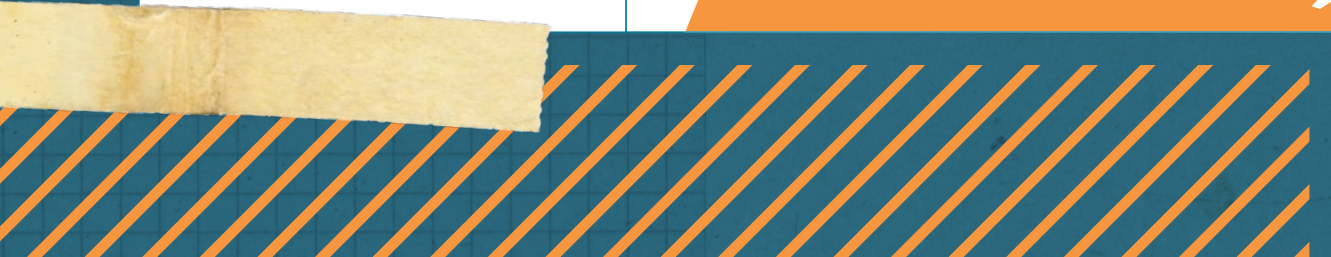
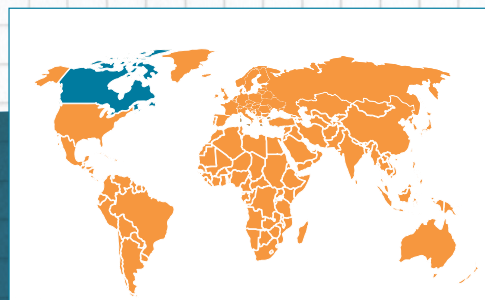
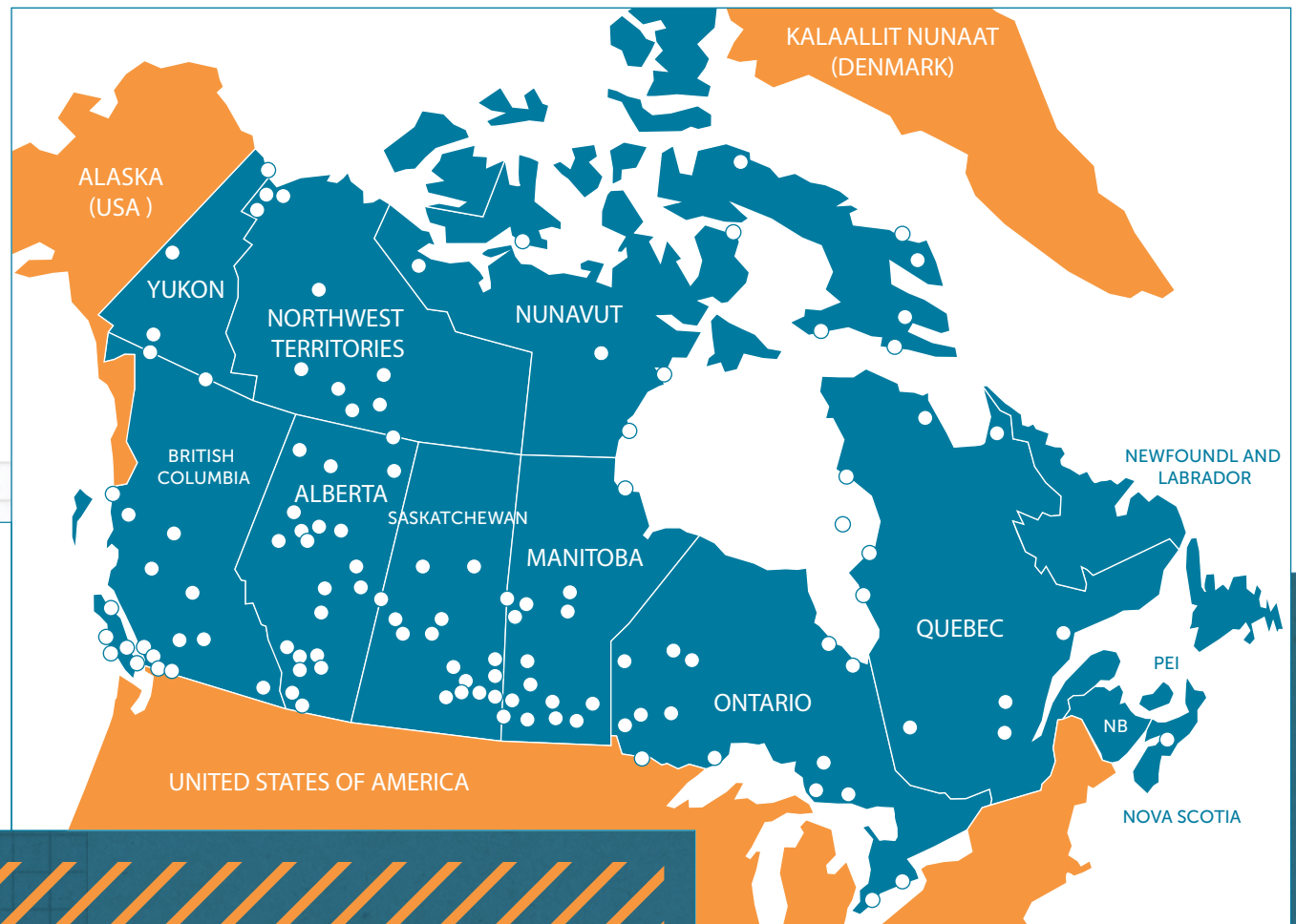
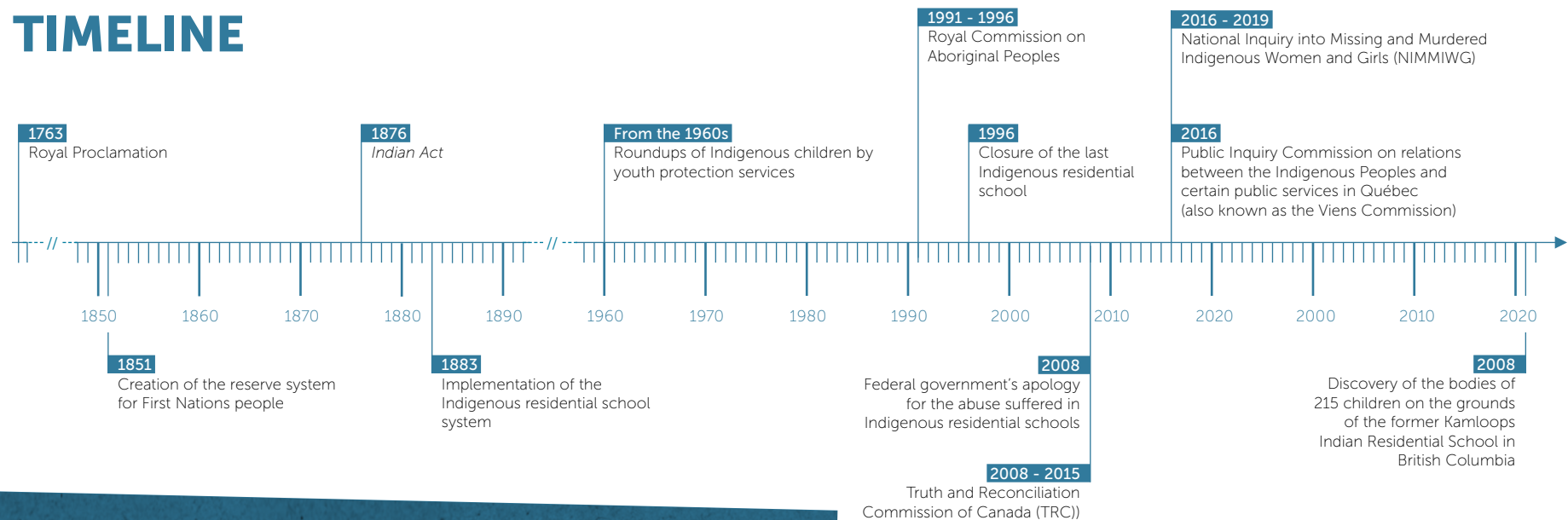


GENOCIDE OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA



TIMELINE



HIGHLIGHTS

What?

- // Implementation by the Canadian government of a policy of forced assimilation of the Indigenous Peoples in Canada aimed at destroying their social, political, territorial and cultural organization, as well as their food self-sufficiency. The Indian Act, the creation of reserves and the Indigenous residential school system were pillars of this policy.
- // Forced sterilization of thousands of Indigenous women
- // Repeated violence against Indigenous women, girls and members of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA) community
- // Removal of thousands of Indigenous children from their families by youth protection services. These children were then put up for adoption or sold.
- // Thousands of Indigenous people died as a result of the implementation of this forced assimilation policy.

Where?

- // In the territories that now make up Canada.

When?

- // Since the start of European colonization, intensifying in the 19th century.

Who?

- // The actors accused of genocide are the Canadian government, to which the Indigenous Peoples were subject, Christian churches involved in managing the residential schools, and the provincial governments (in particular as of the 1950s).
- // Victims were mainly First Nations and Inuit people, who had been living on the territory for thousands of years. Métis were also victims of genocide.

EXCERPT FROM AN ACCOUNT

"All the members of my family attended residential school. . . . Each of them had experienced an institution that tried to scrape the Indian off of their insides, and they came back to the bush and river raw, sore, and aching. The pain they bore was invisible and unspoken. It seeped into their spirit, oozing its poison and blinding them from the incredible healing properties within their Indian ways."

AUTHOR AND JOURNALIST RICHARD WAGAMESE¹

Adeline Raciette and Emily Bone at the Assiniboia Residential School in Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1958

Credit: Library and Archives Canada, PA-185653



ISSUE

The story of the **Indigenous Peoples** since the European colonization of what we call Canada is a complex one. It takes various forms depending on the region, people and period in question. The history of Indigenous Peoples has been marked by alliances and collaborations, war and conflict, relationships of domination, the abuse of power and an assimilationist government. Were the Indigenous Peoples in Canada victims of genocide?

Indigenous Peoples

First occupants of the territory now known as Canada and their descendants.



Indigenous students with principal Father Joseph Hugonnard, staff and Grey Nuns at the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Industrial School in Saskatchewan, 1885

Credit: O.B. Buell, Library and Archives Canada, PA-118765k

In 2015, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) officials concluded that **cultural genocide** had been committed. In June 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) went a step further, declaring in the executive summary of their final report that genocide was committed against the **Indigenous Peoples**, more particularly against women, girls and members of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA) community. In a speech, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that he accepted the conclusions of the NIMMIWG concerning genocide, but the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) quickly qualified his statement. In an email, the PMO indicated that accepting the commissioners' conclusions was not the same as supporting them.² To date, Canada has acknowledged that the Indigenous Peoples were the victims of a government "that sought to overwrite their distinct histories, to eradicate their distinct languages and cultures, and to impose colonial traditions and ways of life."³ On September 1, 2020, the Prime Minister added **Indigenous residential schools** to the list of national historic events, and designated two schools (one in Manitoba and one in Nova Scotia) national historic sites.⁴ What really happened? The exercise in this guide aims to explore the sensitive issue of the crimes committed against the Indigenous Peoples and to provide tools for analyzing the situation by focusing on the 19th and 20th centuries.

Cultural genocide

"... is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group."
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 1

Indigenous Peoples

The Constitution Act, 1982, recognizes three Indigenous Peoples, i.e. First Nations (referred to as "Indians" in the *Indian Act*), Métis and Inuit.

Indigenous residential schools

Educational institutions funded by the Canadian government and established by religious communities with the intent to destroy Indigenous Peoples' culture.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Indigenous Peoples have occupied the territory now known as Canada for thousands of years. In the 17th century, representatives of the French and British empires crossed the Atlantic Ocean to extend their power. To do so, they needed the help of the Indigenous Peoples to differing degrees, depending on the empire and the period. That is why they forged various commercial and military alliances with them. The arrival of the European colonists, attracted in part by the fur trade, changed the relationships between the various Indigenous societies and exacerbated certain pre-existing tensions.

Credit : ENVIRO-FOTO.



From the beginning of colonization, Europeans saw themselves as civilized, and the Indigenous Peoples as primitive, in particular because they were not Christian, appeared to be nomadic and were not organized according to a political hierarchy. They called them “savages.” Convinced of their cultural superiority, both the French and the British attempted to convert them into good Christians and to impart to them the habits and customs of the old continent, including European clothing, agriculture and a sedentary existence.⁵ The attempt to **francisize** the “savages”—which, in the 19th century became a question of “civilizing” them—would last for the next three centuries.

Over time, the French and the British insidiously took over the Indigenous Peoples’ territories. They justified this based on the **doctrine of discovery and terra nullius**. In 1763, the Royal Proclamation established the foundations of a new relationship with the Indigenous Peoples. Among other things, the document recognized their land rights,⁶ but also gave the British Crown hierarchical superiority.

Francization

Teaching French to the Indigenous Peoples and inculcating them with Catholicism and French habits (e.g. adopting a sedentary mode of life, agriculture and European clothing).

Doctrine of discovery and terra nullius

Doctrine according to which non-Christian lands can be claimed by a Christian monarch because they are considered unoccupied and therefore as not belonging to anyone.

Reserve

A piece of land owned by the British Crown set aside for the use of a First Nations people.

For example, after the Conquest in 1759, the British Crown became the new “owner” of the North American territories ceded by France. British powers recognized the Indigenous Peoples as independent nations and set aside certain territories in order to avoid reprisal. In the long term, the Crown would transform the Indigenous Peoples’ land into private property for European colonists.⁷

At the beginning of the 19th century, tensions between the British and the United States eased. The British therefore found their military alliance with the Indigenous Peoples less and less necessary for their protection. During this same period, there was a transition from an economy based on agriculture and the fur trade to an economy based on the exploitation of natural resources. The massive influx of immigrants disrupted the lifestyle of the Indigenous Peoples, whose presence hindered colonization and the creation of new industries. The Indigenous Peoples complained to the British Crown that the newcomers were trespassing on their land and disturbing the hunting activities so necessary to their survival in Lower Canada. In response to these complaints, in 1850, the Crown passed the *Act for the protection of the Indians in Upper Canada* from imposition, and the property occupied or enjoyed by them from trespass and injury,⁸ then, in 1851, the Act to authorize the setting apart of Lands for the use of certain Indian Tribes in Lower Canada.⁹ This was the beginning of the modern **reserve** system.¹⁰ Often located in remote regions, these reserves—for the most part large tracts of land that could accommodate several nations—had two main purposes: to relocate the Indigenous Peoples far from areas of colonial expansion and to foster their adoption of a sedentary mode of life by encouraging them to become farmers. The idea of setting the Indigenous Peoples apart was not a new one at the time. Starting in the 1630s, religious communities had founded missions and reductions in New France to convert the Indigenous Peoples to Catholicism and make them French citizens.



Credit : ENVIRO-FOTO.

In 1867, as the fur trade declined, modern Canada was born. Shortly thereafter, it became the “owner” of the West by purchasing **Rupert’s Land** from the Hudson Bay Company, which had been granted the territory in 1670 by the King of England with no regard for the Indigenous Peoples occupying it. The federal government wished to extend its sovereignty west by building a railway and enabling the massive colonization of the region. These aggressions provoked the Red River Rebellions led by Louis Riel, which ended with the creation of the province of Manitoba. In 1871, the federal government invited the Indigenous Peoples to sign treaties. The purpose of the numbered treaties was to legally dispossess the Indigenous Peoples of their land. The latter, however, saw these treaties as land sharing agreements.

At the same time, the mass killing of animals over several generations by the colonists, coupled with the traditional hunting of the Indigenous Peoples, created an environmental imbalance. In the West, the decrease in the number of buffalo, a major source of food for several Indigenous Peoples in the Prairies, including the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nehiyawak (Plains Cree), Dakotas and Nakoda Oyadebi (Assiniboine), along with several epidemics, was a major stress on the Indigenous Peoples’ survival. The Canadian government took advantage of the situation to accelerate the signing of treaties. If they agreed to cede part of their territory to the Queen, the Indigenous Peoples would receive certain advantages, including farming implements, weapons, food and annuities (yearly payments). They were also promised that the colonists could not

Rupert’s Land

This territory included all of central Canada, from the United States border to the north of Hudson Bay.



settle on the lands reserved for them and that they could continue to fish, trap and hunt on Crown lands as long as the Crown had no use for them. Although several tribes, including those led by Poundmaker (Pitikwahanapiwi) and Big Bear, refused to give their consent, others agreed in order to ensure their transition toward a new lifestyle. In the West, the late 1880s were marked by severe famine, and the government offered food assistance only to those Indigenous Peoples that had signed a treaty. As a result, by 1883, the majority of western Indigenous Peoples lived on reserves, where their condition did not improve.

To survive, those living on reserves had to farm, although they did not have the necessary knowledge, and the lands allotted to them were unsuitable. Moreover, the government, which did not always keep its promises, often gave them the bare minimum. In 1884, Indigenous Peoples' chiefs demanded better treatment. The government, however, turned a deaf ear. The following year, the Métis and their First Nations allies led the North-West Rebellion, also known as the North-West Resistance, against the Canadian government.¹¹

There was loss of life on both sides during the five-month rebellion. However, the First Nations paid the highest price: chiefs who had not even participated in the attack and had voiced their objections to it were accused of treason and incarcerated, and all of those who had killed **European Canadians** were publicly executed without a trial. Other First Nations people were forced to witness the sad spectacle. Of the executions, **John A. Macdonald** said that they “ought to convince the Red Man that the White Man governs.”¹²

Eurocanadiens

Personnes issues de l'immigration des Européens au Canada.

John Alexander Macdonald

Prime Minister of Canada from 1867 to 1873 and from 1878 to 1891, and one of the Fathers of Confederation.



Credit : ENVIRO-FOTO.

A few years earlier, the report of the Bagot Commission (1842-1844), set up to investigate the administration of Indian Affairs, made a series of recommendations that later had an impact on Canadian policy regarding the Indigenous Peoples. The report suggested the creation of schools to separate Indigenous children from their parents and traditions and laid the foundation for many of the provisions of the *Indian Act*.¹³ The Canadian government enacted this racist and **paternalistic law** in 1876. The Act was based on the following documents: the *Act for the better protection of the Lands and Property of the Indians in Lower Canada* (1850), the *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857) and the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* (1869).

At first, the Indian Act was meant to be temporary, since it was believed that the Indigenous Peoples would disappear either by dying or by being assimilated into European Canadian society. It defined the status of “Indian,” as well as First Nations’ rights; it did not apply to **Inuit** or **Métis**. This allowed the Canadian government to legitimize some of its actions against the First Nations, including the implementation of a vast network of 139 Indigenous residential schools,¹⁴ extending across the country. In operation between the 1880s and 1996, these residential schools were attended by 150 000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children.¹⁵ The government saw these schools as “engines of cultural and spiritual change: ‘savages’ were to emerge as Christian ‘white men.’”¹⁶

Paternalistic law

Law that creates a hierarchy between the government and some of its citizens. For example, in the Indian Act, the Canadian government is seen as the father, and Indigenous people as its children, who must respect and obey it.

Inuit

Indigenous Inuktitut-speaking people living in Canada’s Arctic region.

Métis

People of mixed Indigenous and European origin, from the 1700s on. Mostly present in western Canada, they are one of the three Indigenous Peoples recognized in Canada.



STAGES OF THE GENOCIDE

TO CLASSIFY

“Men took my clothes off and had me sit naked in a barber chair. Then they shaved my head. I began to cry, remembering my father’s teachings . . . ‘Your hair is your life energy. Each hair on your head is an antenna to keep you in communion with the Earth. In our tradition, men let their hair grow long to mark their connection with Mother Earth, but also to accompany women. Your hair is therefore a sign of respect for the female sex.’”

Hereditary chief Dominique Rankin, residential school survivor [translation]¹⁷

The distinction between “them”—the “savages”—and “us”—civilized European Canadians—was well entrenched in Canadian society by the end of the 19th century. The traditional clothing and hairstyles of the Indigenous Peoples were cultural peculiarities that European Canadians would highlight to demonstrate their savage nature. As early as the end of the 19th century, the Canadian government would use these in its propaganda to demonstrate the “positive” impact of schools for Indigenous children (Indigenous residential schools). Its goal was to make sure that there was not a single Indian in Canada who was not integrated into society.¹⁸

The staff of Indigenous residential schools would first eradicate traditional clothing and hairstyles—symbols of the Indigenous Peoples.



“They took away our clothes, and gave us clothes... we all looked alike. Our hair was all the same, cut us into bangs, and straight short, straight hair up to our ears... They took away our moccasins, and gave us shoes. I was just a baby. I didn’t actually wear shoes, we wore moccasins. And so our identity was immediately taken away when we entered those schools.”

Doris Young, a survivor of Elkhorn residential school, which operated in Manitoba from 1888 to 1949¹⁹



Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Industrial School with tents, Red River carts and teepees outside the school fence, Lebert, Saskatchewan, 1884.

Credit: O. B. Buell. Library and Archives Canada, PA-182246

TO DEHUMANIZE

«[My foster parents were] adamant about Aboriginal culture being less than human, living as dirty bush people, eating rats. It made me not want to be one of those people. And for years, I didn't know how to be proud of who I was because I didn't know who I was.»

Indigenous woman placed in foster care as a child by social services²⁰



A group of nuns with Indigenous students, Port Harrison, Québec, 1890.

Credit: H. J. Woodside, Library and Archives Canada, PA-123707

From the time Europeans first encountered the Indigenous Peoples, they described them as “savages,” or primitive. They were even for a short time associated with monkeys, the common stereotype relating the “savages” to animals.²¹ Then the term “savages” came to be associated with the concept of child—a being with loose morals requiring rearing.²² The word would follow them everywhere, since it was used every day, as well as in legislation.

Even before they entered Indigenous residential schools, students were cut off from their roots. Their names were replaced by numbers. They were washed and “deloused.” Their hair was cut; their traditional clothing put away or destroyed and replaced by Western garb. On the grounds of the residential schools, children were not allowed to speak their language or allude to their culture. They were often prohibited from having social interactions with their brothers and sisters. Thus, they lost their individuality.

“Children grew up unaware that they were Indigenous. Their mother, who had lost all sense of pride in her Indigenous identity, did not speak to them about it. The women only learned that they were Indigenous in adulthood.”

Theresa “Tess” L., Anthony G. and Angela G.,
in relation to Jacqueline L.²³

“My mother made me pretty braids when I left, and they cut them off. I had a square haircut, you know, everything was square. And all the girls had the same haircut. I was constantly told that Indians stank, that they didn’t wash... That was what I was ashamed of.”

Carmen Petiquay [*translation*]²⁴



TO POLARIZE

“It was a dark time for our people. There was a great sense of confusion. People were wondering why this was happening when this was how we had lived, historically, forever and ever. The non-Native society tried to change us and our culture. They viewed [the potlatch] as a bad thing. They didn’t understand . . . that it was a way of showing how we gave thanks.”

Barb Cranmer, Kwakwaka'wakw and member of the 'Namgis Nation, whose grandfather held a large illegal potlatch in British Columbia²⁵

Shortly after Confederation, the government of Canada, fearing an uprising by the Indigenous Peoples because it had failed to respect some of its commitments (e.g. breaches of territorial agreements, little help with famine and illness), attacked their cultural practices. In 1884, it amended the *Indian Act* to prohibit **potlatches** on the West coast. Eleven years later, it prohibited the thirst dance (sun dance) practised by First Nations in the Prairies. Ultimately, it made all First Nations dances illegal in 1906. Individuals who broke the law were liable to imprisonment. In reality, several First Nations ignored these prohibitions and secretly continued to practise their rituals and ceremonies.²⁶

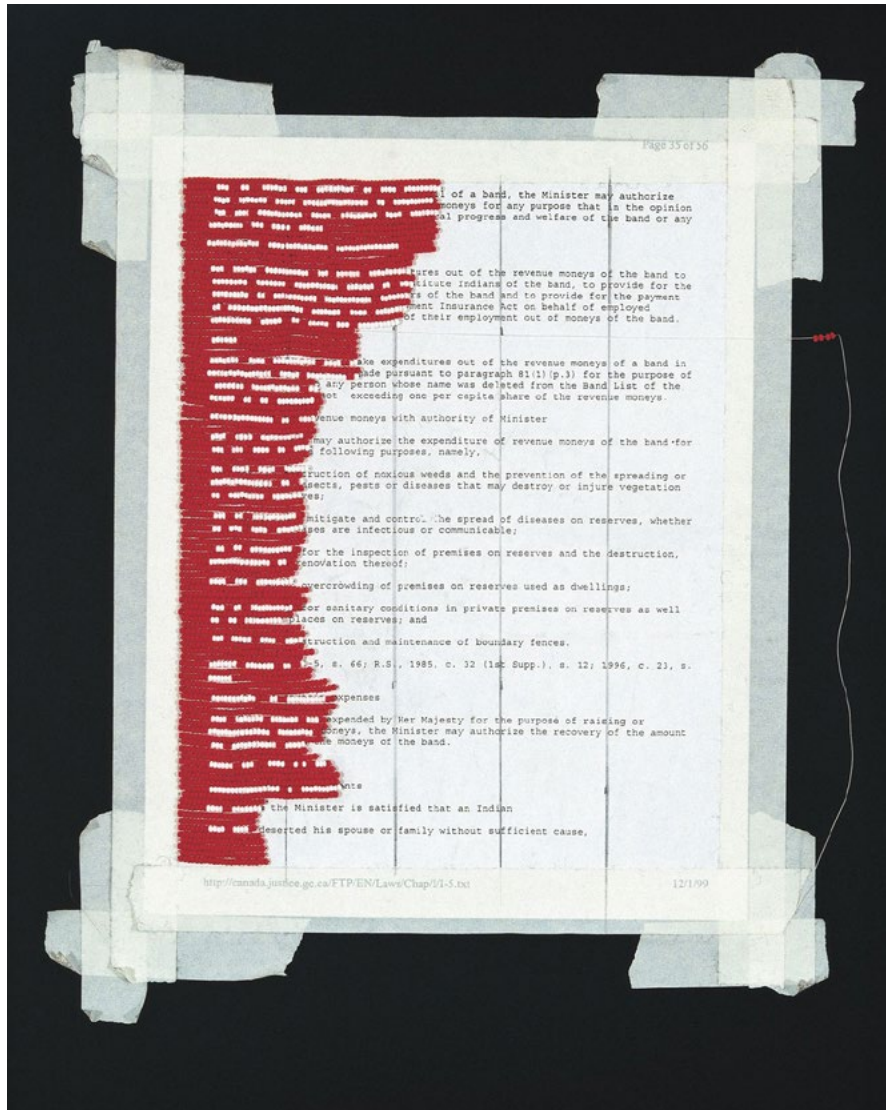
Potlatch

Cultural ceremony in which wealth is redistributed and shared by First Nations in British Columbia on the occasion of important social events such as the Chief's death or a wedding. Today, the potlatch is part of the traditions of many Indigenous Peoples across Canada.



Students cutting firewood in the snow at Fort Resolution Residential School, St. Joseph's Convent in the Northwest Territories

Credit: Library and Archives Canada, PA-048021



Indian Act – beaded artwork by Anishinaabe artist
Nadia Myre, 2000-2003

Credit: Nadia Myre

These rituals and ceremonies had important social and political meaning for them, since they were an opportunity for meetings, diplomacy and economic and social exchanges. At the beginning of the 20th century, wearing First Nations traditional costumes and doing First Nations traditional dances were even prohibited during public events such as fairs and rodeos.²⁷ These bans were only lifted in 1951.

After the North-West Rebellion of 1885, reserves in Western Canada, which were constantly shrinking, became open-air prisons: First Nations now needed a pass to get out. This illegal measure, which many First Nations found a way around, never appeared in the *Indian Act*.

Moreover, starting in the late 19th century, Indigenous women were especially targeted by discriminatory measures on the part of the Canadian government. Generally considered to be guardians of the land and culture, they were quietly relegated to a secondary role by the colonial authorities, like European Canadian women.²⁸

Under the *Indian Act* of 1876, which was intended to assimilate First Nations, members of this Indigenous people were considered second-class citizens by the Canadian government. Depending on the year—the Act was amended several times—and the rules in effect, they were prohibited from voting, acquiring land, pursuing legal recourse or expressing their culture through activities of governance or the celebration of rituals and ceremonies, which were considered political actions. The government was even responsible for the education of First Nations children. Thousands of them were sent to residential schools far from their community, which meant that children and their parents were unable to see each other over long periods of time.

TO ORGANIZE

“He gave me a small mattress so I would be comfortable, and a small bucket to urinate in. Sometimes I went to look out the small window. When I looked to the side, like this, I could see a bus parked out front. He told me: ‘Don’t answer when they call you.’”

Marie-Jeanne Papatie, explaining how her father, who hid her in the basement of the family home, saved her from the residential school [*translation*]²⁹

Beginning in the 19th century, the authorities, who needed land to settle the influx of new colonists and who coveted the natural resources on certain territories, relocated the Indigenous Peoples to reserves, sometimes by treaty, sometimes by force. These reserves were often located on land no one wanted.³⁰ The British, and then Canadian, authorities vacillated between two assimilationist formulas: protecting the Indigenous Peoples’ communities by settling them away from the European Canadians but delaying their assimilation; or integrating them into the European Canadian population in order to accelerate their assimilation but increasing the risk of abuse. Located at the periphery of populated areas, in the 1850s, the first reserves in Lower Canada, Kitigan Zibi (Maniwaki), Pessamit (Betsiamites) and Mashteuiatsh (Pointe-Bleue), offered the “best of both worlds”: partial isolation of the Indigenous Peoples from the rest of society.³¹



Mrs. Haggerty at Yellowknife Indian Residential School in the Northwest Territories with three Inuit children on their way to school, 1970

Credit: Library and Archives Canada, PA-136743

In order to have the same rights as a European Canadian, First Nations people had to be enfranchised, in other words, they had to give up their “Indian” status and leave the reserve and their community. By making this choice, they renounced their language and their identity. Most First Nations refused this “enfranchisement,” since, in their case, it only meant alienation. This way, they believed that they would preserve their culture and traditions, while keeping alive the government’s legal obligations toward them, including the protection of some of their ancestral lands. But, for a certain period, First Nations were “forcibly” enfranchised. For example, until 1951, the *Indian Act* stipulated that anyone who obtained a university degree or the professional title of lawyer or doctor would automatically lose their Indian status. In short, by enfranchising First Nations, the Canadian government was attempting to eliminate Indigenous cultures and regain control of the lands granted to them.

For the Indigenous Peoples, 1951 was a turning point. That year, major amendments were made to the *Indian Act*, including the revocation of many cultural, religious and political restrictions. That was also when the federal government gave the provinces jurisdiction over child protection (youth protection services).



A group of students in front of the Washakada Indian Residential School, Elkhorn, Manitoba, 1900

Credit: Boorne & May, Library and Archives Canada, PA-182261

Dependent on federal government support, the Indigenous residential schools suffered from intentional underfunding. The religious communities that managed them were asked to save at every level: food, heating, building maintenance, etc.³² Added to the mistreatment many of the children suffered, this situation endangered the survival of Indigenous students.

“It’s as if we were forced to live in a petri dish under a watchful eye and in a fixed environment so that they could monitor, observe, know everything about us.”

Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Cree-Métis artist, about the reserves [translation]³³

“What we went through was Father Alexis Joveneau trying to displace people from Pakuashipi to La Romaine. He was the one who got the deportation started... He had promised us so many great things... Yes, we went to La Romaine. We stayed there for a year. And after a year, we still hadn’t received anything.”

Jérôme Mesténapeo, deported to La Romaine in the 1960s³⁴

TO PERSECUTE AND TO MURDER

“One day, a ‘flying object’ scooped me out of our world to send me through the sky to a dark and desolate place. I don’t remember having time to say goodbye to my soul sister Cyril. I don’t remember saying goodbye to my puppies or to my world of light before boarding the RCMP’s single-engine Otter bound for the Chesterfield Inlet Residential School... Now I was following my brother, and I focused all my efforts on that. That was all I had left.”

Jose Amaujaq Kusugak [translation]³⁵

In 1883, following the Davin report suggesting that Canada base its Indigenous residential schools on the US model,³⁶ Canadian Prime Minister John A. Macdonald approved the creation of three residential schools. These three schools would be the beginning of a vast network of residential schools from coast to coast.³⁷ In 1920, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott amended the *Indian Act* to make attending Indigenous residential schools mandatory for all First Nations children between the ages of 5 and 15. It also made it legal for the Church and law enforcement to “scoop” the children from their homes. With this policy, the senior public servant intended to solve the “Indian problem.” Its object was to “continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic.”³⁸



The Scoop, by Cree artist Kent Monkman, 2018

Credit: Kent Monkman

The Canadian government also viewed Métis as members of the “dangerous classes,”³⁹ whom the residential schools were intended to assimilate. Inuit were especially affected by this policy when residential schools began opening in northern Canada in the mid-1950s.⁴⁰

Run by religious communities (Anglican, Catholic and Methodist for the most part), the Indigenous residential schools’ mission was to inculcate European Canadian values in First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, while making sure to destroy their culture (“kill the Indian in the child”). School staff provided mostly religious education and manual training, which made it difficult for students to carve a place for themselves in European Canadian society. They learned to cook, keep house, work with wood and farm; they also learned trades. However, daily life in many of these institutions was marred by psychological and physical violence, sexual abuse and forced labour. Between 1942 and 1952, children were used as guinea pigs in scientific experiments on (mal)nutrition.⁴¹

Since the residential schools had to be self-sufficient, children had to grow and prepare their own food and maintain the buildings in addition to their weekly chores. They often worked without respite in the schools, where the food was often insufficient or of poor quality, and where sanitary conditions were less than optimal because of underfunding. This mistreatment resulted in the death of thousands of children. In spring 2021, 215 bodies of children were discovered on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia.⁴² Yet, at the beginning of the 20th century, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, who had been hired as chief medical health officer of the Department of Indian Affairs, submitted a report to the government criticizing the miserable living conditions in residential schools.



Two boys cutting hay with two teams of horses at St. Michael's Indian Residential School, Duck Lake, Saskatchewan

Credit: Library and Archives Canada, PA-044563

His recommendations were ignored.⁴³ Dr. Bryce went even further, penning a pamphlet titled *The Story of a National Crime: An Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada*.⁴⁴

Once they graduated, 18-year-old students who had survived the experience were, in most cases, asked by the federal government to sign a certificate of enfranchisement, which stripped them of their Indian status. If they did not sign, they could not pursue their studies at the university level.⁴⁵ Few graduates voluntarily chose enfranchisement. While some remembered their time in residential school as a positive experience,⁴⁶ most children saw it as a trauma, a gashing wound that would be handed down from generation to generation.⁴⁷

The impact of these oppressive colonial measures did not end with the gradual closure of residential schools in the second half of the 20th century. In fact, from the 1960s to the 1980s, thousands of Inuit, Métis and First Nations children were kidnapped from their homes by youth protection services and put up for adoption or sold to White families in Canada and abroad. This was known as the

Sixties Scoop. More recently, the NIMMIWG (2019) uncovered the disappearance of Indigenous children at birth or during a stay in hospital. These events happened for the most part in the second half of the 20th century. In every case, the child was pronounced dead. Most of the time, staff at the health care institution refused to show the body to parents or disclose where the child had been buried.



The Scream, by Cree artist Kent Monkman, 2017

Credit: Kent Monkman

They were never given the child's medical record or death certificate. The families affected always lived in doubt about what really happened to their children. Moreover, hundreds and even thousands of Inuit, Métis and First Nations women hospitalized across Canada were forcibly sterilized.⁴⁸

“At the age of one and a half months, Lauréanna was transported by plane to a hospital in Joliette, without being accompanied by one of her parents, which was common practice at the time. She had pneumonia. Approximately one month after her hospitalization, Lauréanna’s parents received a call from the Manawan dispensary, informing them that their infant child had died... Viviane explained that upon her arrival at the funeral home, her mother noted that the baby in the coffin looked more like a big 9- or 10-month-old baby, while Lauréanna was only 3 months old at the time and had been rather small when she was taken to hospital. Armand remembered the same thing, and although he has never known whether the baby in the coffin was a little girl or a little boy, deep inside, he knows that the child was not his daughter.”

Viviane and Armand E.⁴⁹

“We were incarcerated for no other reason than being Indian. We were deprived of the care, love, and guidance of our parents during our most critical years of childhood. The time we could have learned the critical parenting skills and values was lost to the generations that attended residential schools, the effects of which still haunt us and will continue to have impacts upon our people and communities.”

Fred Kelly, member of Midewewin, the Sacred Law and Medicine Society of the Anishinaabe and survivor of St. Mary's Residential School in Kenora, Ontario, and St. Paul's High School in Saskatchewan⁵⁰

TO DENY

“Harper said, ‘We are Sorry.’ . . . There were thousands of Aboriginal people on the front lawn of the Parliament buildings, eager to hear this historic admission of responsibility... And then the people cried. They cried at the memory of what had been done, and what was being said. This event made a lot of people cry, and for many, it was a good cry—a cathartic one.”

Ojibwe playwright Drew Hayden Taylor, the day after Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology to residential school survivors in 2008⁵¹

There are signs that Canada is on its way to acknowledging the genocide of the Indigenous Peoples. However, the fact has yet to be recognized officially. The United Church, aware of having imposed their vision of the world on the Indigenous Peoples, was the first to apologize to them in 1986.⁵² However, it was only after the TRC report in 2015 that the Québec government acknowledged that they had been the victims of cultural genocide.⁵³ The Canadian government admitted its wrongdoing more reservedly. In 2008, then Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper apologized for the tragic consequences of Indigenous residential schools. However, the following year, at the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh,

he said that Canada had no history of colonialism, i.e. no history of a people of another culture attempting to extend its domination.⁵⁴ The day after the publication of the TRC report, he refused to use the term “cultural genocide.” He preferred “forced assimilation.”⁵⁵

Two years later, the government, now led by Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau, maintained more or less the same discourse. However, Prime Minister Trudeau acknowledged before the United Nations (UN) that the Indigenous Peoples had been the victims of colonialism, a paternalistic Indian Act, forced relocation, and Indigenous residential schools.⁵⁶ In 2019, he accepted the conclusions of the NIMMIWG, which stated that Indigenous women, girls and members of the 2SLGBTQQIA community had been the victims of genocide in Canada. However, he avoided saying this on behalf of Canada, which does not endorse this version of the facts. Nevertheless, his acceptance of the NIMMIWG's conclusions concerning genocide caused a stir in the political arena and among Canadians.

Did the Canadian government and its ecclesiastical allies commit genocide against First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada? The question remains open. Nonetheless, the government of Canada responded to call for action no. 79 of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission by commemorating the history and the legacy of residential schools: these schools were added to the list of national historic events and two schools were designated national heritage sites on September 1, 2020.

“The government is still in denial. They talk about a tragic story. We have turned the page, but they are writing another chapter, perhaps more refined, in order to deny what happened to us in those residential schools.”

Jean-Charles Pietacho, Chief of the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit in response to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [translation]⁵⁷

“For First Nations, Métis Nation and Inuit peoples in Canada, those early colonial relationships were not about strength through diversity, or a celebration of our differences. For Indigenous Peoples in Canada, the experience was mostly one of humiliation, neglect, and abuse. Of a government that didn’t respect their traditions and strengths, or their distinct governments and laws, but instead denied and undermined their rights and their dignity. That sought to overwrite their distinct histories, to eradicate their distinct languages and cultures, and to impose colonial traditions and ways of life. That discarded the Indigenous imperative to protect the land and water. . . . The failure of successive Canadian governments to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada is our great shame. And for many Indigenous Peoples, this lack of respect for their rights persists to this day. . . . That is the legacy of colonialism in Canada. Of a paternalistic Indian Act. Of the forced relocation of Inuit and First Nations communities, and a systematic denial of Métis rights and history. Of residential schools that separated children as young as five years old from their families, punished them for speaking their own language, and sought to extinguish Indigenous cultures entirely.”

Excerpt from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Address to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 21, 2017

JUSTICE

In the process of North American colonization, justice was often subverted by political power to serve its interests. The law supported the political aim of plundering the Indigenous Peoples' land and disposing of their rights.

Under the *Indian Act*, adopted in 1876, First Nations became wards of the federal government. The Act, clearly aimed at assimilation, is still in effect. It has been criticized by various stakeholders (the Assembly of First Nations, Quebec Native Women and the lawyers of the Québec bar association), who believe it gives the federal government too many powers over First Nations' identity, governance and income sources.⁵⁸

The *Constitution Act*, 1982, stipulates that existing rights—either ancestral or granted by treaty—are recognized and confirmed, and that the three Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) are included in the constitutional negotiations concerning the right to hunt and fish and cultural rights.⁵⁹ The issues at stake are critical when it comes

to the scope of land rights, resources and self-government.⁶⁰ For socio-economic reasons, the Indigenous Peoples' territories were highly sought after, not only by the government, but also by major industrial powers. They appropriated sections of the reserves⁶¹ that had been created to protect the Indigenous Peoples' lands, without the latter's consent, in order to meet their need for land for settlement and the exploitation of natural resources. For example, in the 1880s and 1890s, Indian Affairs was given the power to cede or lease reserve lands to a third party without the consent of the bands concerned.⁶²

Between 1927 and 1951, under the *Indian Act*, First Nations people could not sue the government using band funds. As a result, claims by First Nations were largely ignored. In 1973, the Calder Decision, in which the Supreme Court recognized the First Nations' territorial rights, signalled changes to come.⁶³ It was followed by the Malouf Decision⁶⁴ in 1973 and the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*⁶⁵ in 1975.

In 1991, after the Oka Crisis, the federal government set up the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to review its government policy regarding First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The Commission's report, published in 1996, proposed a number of changes to improve relations between these peoples, the federal government and the population of Canada, and set the stage for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁶⁶ The Specific Claims Tribunal of Canada (SCT) was created in 2008. It is an independent judicial body with the power to settle First Nations' claims concerning treaty violations, fraud, illegal dispositions and the absence of adequate compensation for reserve land.

Examples of major judicial remedies:

In 2006, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement gave rise to the largest class action suit in the history of Canada, aimed at compensating the Indigenous Peoples for the abuse they suffered in these institutions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, officially created in 2008 as a result of the Agreement, attempted to reconcile residential school survivors, their families and communities, and all Canadians, by conducting investigations between 2008 and 2015.⁶⁷

On December 1, 2018, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Carolyn Bennett announced that the claims and compensation process was open for survivors of the Sixties Scoop that took place between the 1960s and 1980s.⁶⁸

In 2017, two Indigenous women who had been forcibly sterilized in hospital began a class action suit against the Province of Saskatchewan and its regional health authorities and doctors, as well as the federal government. In December 2018, a class action suit was also filed against the Government of Alberta by Indigenous women who claimed they were the victims of forced sterilization by doctors.⁶⁹

In January 2019, the government invited representatives of the federal, provincial and territorial governments to create a task force on the forced sterilization of Indigenous women. The Québec government refused to take part.

EXCERPT FROM MONONK JULES BY JOCELYN SIOUI, 118⁷⁰

"My name is the only thing I have left, along with the spoonful of Wendat blood that flows through my veins. If I didn't have that, I might be accused of being an impostor. I am historical proof of an enforced disappearance, of genocide. I am a mark left by History.

My face is a reflection of the past. Repeated miscegenation in order to survive, in an urgent effort not to disappear altogether.

I carry all that within me. My DNA is an archaeological site."

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