Corporate Colonialism

Private capital has always been deeply interlaced with colonial governance. With the sale of Rupert’s Land, for example, the Hudson’s Bay Company and CN Rail received millions in dollars and acres of land from the Crown as well as the freedom to leverage these assets and create more wealth over time.

At the same time, treaties — interpreted by the Crown as “land deals” — limited communities’ access to land. For instance, instead of receiving a lump sum payment (or capital), treaty terms were outlined as annuities, rations and parcels of land that would be distributed per person or per family. The annuities system also limited First Nations’ abilities to save, accrue or invest money promised in these agreements.

Banking on the Crown’s duplicity, companies were able to exploit this unfair distribution of land and resources, leading to the accumulation of intergenerational wealth at the expense of First Nations.

LEARN MORE
cashback.yellowheadinstitute.org
How can we even begin to assess the cumulative impacts of corporate colonialism?

Land was the foundation of wealth generated by Canadians through re-sale and development. But how much land was distributed with the sale of the HBC?

Sociologist Elizabeth Comack has assigned the term “corporate colonialism” to the ways in which the Hudson’s Bay Company acquired and profited off lands granted by the Canadian state through the Deed of Surrender at the expense of Indigenous peoples.*


What Canada Got
1.2 billion acres
Or approximately 5 million square kilometres, at a very minimum

Canadian Rail Companies
56 million acres

First Nations
3 million acres

RUPERT’S LAND
7 million acres

This research was done by Elizabeth Boyd under the supervision of Dr. Ian Mosby at Ryerson University.

Discrepancies in census data, limited historical documentation along with generally shoddy and confusing financial accounting over the years means that it is difficult to calculate exact numbers when it comes to colonial financial transactions.

What we share here, provides a glimpse into these numbers, and just scratches the surface.
In the “Deed of Surrender”, in 1869, 7 million acres of land were granted to the Hudson’s Bay Company. They also received $1.5 million and were free to leverage these assets to create even more wealth over time.

**RESOURCE EXTRACTION**
The Hudson’s Bay Oil and Gas company played a pivotal role in the building of Canada’s oil and gas sector. This company was sold to Dome Petroleum Ltd.; with shares eventually sold to Conoco, the multinational oil and gas company for $1.68 billion USD. Conoco’s operations run by BP Canada Energy Co, supporter of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion today.

**REAL ESTATE**
The company established a real estate division in July 1873 that focused solely on the selection and sale of lands, to potential settlers. An untold number of Canadians would come to “own” these stolen lands.

**LAND SALES**
HBC lands rarely sold for under $10 per acre. In fact, in some instances, they were able to sell for as high as $34 per acre, in part because they capitalized on the fertile land they acquired in the Rupert’s Land transfer terms.

The “Deed of Surrender” from the HBC to the Crown marked an economic transaction that laid the foundation for Canada’s geography. It represents perhaps the single largest land grab in the world and a significant basis for Canada’s economy today.
The value of lands and resources that First Nations received vs. companies is difficult to compare because the ‘deals’ were formulated and designed so differently. While HBC received a lump sum of $1.5 million along with other highly lucrative terms, treaty terms were outlined as annuities, rations, and parcels of land that would be distributed per person or per family instead.

**Railroad Companies**

$107 million

$1.5 million paid out in the “Deed of Surrender”, plus estimated profits of $96 million from selling the 7 million acres of land acquired over 50 years, for additional lands HBC received, in addition to other ventures including retail and resource extraction across the prairies.

**Hudson’s Bay Company**

$97.5 million

**First Nations**

$50 million

Total estimated annuities paid to the Signatories of Treaties 1-7 (1871-2021) following the transfer of Rupert’s Land. Many descendents of treaty signatories never even saw these funds.
Each bag represents $1 million.

Hudson's Bay Company Advertisement to Settlers, February 1, 1883. The Company Own 7,000,000 acres in the Great Fertile Belt! In reality, the majority of this land was not acquired by the company until 1924.

03. LAND SALES

- **Canadian Northern Railway**
  - $45.17/acre on average

- **Hudson's Bay Company**
  - $19.01/acre on average

- **First Nations**
  - $2.60/acre on average

While corporations were allowed to sell land at favourable rates, First Nations had a rate set that was at least 10x lower. They were also only allowed to sell land back to the Department of Indian Affairs. While these sales were made by First Nations, they were often coerced into these transactions.