

Residential schools were seen by the Canadian government as a way to civilize the native population and keep their children from continuing in their native traditions. In 1895 Rev Fr A.M Carion stated in a report from a residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia that the purpose of the residential school is to civilize the Indian and to make them good, useful and law abiding members of society with strict punishments for any wrong doings.¹ Richard Pratt, who founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, one of the first of the reservation schools in the United States, preached “you must kill the Indian in him; to save the man”. These ideals were later adopted by the Canadian government.² The goal of residential schools was to assimilate Aboriginals into white society through children since they were much more susceptible to influence. This research paper will focus on the residential school system and will argue that the Canadian government and churches committed genocide amongst the indigenous populations in an attempt to eliminate the native culture. It will focus on the history of residential schools in Canada, their intended targets, the health and quality of life of the Aboriginals attending these schools, the sterilization of Aboriginal women, those who succeeded in the school system, and what has changed since the opening of the schools.

Up until the mid 1850’s, churches were in full control of the residential schools. The Bagot Commission Report of 1842 and the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 came into effect and opened the way for the Canadian government to fund schools that would teach english, religion and other aspects of European culture and discipline anyone who displayed native traits.³ By 1892, the Federal government and churches entered into a partnership to run the residential school system for the children.⁴ The residential schools grew from fifty-four schools in 1898 to a high of eighty-one by 1946. Residential schools expanded in numbers quickly due to the Federal government’s funding and support. From 1840 to 1980, over one hundred twenty-five thousand Aboriginal, Metis and Inuit children attended these residential schools.⁵ Residential schools were the government and churches’ way of eliminating the native traditions and forcefully assimilating them into society. Most acts of genocide receive public support towards the victim but due to the government’s cunning ability to conceal the truth they were able to continue this form of

¹ Derek G. Smith, The “Policy of Aggressive Civilization” and Projects of Governance in Roman Catholic Industrial Schools for Native Peoples in Canada, 1870-95, *Canadian Anthropology Society*, 43(2001): 264.

² Latoya Peterson, NPR Reports on the Strange History of Native American Boarding Schools”, *Racialicious*, May 13, 2008, <http://www.racialicious.com/2008/05/13/npr-reports-on-the-strange-history-of-native-american-boarding-schools>.

³ Can Money Undo the Past? A Canadian Example, *Comparitive Education* 39, no. 3 (August 2003): 332.

⁴ Heidi Kuran, “Residential Schools & Abuse”, <http://www.niichro.com/womhealth/wohealth7.html>.

⁵ Murray, “Can Money Undo the Past”, 332.

cultural annihilation for over 150 years with little opposition. This act of genocide is now looked on by some as Canada's Holocaust; as Canadian officials delicately attempted to eradicate an entire culture and assimilate Aboriginals in Canada into its own culture and under its rules.

The intended target of the residential schools was not the adult population but native children between the ages of three to eighteen because they were easier to manipulate and control. By 1920, under the direction of Duncan Campbell Scott, head of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, it became mandatory for all to attend residential schools and people were taken by force if necessary. Some children were apprehended without struggle while others were taken while their parents received jail time for resisting the government.⁶ It became mandated under federal law to apprehend and separate children from their parents, bring them to the residential schools and to pursue them if they ran away from the school.⁷ The long-term goal of the Canadian government was to "free the native people from their savage and unproductive state" and force civilization on them in order to make Canada united while carrying the illusion that Canada was an egalitarian society.⁸ The Canadian government officials realized children were easier to mould than adults so an aggressive assimilation system was developed to be taught at the government-funded church-run residential schools.⁹ The teaching revolved around the brainwashing of native children and included teaching the advantages of white life and the evils of First Nations due to isolation, primitive language and culture.¹⁰ The students would spend ten months a year away from their parents in order to become fully immersed and would only be allowed to speak the English language. When letters were sent home they were forced to write in English which many parents were unable to read and made it less likely to see the problems and illusion the government and residential schools were casting.¹¹ When children did return home, there was a noticeable difference from the children that went to the residential school as many children had lost the ability to understand their native heritage, skills needed to help their parents, or the patience to listen to the elders.¹² Their ability to

⁶ Kuran, "Residential Schools & Abuse".

⁷ The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, "Hidden from History: The Canadian Holocaust," *The Untold Story of the Genocide of Aboriginal Peoples by church and State in Canada*, The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada. <http://canadiangenocide.nativeweb.org/genocide.pdf>.

⁸ Daniel N. Paul, "We Were Not the Savages", *First Nation History, MiKmaq, Maliseet, & European relations with them*, <http://www.danielnpaul.com/IndianResidentialSchools.html>.

⁹ CBC News Canada, "Residential Schools: A history of Residential Schools in Canada", <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/05/16/f-faqs-residential-schools.html>.

¹⁰ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".

¹¹ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".



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self-sustain themselves by means of hunting, fishing, and their connection with the land had been diminished. Children were taught to hate the food their mothers prepared and reject their standards of cleanliness as they were taught that rejecting their heritage was the beginning of a long and healthy life.¹³

The health and quality of life of the Aboriginal students at the residential schools was very poor compared to non-Aboriginals.¹⁴ Students suffered physical, sexual, mental, emotional, spiritual abuse, unhealthy environmental conditions and malnutrition.¹⁵ The Residential Schools themselves suffered from diminishing funds, which affected the buildings' repairs, equipment, water, light, fuel, salaries, food and clothing for the students. Along with increasingly crowded schools, learning and student safety were the schools' lowest priorities.¹⁶ Death rates amongst Native students at the residential schools fluctuated across Canada. The mortality rate for the Nuxalk Nation in Bella Coola Valley BC was 52% and most deaths between 1917 and 1983 under the ages of twenty five were due to tuberculosis and pertussis (whopping cough).¹⁷ Most of these illnesses were preventable through sanitary working environments, medical staff, trained educators and an environment free from the anxiety of abuse. There was very little chance of success since Aboriginal children compared to non-Aboriginal children were living in much worse conditions; they were malnourished and psychologically and physically abused.¹⁸ The government and the church gave society the false assumption that residential schools were the salvation of the Aboriginal people as they represented savages and an inability to take care of themselves. Diseases spread through the Residential Schools, such as cases of influenza, scarlet fever, small pox and mumps.¹⁹ The treatment's given at Lejac Residential School for Tubercular meningitis was brandy, sugar and cookies. Because of one student carrying the disease and spreading it amongst the student population, many pupils were infected.²⁰ When the schools couldn't do anything more medically for the children who were expected to pass away from their illnesses, it was only then that they were allowed to return home to their family to live out the rest of their days.²¹ In 1909, Dr. Peter Bryce of the Ontario Health Department was hired by

¹² CBC News Canada, "Residential Schools".

¹³ Kelm, Mary E. . "A Scandalous Procession: Residential Schooling and the Reformation of

Aboriginal Bodies" in *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-1950*, 536, in Trent Course Pack for History 1700, (2010-2011).

¹⁴ Barton et al, Health and Quality of Life of Aboriginal Residential School Survivors, Bella Coola Valley. *Social Indicators Research* 73 (September 2005): Abstract.

¹⁵ Barton et al, "Health and Quality of Life", 296.

¹⁶ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession," 70-74.

¹⁷ Barton et al, "Health and Quality of Life", 296.

¹⁸ Peterson, NPR Reports on the Strange History of Native American Boarding Schools".

¹⁹ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession," 540.

²⁰ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession," 540.

²¹ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession," 540.

the Indian Affairs Department in Ottawa to tour western Canada and British Columbia and report on health conditions. Dr Bryce's report offended the government and churches as he indicated that the residential school was systematically and deliberately killing the native children. This report was officially buried along with his accusations that staff and church officials were falsifying records and withholding information on the native children's deaths.²² There were students who went mysteriously missing and others who died due to the conditions and living environments forced upon them.²³ Students were subjected as part of their studies to work more in the kitchen than in the classrooms and working environments were hazardous. In 1936, a fifteen year old girl from the nearby Shubenacadie Reserve in Nova Scotia was ordered to stand on the outside of the windows with a rope around her waist to clean windows on the fourth floor with a little girl half her size holding the rope.²⁴ Refusal was dealt with threats of violence and beatings.²⁵ For some students there was little or no ability for advancement in the classroom. Some students who started in the eighth grade years later remained in the eighth grade with the only skills learned through forced labor: sewing a straight seam, scrubbing clothes, and fixing socks.²⁶ This idea of civilizing the native youth population by means of labour intrigued some provinces. In 1892 the department of Indian affairs toyed with the idea of building a residential school farm in Nova Scotia to educate Maliseet and Mi'kmaq children since they felt education was not a high priority.²⁷ Educating the native population wasn't the government's intention as much as it was to separate them from their homes and families and instill a new set of beliefs.

Students lived every day in fear that they might be abused or someone they know die and robbed of their identity. Female aboriginal students not only had to fear sexual predators but those who would mutilate their bodies.²⁸ With the passing of the Sexual Sterilization Act in Alberta, it is estimated that at least three thousand five hundred Indian women were sterilized under this law.²⁹ Since the repeal of this law in 1972 it has become acknowledged that discrimination and faulty science played a role without even

²² The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, 16.

²³ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".

²⁴ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".

²⁵ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".

²⁶ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".

²⁷ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".

²⁸ Gail Guthrie, Madeleine Valaskakis, and Dion Stout, editor, *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, (University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 76.

²⁹ Kevin Annett, *Hidden from History: The Canadian Holocaust, Genocide in Canada*, <http://canadiangenocide.nativeweb.org/intro2.html>.

meeting the legislation's basic requirements.³⁰ These crimes against humanity were committed by nuns, clergy, doctors and school staff and concealed by the church, police and state officials which included the destruction of the records of the proceedings.³¹ Many Aboriginal students and individuals didn't find out until years later that their life and ability to reproduce was predetermined. The case of Ms. Muir, who in 1955 at the age of 10 was institutionalized in an Alberta training school for the mentally deficient despite being a woman of normal intelligence.³² At the age of 14 she went in for an appendectomy and was irreversibly surgically sterilized without her consent or knowledge.³³ Some mothers were not as lucky as abortion procedures were often hurried and as a result many mothers perished along with their children and were usually buried together in a secret graveyard such as the one at the Kuper Island Catholic School. In some of the schools, many of the fathers of the children were men who worked at the school. Some of the women who died in the process were killed deliberately to protect the names of the rapists at Residential Schools. Many of the women described the experience as Aboriginal women sterilization more resembled an assembly line and whether you wanted it or not when you woke up you would be sterilized.³⁴ Some of the mothers in the residential schools were offered bribes of an early trip home as well as up to \$300 but regardless the deed would be done.

Even after these traumatic experiences at the residential schools, the effects of the schools have continued to influence Native populations for up to four generations.³⁵ At every turn Aboriginals were considered savages and uncivilized citizens of society even though they were the ones being abused. Racist supporters of residential schools blamed the students for succumbing to their demise for lacking strength of character and physical weaknesses.³⁶ The reasons why so many residential schools sent children home or discharged them when they were expected to die meant that it would be one less investigation to be done at the school.³⁷ For some of the children this was too much to bear as many were whipped, beaten, psychologically diminished some ran away, others retaliated and those who lost hope committed suicide.³⁸ Many of these survivors have developed post-traumatic stress disorder due to the low self esteem taught as well as the physical beatings endured.³⁹ For a society that had prided

³⁰Supreme Court of Canada, "Remarks of the Right Honorable Beverley McLachlin, P.C. Medicine and the Law: the Challenges of Mental Illness February 17 and 18, 2005", <http://www.scc-csc.gc.ca/court-cour/ju/spe-dis/bm05-02-17-eng.asp>.

³¹ The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, 43.

³²Supreme Court of Canada, "Remarks of the Right Honorable Beverley McLachlin".

³³Supreme Court of Canada, "Remarks of the Right Honorable Beverley McLachlin".

³⁴ The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, 46.

³⁵ Barton et al, "Health and Quality of Life", 307-08.

³⁶ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession," 546.

³⁷ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession," 539.

³⁸ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession," 541.

³⁹ Barton et al, "Health and Quality of Life", 307-08.



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themselves on being moral and civilized Canada was no different than Germany during the second world war and Hitler's reign of terror with the Nazi's persecuting the Jew's to the point of taking their own lives to retain control over their own fates we also committed the same horrid acts amongst the Aboriginal societies. The Nazi's Theodor Mollison (The Butcher of Auschwitz) and the Canadian Government both wanted to prevent what they considered an inferior race from reproducing and threatening the harmony of the supposedly superior race.⁴⁰

Residential schools were seen by society as a way to modernize the native population. That they could educate the natives to survive in society as they viewed it, educating them to not only live off of the land but to become part of the hierarchy of society. As far as many were concerned, whites were heroes for saving these poor natives children from a fate inflicted on them from the savage influences of home life.⁴¹ The conversion of religion amongst the native people showed that there were great possibilities for success. Natives such as Peter Jones who became one of the most influential native missionaries was a perfect example to the government that if one person is willing and able then whether the Aboriginals realize it or not they must conform to our ways of society. People like Peter Jones only increased the governments hunger to incorporate the native population to force them to assimilate into society to adapt to Canadian ideals and forgo their culture.⁴² The death of the fur trade allowed churches and governments to step in to replace Aboriginal independence with dependence on the churches.⁴³ The Aboriginal people's lives were to be refashioned to adapt to the agricultural developments of western society. By educating the native children they will return home stronger and be able to contribute to the unity of society.

Throughout the history of western society we have feared change, differences in religion and ideals different from our own. What we fear or lack in ability to understand we either assimilate or destroy. Some of the greatest, most destructive wars in the history of our civilization have been fought over such ideals such as the crusades in which millions of lives were needlessly lost. Canadians might not have killed natives with guns and swords but they did through more of a passive aggressive approach over time. Officially schools operated in Canada from 1892 to 1969 although there have been recordings of some schools not closing until much later. A residential school closed in Tofino BC in 1983 and in 1996 Akaitcho Hall in Yellowknife closed.⁴⁴ There were a total of 130 schools in every territory and province except

⁴⁰ The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, 43.

⁴¹ Kelm, "A Scandalous Procession 535.

⁴² Hope Maclean, "A Positive Experiment in Aboriginal Education: the Methodist Ojibwa Day Schools in Upper Canada, 1824-1833" *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, The Canadian Journal of Native Studies 22, 1:2002:29.

⁴³ John S. Milloy, "A National Crime': Building and Managing the System, 1879 to 1946" in *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System*, 550, in Trent Course Pack for History 1700, (2010-2011).

⁴⁴ Guthrie et al, editor, *Restoring the Balance*, 90.

Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.⁴⁵ On Friday June 27, 1997 John Watson, the highest ranking Indian Affairs official in BC was the first government of Canada representative to admit that residential schools were part of an assimilation policy of the Canadian government.⁴⁶ Over nine-thousand lawsuits have been filed against the Canadian government and four Christian denominations.⁴⁷ Apologies have been made by both the church and government; in 1993 Archbishop Michael Peers made a public apology on behalf of two Christian denominations for attempting to make natives and their children in their own image.⁴⁸ Prime Minister, Stephen Harper on June 11, 2008 also apologized for the atrocities that had taken place to the Aboriginals who attended the residential schools.⁴⁹ On November 23, 2005 the Canadian government announced a \$1.9 billion compensation package for those forced to attend these schools.⁵⁰ Unfortunately a large portion of the money went towards lawyers, courts, and plaintiffs while the Aboriginal communities continue to suffer.⁵¹ In Ms. Muir's case, she brought action against the government of Alberta for improper sterilization and institutionalization and was awarded \$740,780 in compensatory and aggravated damages.⁵²

Due to the actions of a closed-minded government, an entire civilization was nearly lost. The Canadian Government, with the help of the churches, nearly killed off an entire civilization. The attempted assimilation and genocide of the Native people did extensive and lasting damage to their livelihood, beliefs and cultures. No amount of money can replace what was lost or the lives that had been forever changed by this experience. Children were targeted in hopes of them rejecting their heritage and putting an end to the Native people in Canada through manipulation and sterilization. It was the Canadian Government who had the laws put in place to sterilize minority ethnicities including Aboriginal women to force those of other cultures into assimilation.⁵³ The term genocide refers to the planned and carried out destruction of a religious and ethnic group.⁵⁴ This was carried out amongst the Aboriginal people who refused to forgo their culture and religion and adopt Christianity. It will take much more effort on the part of the Federal government and Canadian citizens as a whole before this embarrassment in our history will be rectified. It is people like Ms Muir who will live with these scars for the rest of her life, no amount of money can replace what she has lost and how many of her friends and loved ones have perished due to this cultural genocide that Canada is responsible for.

⁴⁵ CBC News Canada, "Residential Schools".

⁴⁶ Kuran, "Residential Schools and Abuse".

⁴⁷ Murray, "Can Money Undo the Past", 331.

⁴⁸ Murray, "Can Money Undo the Past", 332.

⁴⁹ Daniel, "We Were Not the Savages".

⁵⁰ CBC News Canada, "Residential Schools".

⁵¹ Murray, "Can Money Undo the Past", 342.

⁵² Supreme Court of Canada, "Remarks of the Right Honorable Beverley McLachlin".

⁵³ Supreme Court of Canada, "Remarks of the Right Honorable Beverley McLachlin".

⁵⁴ The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, 12.

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