

Residential schools: an act of cultural genocide



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Abstract

This paper will examine on why the enforcement of residential schools was an act of genocide. This paper will analyze the attempts that were made in order to make the First Nation group as “civilized” or “proper” as possible, in this sense this paper will focus on how the Indigenous people were completely stripped out of their identity. This paper will also discuss how the use of education was supposed to be vital for the policy, but it turned out how the Canadians were more concerned about assimilating Aboriginals into English Canadians rather than ensuring they receive an education. I will discuss the ultimate goal of the Europeans and what they were trying to gain and what was the reason behind this act of injustice. This paper will show how all this occurred through the act of cultural genocide against the First Nations People.

Keywords: Residential Schools, Cultural Genocide, Culture, Education. First Nations, Natives, Canada, Genocide

Residential Schools: An Act of Cultural Genocide

There have been numerous events that have truly presented groups that have endured the and have suffered from power and being dominated by a different group. It is often the case that certain groups are mainly destroyed, or even worse ruin by other groups in order to try to washout their unique community for their own better good. These actions are precisely there to destroy their true elements that represent themselves, for instance their language, tradition, and values which differentiates from other groups. This act is mainly known Cultural Genocide. Researchers have contended that the <https://assignbuster.com/residential-schools-an-act-of-cultural-genocide/>

Indian Residential Schools in Canada is responsible for the act of cultural genocide they have committed against the native community. Indian Residential Schools in Canada were set up for the deliberate motivation behind social annihilation, and this has been denied by Canada for its very own gain. The term Residential schools was introduced to the educational system by the Canadian government and also by the holy churches. The residential Schools system harmed indigenous children by removing them from their families, removing them from their language, exposing them to sexual and physical abuse. They were trying to remove the “ Indian in them”, and to try to lose their identity of who they are. With all this being, due to the enforcement of residential schools the government of Canada and the holy churches actions are a pure indication of cultural genocide by taking advantage of a system built for “ educational purposes”, instead an attempt was made against the indigenous children to cleanse them of their identity and enforce their own cultures and assimilating them into the dominant European/Canadian society.

When we look into indigenous children and how they tied to residential school, we can understand that children were the main targets for the Europeans. They believed that since the parents are well gowned up and understand what is going one, we must stop their unique generations from continuing so we must stop the next generation. The Europeans main goal was to “ Kill the Indian In the Child”. Between 1879 and 1996 indigenous children were place in Residential Schools Nationally. About thirty percent of indigenous children were sent to Residential Schools. The Residential Schools was the Government answer to Treaty stipulations to provide indigenous

communities education for their children. The system was created for the purpose of removing children from the influence of their own culture and assimilating them into the dominant Canadian Culture. The schools were mainly run by the Churches in order to spread Christianity. According to one of the historians John S. Milloy whom is mentioned in *Cultural genocide in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States* has stated how the children were treated and what they faced while being in the residential schools

Students were taught English and punished for speaking their Native language. However, Canada's residential (boarding) schools inadequately preparing students to live in white society or to return to their reserves ... Milloy found Canada's residential schools were —" marked by the persistent neglect and abuse of children and through them of Aboriginal communities in general" and characterized by widespread physical and sexual abuse till the last residential school closed". (Reyhner, Singh. 2010.)

By just seeing how the children were treated just in order to forget their true identity of who they are so they could just adapt to the " white society" and if they were to participate or speak in their native language they would be punished. It shows how the Canadian government. Not by just showing them to the new society they were even being punished if they do anything in regard to their true identity.

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, in the report titled *Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* it is referenced that the Canadian residential school system was just by name and that the

main reason behind the school was not displayed. In the report it gives an understanding on the main reason for the use of residential schools and how the act was done by the government all this led to the true definition of cultural Genocides. According to the report Honoring *the Truth* it gives us the real definition on what a cultural genocide is, and a cultural genocide is “the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group.” pg: 8). By the definition itself it is understandable that the main reason behind Canada’s approach was to wipe out the Native community; belittle them, discard their rights and to just use the Treaties as an advantage. The Canadian government played a huge part in the act of cultural genocide, they powerfully did not allow children to practice their religion or tradition that their parents have imbedded on them, they had no choice but to adapt to a different lifestyle. On the other hand, children were not allowed to stay with family or be near their family because of the fear that they might influence their kids and in order for them to not know their true identity they must be removed from the influence and the environment and must be placed in residential schools. The report states the ways that the government has committed the act of cultural genocides especially with the use of authority that the Canadian government had on the Aboriginal people.

Looking thorough the Assimilations and the Indian Act, it comes to a clear understanding that, in order for the Canadian government to obtain control and power over the Aboriginal communities they first must have the right to do so. in 1876, The Indian Act was passed which gave the right for the federal government to be charge for the aboriginal affairs. The Indian Act

allowed the government to govern majority aspects, such as their land, Indian status, wills, resources, band administration, and also their education. The Indian Act was a way to help to define which individuals were "Indians". By this they reserved rules for them and put a band on them as well. By indicating who is an Indian was designed to help increase assimilation and was also placed to bring pressure to the First Nations. The first prime Minister of Canada, has stated that "The great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the Tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they fit to change." (Cohen, 2016, Pg. 15) By having such laws and rules for the first nations, their rights and freedom was limited. Like for instance, traditions dances or ceremonies were banned, and that whom every that is an Indian obtains a university education they will lose their identity and status of being called an Indian.

Prime Minister John A. Macdonald sent a reporter by the name of Nicholas Davin, to the US to report on the schools that have already been set up to see if they are suitable to Canada. Davin concluded in his report that industrial schools like residential schools would be "better suited" for Canada. In his report Davin has stated that a military man said that "Kill the Indian to save the man." (Cohen, 2016. 2) Once that the prime minister read the report and agreed with what was written then in 1883, he went and told the Canadian house of Commons and stated that

When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write...

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Indian Children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (Cohen. 2016. 2)

Enforcing schools for children to attend, was a sign of hope for the parents, so they could help their people when they get older and had the proper education, but in the views of the government and the Euro-Canadian their hopes were to remove who they are, so once the children do leave the schools they do not turn back to their old routes and follow their parents steps. Prime Minister MacDonald did not want the influence of the parents to be around the children, so they removed to prevent them from learn their true identity. They wanted the children to learn and think like a “ White Man” rather than who they are which is Indian.

During the years 1913- 1932, Duncan Cambell Scott, was the one who ran the school system. Scott was a civil servant who was mainly involved in Aboriginal Affairs. He passed many amendments under the Indian Act, for instance, he made is mandatory for children to attend the residential school. Scott was really into the aspect of educations being the only way to civilize or to change the indigenous people he stated that

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone.... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no

Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill. (Facing History and Ourselves, 2018)

By just saying that the school is a way to end the “ Indian problem” is just another way for trying them to prevent them from really expressing their true identity. Using the bill to go against what they signed for which was the purpose to educate the children, they used it to educate the studies into their own way of living. Throughout the enrolment of students to these residential schools, the answers were just the number of students enrolling. They did not even take in hand the health and safety of the schools. The residential schools were all so poorly, that children would also be sick.

In an article written John Milloy, ‘ *The Tuition of Thomas Moore*’ in *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986* , Milloy includes two photos of a young aboriginal boy by the name of Thomas Moore. In the picture we see the difference transition from before and after attending the residential school. The policy for the Canadians, were for the first nation communities to change their state in order to move towards a more civilized state and to move away from their savage state. The main reason behind the photograph was to show the difference the schools can cause and to show the reason on why the schools were there for. For the government’s main concern towards civilization, the Canadians believed that they could isolated the aboriginal children from their parents and make them attend residential school, where they weren’t really there to actually learn but there to change their identity. In the photo we can see the effects the school had on the little boy, by the change of posture and being

more professional in a way, by the change of clothing and making them look more polished.

In the start of 1871, there were roughly around eleven treaties that were sign with the First nation with Canada. By the signing treaties it gave the power to the government. As stated by Cohen, Robert Z, in his book *Canada's First Nations and Cultural Genocide* that " The First Nations were seen as a stumbling block in the march toward " Civilization." The plan of the government was to assimilate Native People, to " Bring them to civilization" so that they would not claim legal rights as separate and unique communities." (Cohen, 2016, Pg. 15) It just indicates that how the Euro-Canadians viewed the First Nations as. By have the authority and power over them that they were able to perform their task in washing the aboriginal's identity away. By Cohen saying that they were blocks that were covering the way towards civilization just itself shows how they felt like it was their duties and jobs to remove them or " fix them" so they could be " civilized".

Throughout history, indigenous peoples have truly confronted discrimination and physical violence, which today play a key role in the act of cultural genocide. Not knowing that genocide does not only mean killing of one group but also preventing them from practicing their tradition and religious beliefs. In one of the journals written by Lindsey Kingston, *The Destruction of Identity: Cultural Genocide and Genocide and Indigenous Peoples* it is stated mention that

Tinker (1993) writes that cultural genocide destroys the cultural structures of existence that give indigenous people a sense of holistic, communal integrity. It limits freedom to practice cultural traditions and to live out their

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lives in culturally appropriate patterns, and it effectively destroys a people by eroding both their self-esteem and the relationships that bind them together as a community (Tinker 1993: 6). (Kingston, 2014, p. 67)

From what Kingston is saying by quoting Tinker is that, cultural genocide destroys the true meaning of oneself, both internal and external. By the act of a genocides like this it had huge effect on the indigenous people and how they were limited to the things they worshipped or practice. Their freedom was cut short.

On June 11, 2008 the Canadian federal government, after a very harsh and long history of torture of the aboriginals, had finally decided to apologize. This apology consisted of members of the parliament, the elderly aboriginal members that include the leader and a few of those survivors who were forced to attend residential schools. The apology was in private; however, it was recorded where the public could also see it. During this apology, the indigenous representatives were made to sit in the centre of the room, while the politicians and members of the parliament were sitting just above and surrounding them.

We are on the threshold of a new beginning where we are in control of our own destinies. We must be careful and listen to the voices that have been silenced by fear and isolation. We must be careful not to repeat the patterns or create the oppressive system of the residential schools. We must build an understanding of what happened to those generations that came before us. (Indigenous Foundations, 2009)

Overall, the ultimate goal for the European/ Canadians were to eliminate the Indian out of the man. Ultimately, everything that was a part of them, everything that they valued, everything that was near and dear to them was completely taken away. They lost their identity. The use education was supposed to be vital for the policy, but it turned out that the Canadians were more concerned about assimilating Aboriginals into English Canadians rather than ensuring they receive an education. Throughout history, indigenous people have been treated in way that to make them as “ civilized” or “ proper” as possible. They were stripped out of their true identity and were forced to learn the ways of the Europeans. Initially, the ultimate goal of the Europeans was to gain power and the Aboriginal lands. This all occurred through the act of cultural genocide against the First Nations People.

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