

When we think of Benedict Anderson's term "imagined communities," in Canada, Eva Mackey describes it as "imaginings of tolerance of diversity, imaginings which consider cultural and racial heterogeneity an integral part of national identity." However, is this imagined community synonymous with decolonizing public history? By shedding light on issues surrounding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools, I intend to analyze challenges faced by public historians, and offer some comprehensive solutions.

First, I will discuss questions about a highly-anticipated event in development, which is the upcoming 150th anniversary of Confederation. This event will celebrate not only the advent of the Dominion of Canada but the ideals that constitute a collective Canadianness. The TRC's Calls to Action urge the federal government to collaborate with Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian Museums Association design a funding program for commemoration projects on the theme of reconciliation to mark this sesquicentennial anniversary. Public historians become crucial in collaborating stories of residential schools and connecting them to community memory and Canada's history. The challenge I present is how will they reconcile the need to address a critical part of Canadian history of residential schools with the need to attract tourists? JoAnn MacGregor and Lyn Shumaker, from their paper on Heritage in Southern Africa, discuss how globalized tourism has an impact on national heritage, it affects the state's imperative to decolonize cultural spaces. Thus, I harken back to the TRC's Volume 6, where it states that Canadians should "stay in the decolonizing struggle of [their] own discomfort ... [and] to embrace [residential school] stories as powerful teachings." Perhaps it is time to change Canadians' understanding of history, and aspects of Canadian national sentiment. One proposed solution is to dedicate a commemorative space or event on July 1 in the form of ceremony,

monument, oral storytelling and more, with consistent indigenous participation, in order to meaningfully educate Canadians. In return, listeners become, to a certain degree, witnesses to indigenous histories and surviving cultures. Inserting only brief anecdotes into national narratives is not enough, and it should not be deterred by demands faced by tourist sentiment. Despite the difficulty to commemorate a part of Canadian history of cultural genocide and human rights abuses, especially for such a celebratory event, I want to reiterate the TRC's argument that this should nevertheless be "an integral part of Canadian national history."

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also called upon an increase in archival accessibility about residential schools to educate Canadians. John Milloy, the Commission's former Director of Research and Report Writing, argues that public historians are on the frontlines to bring "an invaluable, searchable oral database of survivor testimony." This involves transferring and digitizing federal and church documents to the National Research Centre of Truth and Reconciliation, and to make them electronically accessible to indigenous communities. However, despite funding and lack of government resources, there are more questions, especially about digital archiving. Who tells the story, and how is it contextualized? Will everyone really have access? The first question is about the tendency for an institution's online educational archive to colonialize this history by reducing indigenous populations to victims. For the latter, I address specifically, the present social and economic issues that various indigenous communities face which pose barriers to information access. Thus, the public historian must help create an educational database that is wholly accessible, and to achieve this goal through collaboration. In order to do so, public historians must facilitate contact between the resources and remote communities, and this will involve personally meeting the residents. Personal contact will deliver

necessary information to them, and in turn allow them to have their voices heard. In particular, one of their assignments would be to transcribe oral histories, for the National Research Centre, and give them the credibility required. In addition, major social, and economic changes addressed by the Canadian government are necessary to enable public historians to provide better accessibility to their histories.

While I recognize that this is only a fragment of the significant challenges and necessities to decolonize Canadian history, addressing them and coming up with a plan is the first step. I hope to see more of these efforts on a national scale, and first we must not ignore the importance to decolonize the practice of public history.