

A Brief History of Centralization

Story by
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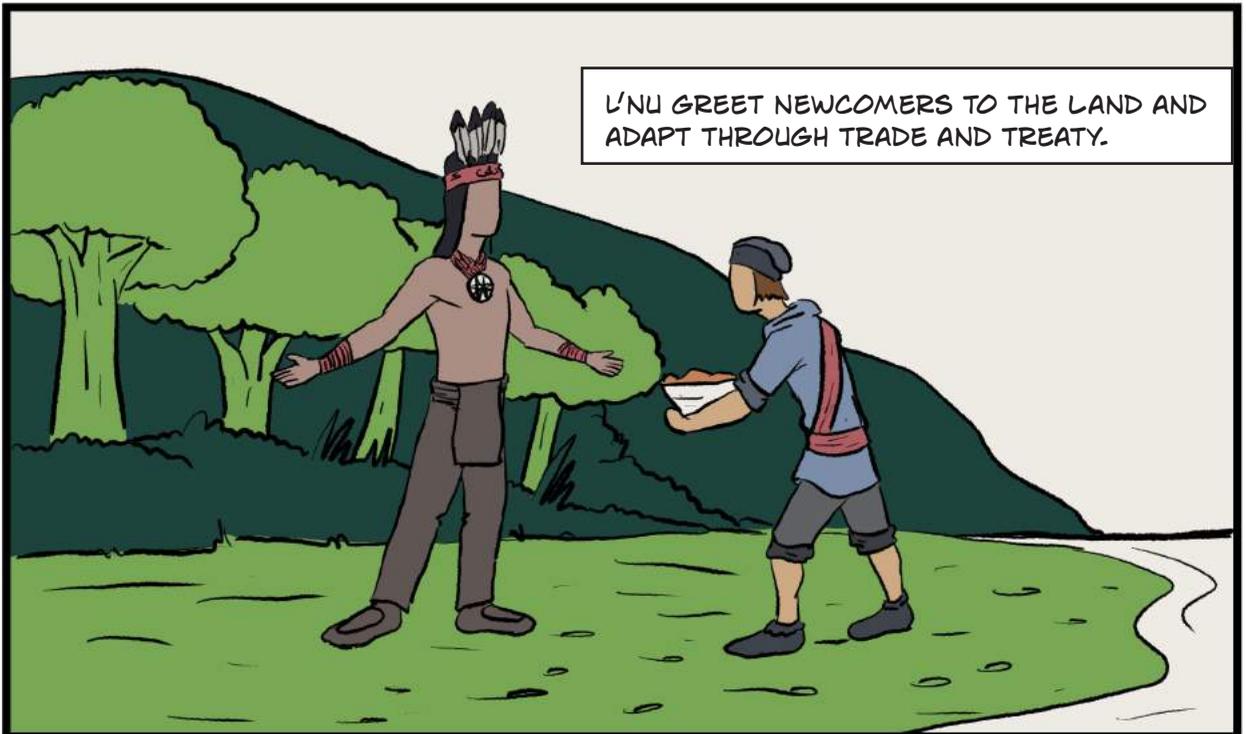
Illustrations by
Brandon Mitchell,
Mi'gmaq - Listuguj



A MI'KMAQ VILLAGE
IN THE LATE 1600'S



L'NU ARE LIVING ALONG THE RIVERS
AND SOCIALIZING ALONG THE
SHORELINES OF THEIR HOMELANDS



L'NU GREET NEWCOMERS TO THE LAND AND
ADAPT THROUGH TRADE AND TREATY.

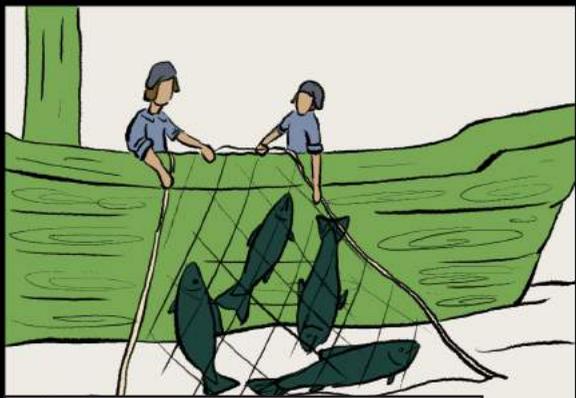
WITH THE INFLUX OF LOYALISTS IN THE 1780S, LANDS ARE CLEARED FOR AGRICULTURE,



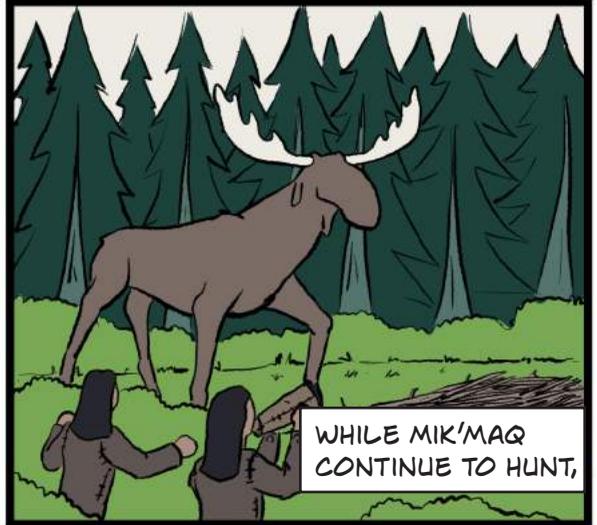
LOGGING FELLS FORESTS,



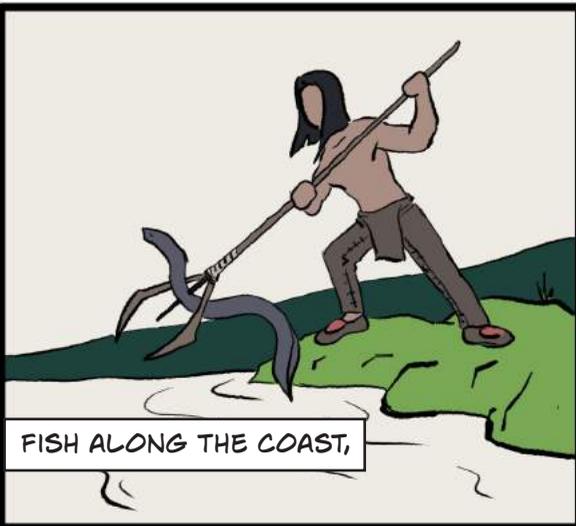
AND LARGE-SCALE FISHERIES ARE ESTABLISHED BY SETTLERS,



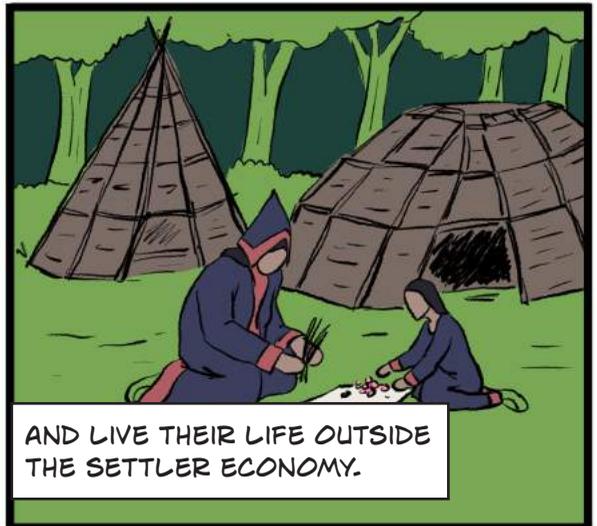
WHILE MIK'MAQ CONTINUE TO HUNT,



FISH ALONG THE COAST,



AND LIVE THEIR LIFE OUTSIDE THE SETTLER ECONOMY.



THE 1800'S



MI'KMAQ ADAPT BY SELLING FISH, PORPOISE OIL,



AND OTHER PRODUCTS LIKE HANDWOVEN BASKETS AND CARVED AX HANDLES.

THEY PICK UP SEASONAL WORK...

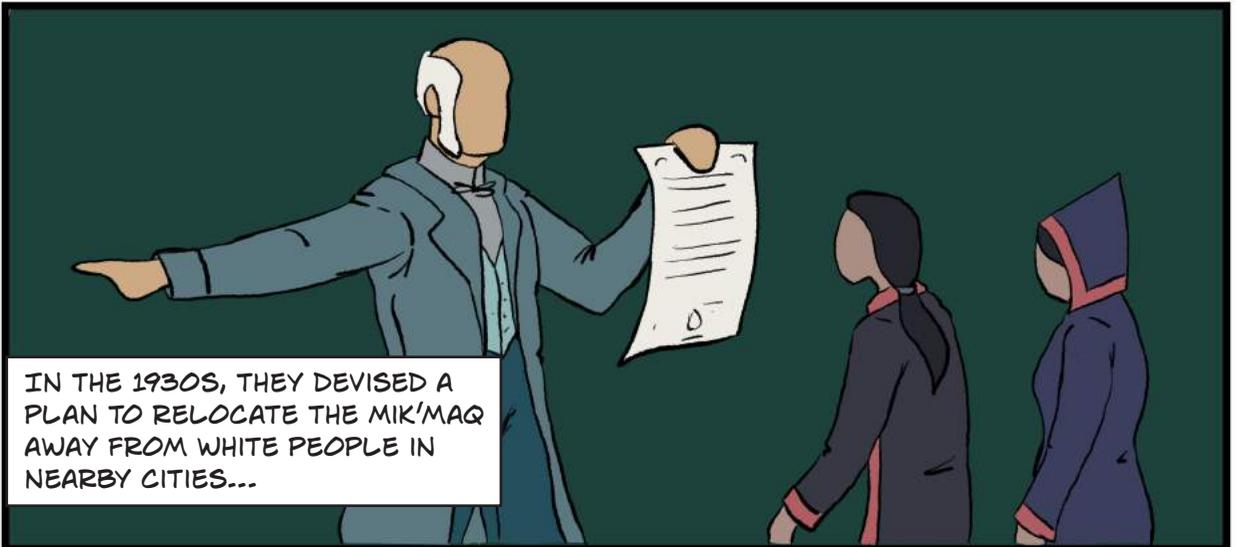


AND SET UP SMALL FARMS TO FEED THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

MEANWHILE, THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS IS COOKING UP A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT CALLED "CENTRALIZATION" THAT WOULD DESTROY THIS ALL.



IN THE 1930S, THEY DEvised A PLAN TO RELOCATE THE MIK'MAQ AWAY FROM WHITE PEOPLE IN NEARBY CITIES...



ALL IN ORDER TO SAVE \$200 A YEAR IN SALARY TO INDIAN AGENTS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.



BY 1942, THE PROGRAM IS UNDERWAY AND HALF THE NATION - THOUSANDS - ARE MOVED, WITH THREAT OF ASSIMILATION AND LOSING THEIR INDIAN STATUS IF THEY REFUSED.



ARRIVING AT THE NEW SETTLEMENTS,



THE MI'KMAQ FOUND UNFINISHED HOMES, WITHOUT BATHROOMS, RUNNING WATER, INSULATION, OR PROTECTION FROM THE HARSH WINTER.

MANY ENDED UP LIVING IN TENTS. THEY HAD BEEN ASSURED JOBS, BUT THERE WAS NO LUMBER MILL, AS PROMISED.

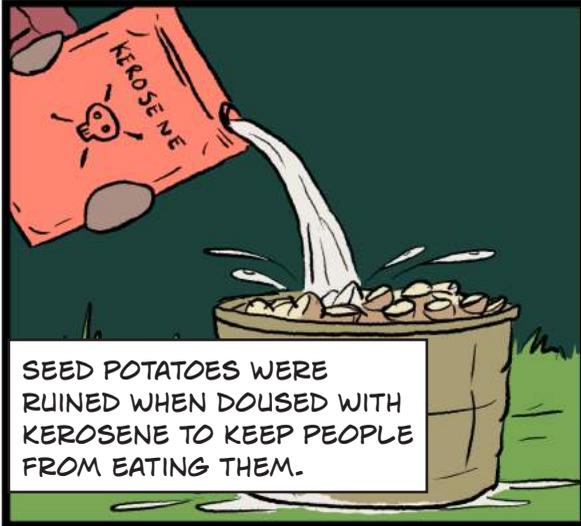




AT ESKASONI, FARMING PROJECTS FAILED BECAUSE THE INDIAN AGENT REPLACED COWS WITH GOATS,



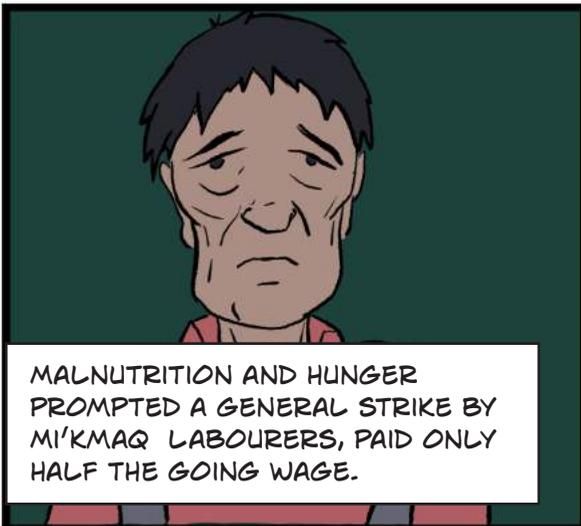
WHO ATE NEWLY PLANTED FRUIT TREES.



SEED POTATOES WERE RUINED WHEN DOUSED WITH KEROSENE TO KEEP PEOPLE FROM EATING THEM.



THE WELLS AT ESKASONI WERE CONTAMINATED AND THE WATER UNDRINKABLE.

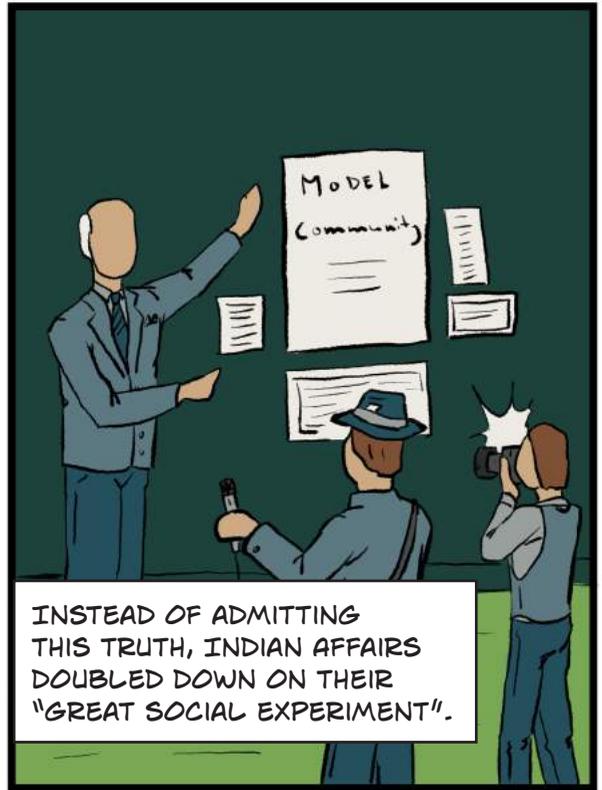


MALNUTRITION AND HUNGER PROMPTED A GENERAL STRIKE BY MI'KMAQ LABOURERS, PAID ONLY HALF THE GOING WAGE.



THE MI'KMAQ WERE CLOSELY WATCHED BY INDIAN AGENTS TO SUPPRESS RESISTANCE.

"THE EXPERIMENT WAS DOOMED FROM THE START" - SAID MI'KMAQ SCHOLAR LISA PATTERSON, WHO STUDIED THE POLICY THROUGH ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS.

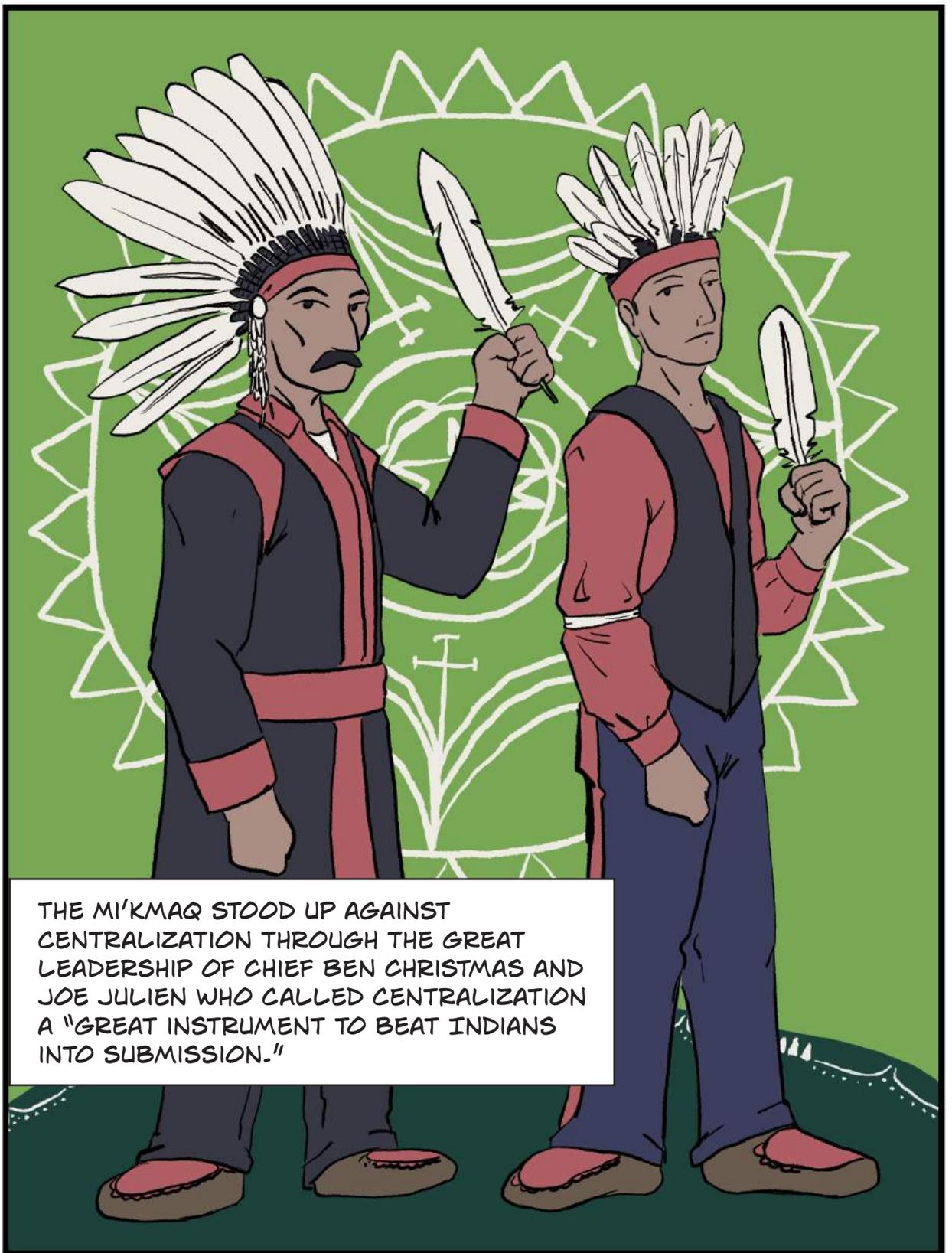


INSTEAD OF ADMITTING THIS TRUTH, INDIAN AFFAIRS DOUBLED DOWN ON THEIR "GREAT SOCIAL EXPERIMENT".

MEANWHILE, CHILDREN WERE TAKEN AWAY TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS



AS THEIR PARENTS FELL ILL FROM COLD AND HUNGER.



THE MI'KMAQ STOOD UP AGAINST
CENTRALIZATION THROUGH THE GREAT
LEADERSHIP OF CHIEF BEN CHRISTMAS AND
JOE JULIEN WHO CALLED CENTRALIZATION
A "GREAT INSTRUMENT TO BEAT INDIANS
INTO SUBMISSION."

BY 1959, THE POLICY OF CENTRALIZATION QUIETLY ENDED.



MANY HAD NOTHING TO RETURN TO HOWEVER, AND ENDED UP STAYING.

SOME SUCCUMBED TO HABITS TO HEAL THEIR LOSS WHEN THEY COULD NO LONGER PROVIDE FOR THEIR FAMILIES.



A THIRD OF THE MEN TRAVELED TO NEW ENGLAND FOR WORK

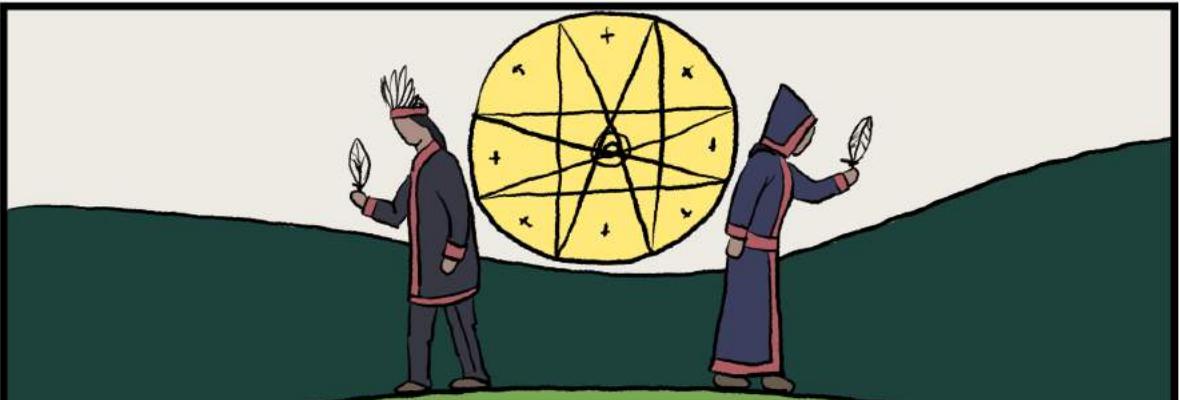
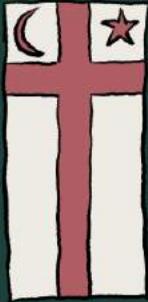


WELFARE DEPENDENCY QUADRUPLED; UNEMPLOYMENT RATES RANGED FROM 55% - 70% IN THE 1970S.

THAT DECADE, THE UNION OF NOVA SCOTIA INDIANS RESEARCHED THIS HISTORY.



THEY MADE A CLAIM FOR DAMAGES TO THE NOVA SCOTIA GOVERNMENT THAT WAS IGNORED.



NO REPARATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR THE DEVASTATING CENTRALIZATION POLICY AND NO APOLOGY HAS EVER BEEN ISSUED, DESPITE THE LONG-TERM SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON MI'KMAQ COMMUNITIES.

REFERENCES

Marie Battiste. (1987). "Structural unemployment: The Mi'kmaq experience." In George Peabody, Carolyn MacGregor and Richard Thorne (Eds.), *Maritimes: Tradition, challenge and change* (pp. 319-326). Halifax: Maritext Ltd.

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