

Residential School Supplemental Information

August, 2021

The following information is intended to provide members of indigenous communities, scholars, journalists, teachers, and the interested public with a more nuanced and complete understanding of the story behind revelations of events at residential schools that were designed to advance the agenda of forced assimilation experienced by Native Americans in the USA and First Nations peoples in Canada. It is not our intention to capture and catalogue the entire vast array of materials on this topic. For a general overview of residential schools and their histories in the United States and Canada see online histories such as: <https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/canada-u-s-differ-on-boarding-school-policies>

We seek to bring perspectives, informed by indigenous experience, that have been neglected or have appeared only in obscure publications not generally or easily accessible to the public. Our objective is to fill in some of the gaps in reporting. Additional questions and relevant resources will be added as the need and opportunity arise. *Please contact me with question, comments, or suggestions for recommending resources:* Randy Kritkauský rkritkauský@ecologia.org

1. Are recent discoveries of abuse and graves at residential schools entirely new information?

Indigenous people have known about disappearances, vanished children, and missing young women on reservations for decades, if not a century or more. It is the mainstream and media that have suddenly awakened to the broader implications of a story we have long tried to tell. In fact this story has previously appeared in mainstream media and fact finding reports for more than a century.

Examples/Resources:

- July 4 1889 New York Times story titled “The Hampton Indian School: Another Denial of the Charges of Dr. Childs”, <https://www.nytimes.com/1889/07/04/archives/the-hampton-indian-school-another-denial-of-the-charges-of-dr.html>
- The 1928 Meriam Report commissioned by the Institute for Government Research which later became the Brookings Institution, <https://narf.org/nill/resources/meriam.html>
- a Canadian doctor and health official who was a whistle blower, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/this-doctor-tried-to-raise-alarms-about-residential-schools-100-years-ago-but-was-ignored-1.5462902>, and most recently
- Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigation and final report, <http://www.trc.ca/about-us/trc-findings.html>

2. Why are stories about residential schools gaining such prominence now?

Indigenous people have made enormous advances in recovering and revitalizing their threatened culture. We have begun to speak out and take bold steps through legal actions and protests in recent decades. Other social movements of marginalized people, such as Black Lives Matter, have sensitized the media and general public to long neglected realities of marginalized and colonized people.

Consequently that which was once denied, ignored, or virtually invisible for mainstream society is now front page news.

3. Was it the intention of residential schools to “kill the Indian”?

This phrase is a partial quotation from one of the architects of the residential system in the USA, Richard Henry Pratt. Almost every news article about residential schools quotes part of Pratt’s 1892 statement which stated this: “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: That all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man.” It is the final statement that is so widely quoted. In its entirety or in the more widely known fragmentary form Pratt’s sentiment is arrogant and racist. But it is not calling for the physical extermination of Indians. In fact, Pratt defended Indians from those who would indeed let them, or even encourage them to vanish into the mists of history. (See question # 8 below)

The horrific facts surrounding still untabulated deaths at residential schools are a reminder that metaphorically killing Indianness occasionally morphed into actually killing indigenous children outright, or more commonly killed them through malign neglect. This distinction is important because we need to *recognize that the cumulative effect of many racist and assimilationist policies often had the same outcome as intentional policies of genocide*. Many of the same attitudes of cultural superiority survive today and they continue to converge and create living situations where hunger, abuse, and disease still kill indigenous people at high rates. Colonial societies and post colonial societies do not need to have explicit policies of genocide to produce many of the effects of a genocidal policy.

4. Media stories and even testimonials given by residential school survivors often give the impression that residential schools succeeded in erasing indigenous culture for an entire generation or even indigenous people as a whole. Is this an accurate characterization of the impact of residential schools?

Emphatically, NO. Enormous damage was inflicted on many individuals and on entire communities. Collectively, traditional communities experienced a break in the millennia-old practice of elders passing along customs, language, and wisdom to young ones. But there was also resistance against this even within the walls of schools and within broader indigenous communities at the very time residential schools were operating. For every story about Indian names and language being banned, and for every image of a long haired kid next to his shorn hair “after” photo in white people’s clothing, there is another story of indigenous students eventually returning home dedicated to reviving tribal culture. If we were to evaluate the residential schools as historians do with wars, by looking at longer term outcomes, the residential school system would need to be given a failing grade for how successful it was in achieving its self-declared mission to “kill the Indian to save the man”. As noted below (see question #7), paradoxically, residential schools did “educate” indigenous students in ways that were often unanticipated and in many ways that ultimately worked against their assimilationist agenda.

Examples/Resources:

- a New York Times photo essay on Canadian residential school has the usual haircut photo but also another of First Nations kids at a residential school practicing with bows and arrows:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/05/world/canada/Indigenous-residential-schools-photos.html>

- a photo taken at the Hampton Institute shows an Indian wearing full traditional Sioux regalia for an American history class: <https://jubiloemancipationcentury.wordpress.com/2011/02/28/the-american-indian-at-hampton-institute-virginia/>,
- and the following account suggests that there are many unrecorded acts of subtle defiance that residential school staff would not even notice:

“...Luther Standing Bear’s description of his first day in a classroom in Carlisle when his teacher, Marianna Burgess, wrote English names (that none of her students could read) on the board and made each of them come up to “pick” one to replace their own. Standing Bear explains, “When my turn came, I took the pointer and acted as if I were about to touch an enemy, *counting coup** on his English name in an assertion of Lakota identity in a threatening moment”. Page 12, Learning to Write Indian: The Boarding School Experience and American Indian Literature, Amelia V Katanski, University of Oklahoma Press 2007

** counting coup was a Plains Indian tradition of striking a blow on the enemy without killing him in order to display bravery and bring shame to the adversary who was struck.*

5. Were indigenous children prevented from absolutely any expression of their culture and particularly using their native languages at residential schools?

No, not at all schools. The truth is more nuanced and was, if not by design then in effect, sometimes even more insidious and confusing for students than an outright ban. Children were indeed often severely and brutally punished for speaking their language. But the practice was not universal. At my grandfather’s third residential school, Hampton, the graduation ceremony that he attended provided for an Indian language song (source: author’s reading of Hampton archived graduation ceremony program). At other school ceremonies Indian music and songs in Indian language were featured.

In fact, Hampton had a highly complex and sometimes not strictly enforced English language policy:

“Indian students were prohibited from speaking their native tongue, except before breakfast and after supper, and on holidays and Sundays. Even on the Sabbath Armstrong (ed. the school’s founder) advised them to ‘pray all they can in English and the rest in Indian’. They were awarded ‘pretty badges’ called ‘eagles’ if they spoke only English and were fined a quarter and sent to the commander each time they did not. Nevertheless, Hampton did oppose Commissioner Morgan’s policy of English only, since Indian students needed fluency in their native tongue to act as cultural missionaries. (Indeed it appears that some non-Sioux learned Lakota as well as English.)” p. 201 *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877-1923*, Donal F Lindsey, University of Illinois Press, 1995

The overall message of residential schools and the society in general about when and where to be seen or heard as an Indian was confusing. It appeared more in this form: you can be an Indian when and where we allow it! Outside of these allowed spaces and times, there is a high price to pay. Similar codes of conduct, at the same time in history, were used to control, dis-empower or terrorize African Americans who risked their lives if they violated unwritten “Jim Crow Etiquette” rules governing social encounters with whites, or if they violated “Sundown Town” norms about when non-whites could be seen in white sections of town.

Adding to this message confusion is the fact that white settler colonist descendants paid to see Indians parade and perform in regalia as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show at the very same time that authentic celebrations on the reservation were illegal and were banned at residential schools.

"Celebrating" Indian heritage in museum exhibits, at the 1893 Chicago Exhibition, in literature, and travelling shows was part of how white people were able to escape confronting their repressive racism. They could believe that they admired certain aspects of Indian culture. Whites could convince themselves that they just reserved the right to decide when and where it was best for Indians and the larger society to allow expressions of that culture. It is within this ambiguity that culture erasure functioned without requiring whites to continually confront their own blatant racism and dehumanizing attitudes.

6. Were all of the religious organizations involved in residential schools fanatical and sadistic?

It is simplistic to generalize and demonize. If we focus the blame primarily on Catholic nuns and priests, we separate ourselves from a broader history of complicity that continues to this day. Many Protestants, were also involved in the direct or indirect operations of residential schools. The peace loving Quakers, known for their tolerance, were deeply involved in Pennsylvania's Carlisle Indian School, the flagship and model for the entire nation and even Canadian residential schools. Quakers were conveners of the Mohonk Conference which guided assimilationist and residential school policy for decades as discussed in question #8 below. Indian children at the Carlisle School were sent out during summers as cheap labor for Quaker farmers who paid a pittance for what was something like indentured service. We have a letter from my grandfather about poor treatment during his summer at a non-Quaker home in New Hampshire during his Carlisle summer outing. The othering and dehumanizing of Indians was not limited to a particular religion.

7. News stories give the impression that residential schools were universally horrific. Is this an accurate portrayal?

The degree and extent of physical cruelty involved with residential schools is a question finally being investigated. Meanwhile, in the absence of answers to questions about what actually happened at individual residential schools and in some overall sense, a somewhat distorted and probably unnecessarily dramatic portrait of abuse resembling concentration camps has emerged. Indeed, in the more than 200 articles on residential schools that we have examined, parallels with Holocaust concentration camps have been frequent. There appear to be multiple factors involved in this. First, both print and social media have learned that the dramatic and the outrageous "sells", attracts readers and viewers. It is common to see a story that has a very shocking headline about a residential school but ends with a tale about resiliency that does not confirm the more extreme implications of headlines.

Another factor in play is ideology. Many scholars who write about indigenous affairs rigorously adhere to claims of secularism and objectivity. This can predispose them to skepticism, if not outright hostility, toward the religious institutions that operated many residential schools. In addition, other academic schools of thought project a hard ideological edge and expect their adherents to toe the line. Consequently a large percentage of "academic experts" express the more extreme opinions on residential schools. One academic expert on indigenous affairs that we encountered in print not only defended

burning down churches on reservations but advocated jettisoning Christianity in a wholesale fashion and having all Native Americans return to a spirituality rooted only in traditional values. This suggestion ignores the fact that a huge percentage of North American indigenous people have been Christians for generations and it now constitutes their tradition. Various surveys suggest that 50-70% of Native Americans claim Christianity as part of their heritage.

There is a great deal of pain and anger in indigenous communities. This frequently manifests itself in highly emotional statements which are more expressive than they are fact based.

Finally, there is a high degree of white guilt that has been triggered by news stories about residential schools. A *mea culpa* posture expressed by descendants of white settlers seems to provide many with a psychological defense mechanism akin to “I have expressed my guilt by association, now my hands are clean, and I am excused from responsibility for ongoing societal racism victimizing indigenous people.” These bizarre strains of societal processing news often lead to hasty and ill thought out efforts to compensate for historic injustice (See question # 15 below).

Paradoxically, we have found the most balanced portrayal of what went on at residential schools in a newspaper deeply committed to advocacy of indigenous affairs. It is likely that the editors and journalists there understand the need to have an accurate and nuanced understanding of the past if we are to escape its lingering trauma. They also have not so easily challenged legitimacy and authenticity that allows them to “risk” being rational and moderate. Note the following excerpt from *Indian Country Today*, July 18, 2021, <https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/canada-u-s-differ-on-boarding-school-policies> which is boldly balanced.

“It’s important to note, however, that not everybody who attended the schools, in both the U.S. and Canada, describe the same experiences, according to interviews with former students over the years by Indian Country Today.

Some former students share fond memories of their boarding and residential school years. Some made lifetime friends or met their spouses there. And for some, the schools represented a relief from overcrowded family homes with limited resources.

As more generations of Indigenous people attended the schools, they developed survival strategies and ways to maintain their human dignity and to hold on to a measure of their languages and cultures. In many ways, going away to boarding schools and the attendant hardship grew normalized.

But in many ways, Canada and the U.S. succeeded in the overarching goals of assimilation and diminishing Native language and culture. Like generations of immigrants who settled in the U.S., some Native people left their cultures and traditions behind.

Their survival came at a great human and spiritual cost.”

Undue emphasis of the abuse that was widely present in many residential schools not only obscures the pathway to a rational and balanced understanding of this history, it unnecessarily triggers trauma for those who experienced these realities, and for their descendants. (See discussion of inter-generational trauma in question #13 below.)

8. Were residential school students able to extract anything positive out of their experience?

As noted above, residential schools did “educate” indigenous students in unanticipated ways. Despite their strong emphasis of practical and vocational skills (housekeeping, agriculture, and mechanical skills) many schools offered varying degrees of a liberal arts education. This allowed some previously marginalized people to meet white society on its own terms and to demand equal treatment and fulfillment of treaty obligations.

On the very practical level of daily life, an education could level the playing field as evidenced in this “encouragement” testimonial published in the Hampton Institute’s Indian student newspaper *Talks and Thoughts*:

One letter-writer, describing his encounter with whites on the reservation, recounted in rough English what often happened once an Indian’s land-lease expired:

“When the time is up, you are kicked out, and he will tell you to get there [sic] you Injun. I don’t want no more of you, I have get [sic] all you had. It is good to have an education, then you can read and learn the ways of the whites. As for me, I haven’t got much education, but I would like to see that white man that could cheat me on a bargain. I have held office in this town. I have been constable and assessor.”

Such letters from ex-students testified to the value and potential application of the skills they might acquire at Hampton.”

Page 41, " 'Traveling the White Man's Road' The Quest for Identity in Hampton's Indian Newspaper, 1886-1907", Eli Winkler, MA Thesis, 1998, College of William and Mary
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3814&context=etd>

Talks and Thoughts tip-toed around major national news of the day, including the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee. But it did provide an outlet for asserting Indian identity in often biting humorous anecdotes. One story,

... reported that one of the Indian students used his role in the school play *Hiawatha* to upbraid the uncomprehending audience in his native tongue; only the teacher and the few other Lakota students realized that he had called his onlookers “fools” who “only sit there and smile.”

Page 57, Winkler.

Such an ability to function simultaneously in two worlds, a skill developed in the midst of mixed messages sent and received at residential schools, allowed many graduates to simultaneously achieve prominence in both mainstream and indigenous society. For example, a former editor of *Talks and Thoughts* became a lawyer promoting Indian rights and was the first indigenous lawyer to argue before the US Supreme Court.

Emma Goulette Johnson received an education at the Chilocco residential school in both homemaking skills and the liberal arts. She went on to become a highly regarded teacher at Chilocco who wrote articles

about freeing Indian women from gender restrictions. Johnson was also a co-founder of the Society of American Indians (SAI), along with Charles Eastman and many prominent residential school graduates who acquired skills needed to not only navigate in the white world, but also to find common ground with other indigenous peoples. SAI is acknowledged as the beginning of the pan-Indian movement in the United States.

Resource Recommendation: The Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians documents a continuing dialogue between those who designed residential schools and those who attended, taught at, or simply outright opposed them. Journal articles are surprisingly frank and revealing. Two volumes of the SAI Journal for the years 1913 and 1914 are available as open source documents. See:

<https://www.aidhp.com/items/show/174#?c=&m=&s=&cv=>, and

<https://www.aidhp.com/items/show/154#?c=&m=&s=&cv=>

Clearer, more readable, and hardbound versions can be acquired from multiple sources found online.

9. Were the architects of residential schools the cultural extremists of their times?

Strange as it may seem, those who designed, built and operated residential schools were not the most threatening adversaries of indigenous people and their culture. Reflecting “progressive” values of their time, most residential school architects defended indigenous people from more extreme racist notions of the times concerning racial purity and the notion that “primitive” indigenous societies and peoples were an evolutionary dead end beyond rescue as living beings. For example, many anthropologists and policy makers believed that Indians represented a lower racial form. They explained Indian culture in purely racial terms and set up definitions of “Indianness” based on cranial size and shape, very much like Nazi characterizations of “Aryans” and Jews. And like the Nazis they advocated policies of racial cleansing such as forced sterilization.

The ultra extremists of colonization declared Indians to be a deservedly disappearing race on the verge of extinction like the buffalo. For them, government efforts to help Indians were a waste of time and resources. By contrast, wealthy philanthropists, inspired largely by religious zeal, declared themselves to be “Friends of Indians” who wanted to rescue them through education. They met annually between 1883 and 1916 at the famous New York State resort by which the group became known, The Lake Mohonk Conference, <http://nativeamericannetroots.net/diary/937>. Eventually Native Americans participated in these gatherings. The Mohonk conference discussed and designed programs which were influential in Bureau of Indian Affairs programming, and residential schools in particular. The now demonized Col. Henry Pratt attended Mohonk Conferences and argued that Indians could be educated and brought into contemporary society, though entirely on terms dictated by white society. While Pratt’s infamous statement “kill the Indian to save the man” is often misrepresented today as evidence of an intention to actually physically kill kids at residential schools, Pratt was viewed as an ally as much as an adversary by many contemporary indigenous leaders who worked with him to promote the notion that Indians *could be educated*. Articles by Pratt were published in the SAI Journal referenced above.

Resources:

- The State of Vermont implemented a policy of forced sterilization targeting Native Americans, French Canadian Catholics, and those deemed mentally deficient. A 1991 Vermont historical study, while slightly outdated, is revealing as it presents the motivations of the programs designers in their own words: <https://vermonthistory.org/journal/misc/EugenicsSurvey.pdf>. The historical society states that “eugenics” was a state policy for one decade, 1925-1936. In fact the program continued until the 1960s, see <https://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/VT/VT.html>
- Information on anthropology’s racialization of Indians and the eventual rejection of this racist notion by Franz Boas, one of the founders of modern anthropology: https://www.academia.edu/36969259/Introduction_to_Indigenous_Visions

10. Is the residential school and forced assimilation story uniquely North American?

Residential schools also occurred in Australia. Many of the policies behind the Australian schools foreshadowed and echoed South Africa’s Apartheid policies.

Resources: forthcoming-

11. Were racist assumptions about European, white, Christian cultural superiority universal and unchallenged among those making policy about indigenous people and their assimilation?

It is a common assumption among both white mainstream and indigenous observers that all late 19th and early 20th century scholarly advisors (including anthropologists and ethnographers) and policy makers blindly and dogmatically adhered to notions of racial and cultural superiority. Quite obviously, a centuries-old colonial and racist perspective ultimately dominated policy making and institution building for many decades. That said, it is important to acknowledge articulate dissenting voices from the times. Such voices beg the question, why didn’t reason prevail? And equally importantly, did dissenting voices help to plant the seeds of resistance and keep resilience alive?

One of the more extraordinary examples of vigorous dissent is an essay in the SAI Journal of January-March 1914 referenced above. Frank Speck, an anthropologist from the University of Pennsylvania, penned a provocative essay titled “Educating the White Man Up to the Indian”. Speck vigorously rejects any notion of the inferiority of indigenous culture.

12. Were Indian Residential Schools uniquely brutal or were they a reflection of the times?

The answer is a bit of both. Residential schools were a place where settler colonist values were allowed to play out in their more extreme forms. But the overall scheme and cultural of residential schools actually reflected late 19th and early 20th century social attitudes of hostility and fear directed at non-whites. The “melting pot” was a cauldron into which real humans were tossed and expected to be boiled down to a homogenized and sanitized version of white society. Immigrants were often treated brutally on the streets and in schools. Even the Playground Movement, which is credited with the appearance of childrens’ play spaces in cities, was designed to strip foreigners of their culture and make them rule-obeying punctual “Americans” prepared for factory work lives. This is so similar to the agenda of Indian residential schools.

By demonizing residential schools as “exceptional”, we distract ourselves from an ugly truth - our society was profoundly racist and still is. While events that transpired at residential schools were extreme in their degree of expressing the cruel racism of the times, the practices making headlines today are more a matter of the degree of their cruelty than they were unique in their historical context.

In an even broader context, we must recognize that both historical and contemporary societies across the globe tend to “other” and dehumanize the most vulnerable beings within their fold and then to inflict the worst of human impulses on these most vulnerable beings. Think of recent scandals at Irish orphanages and their secret cemeteries. (“Report reveals how 9,000 children died in mother and baby homes across Ireland” <https://www.euronews.com/2021/01/12/report-expected-to-detail-how-9-000-children-died-in-18-care-institutions-across-ireland>)

Think of the student-on-student sadism that characterized British boarding schools for the “elite” where vulnerable students were bullied. Think of how the United States treated undocumented children during the Trump administration – children were separated from their families and put into unsanitary cages.

None of this argues against the moral condemnation being leveled at those who operated residential schools and those who were complicit in covering up the facts down to today. However, in order to fully understand what happened we need to dig deeper, into the most fundamental values of our society and its hierarchical conception of where otherness begins, and what norms apply to interacting with “others”.

Here we take the opportunity to point out that beneath racial minorities, ethnic outcasts and powerless children there is one even lower rung in the social hierarchy- our other than human kin. We might take this moment to ask how future generations will judge our treatment of other living beings: the winged ones, the rooted ones, the four legged ones. Might they not view our commonplace assumptions about the unworthiness of these beings to be troubling echoes of prevailing social norms a few centuries ago that relegated people of color to a less than human status, one with no rights?

Without distracting ourselves from the issues of basic human rights that are raised with respect to residential schools, we should use this moment to ponder the rights of nature. This movement is not just abstractly related to matters of indigenous peoples. As discussed below in question 14, if we want to make amends for abuse and harm inflicted on indigenous peoples, one means of doing this would be to accept the indigenous valuation of the world of nature as animate and constituted of kin. It is within this broader context that indigenous people seek healing and justice, not just for the outrages of residential schools, but for the entire legacy of colonialism.

Resource: - forthcoming

13. What is inter-generational trauma?

Nearly every news story and analysis of residential schools mentions “inter-generational trauma”. In recent decades we have become familiar with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). It is now widely understood that those involved in wars and various forms of domestic and sexual abuse can continue to re-live their traumatic experiences in flashbacks and dreams. Inter-generational trauma refers to the fact

that an individual's relived trauma and stress can color relations with succeeding generations, even to the extent of recreating the levels of stress and replicating the behaviors that the original victim experienced.

Biologists have documented the fact that plants and animals turn on stress preparation genes when droughts or pest attacks occur. Their off-spring are born primed to react and adapt. Humans pass along the same predispositions. Those born in war-torn countries are often prepared to struggle to merely survive, to be hyper alert for life threatening sounds and actions.

In a similar fashion, extensive cross-cultural research has documented that those who are abused are more likely to become abusers within their families and communities as adults. Such findings are often cited as a primary explanation for high levels of domestic violence in Native American communities. Now residential schools and their history are often being portrayed as the primary causes of violence in indigenous communities. However, domestic violence in indigenous communities cannot be attributed *solely* to a residential school legacy; centuries of dislocation, drug and alcohol abuse, and poverty all play a role. Removing one factor is not adequate to address such issues. All contributing factors must be comprehensively addressed, simultaneously.

And then there is the issue of a culture of violence. Many indigenous cultures often emphasized values associated with being a warrior such as enduring extreme physical hardship, some of it in the form of self-inflicted pain. Little is written about if and how this legacy contributes to violence within indigenous communities. But the conversation has begun. We may soon learn more about how *all* of these historical factors contribute to the trauma in indigenous communities.

What we do know now is that the physical abuse residential schools inflicted on our children was not part of indigenous cultures. Native Americans disciplined children with story telling and other forms of guidance. If our young experience the trauma of violence and abuse today, it is because of choices that we make now about our actions.

14. How did assimilation actually occur during colonial times?

Indian residential schools were a later stage development rather than a leading edge of cultural assimilation. News stories can give the impression that Native Americans succeeded in holding onto their traditional values until the appearance of the white people's residential schools, which in a very well coordinated fashion led the attack on indigenous cultures and societies.

In fact the earliest European contact with Native Americans stimulated very different approaches to recognizing and/or undermining indigenous culture. In the 17th century, generally speaking, English colonists sought to socially transform Indians by making them *live* like "civilized" European settled farmers rather than as semi-nomads. The English attempted to introduce plows and other agricultural tools. French colonists and missionaries, by contrast, initially accommodated Indian cultural practices and lived among the Native peoples, often intermarrying.

As is so often the case with cultural assimilation and colonization, material culture (steel axes, hunting rifles, horses, metal cooking kettles, metal knives, etc.) proved very attractive. Indian women saw benefits to labor saving technology, and they were often proponents of adopting aspects of the foreign culture,

including its religion. What we characterize as a collision and competition among cultures was to no small degree a competition between competing technologies.

Much of the “work” of cultural assimilation was accomplished a century or more before systematically educating Indians in residential schools on a massive scale became a reality. By the time my grandfather was enrolled in his first of three residential schools, his family had a long, three or four generation, connection with Christianity. English was his first language. He, like many other indigenous children, was familiar with many of the cultural elements that news articles imply were first and forcibly introduced for the first time at schools away from home.

This is a critical point that both the media and many academics miss. When they characterize Native Americans as having been brainwashed into an alien religion that they did not truly understand, analysts imply that the substantial portion of contemporary indigenous people in North America who identify themselves as Christians do so with incomplete understanding and lack of full spiritual commitment. The real story is more complex: many Native Americans hold onto and practice *both* their traditional spiritual ways and those of various forms of Christianity.

Resources:

- *Nicolas Black Elk: Medicine Man, Missionary, Mystic*. Michael F. Steltenkamp. University of Oklahoma Press, 2009.
- “Encounters with Kateri Tekakwitha”, Chapter 9 in *Without Reservation: Awakening to Native American Spirituality and the Ways of Our Ancestors*. Randy Kritkauskay, Bear & Company, 2020.

15. How can indigenous communities and residential school survivors heal? How can post-colonial societies in North America come to terms with their role in residential schools?

These difficult questions cannot be fully answered in this brief format. We remind the reader that our objective is not to summarize the vast body of information and analysis on the topic of residential schools. It is instead to offer fresh insights. In that spirit, we offer a few pointers indicating directions, perspectives, and pathways that have been neglected and which are worthy of special attention. In answering these questions we will keep our focus narrowed on residential schools as it is all too easy to wade into the deeper waters of addressing the entire legacy of colonialism, of which residential schools are one chapter.

Even with a narrow focus, we are immediately confronted with a dilemma. Questions about healing the legacy of residential schools are posed and answered very differently by indigenous people and by those in the mainstream.

Mainstream solutions to healing tend to fall into the category of “instruments of colonialism”, a term first brought to our attention by Grant Paulson, an Australian Aboriginal elder who appeared on our internet streamed radio show *Indigenous Perspectives to be broadcast August 26, 2021*. We had raised a rather broad question about apologies, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and reparations in the Australian context, when we received a patient reminder from Grant that such actions are undertaken by those who wield the predominance of power in an imbalanced power relationship. There is no better reminder of

this than the fact that South Africa's trend setting 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission happened only because it acquiesced to the demand for immunity from criminal prosecution set forth by architects of Apartheid and by those who engaged in decades of violence against Black South Africans.

This fact became more poignant when Grant Paulson expressed discomfort with the very term "reconciliation". He reminded us that the word indicates a return to good relations that previously existed. That is an impossibility when "the good old days" of early colonization are a painful tale of invasion and conquest. The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2008 to investigate the history of residential schools, avoided some of this power imbalance with its mission focus to committing to uncovering and bringing historical realities to Canadian citizens in order to address a legacy of injustice. However, slow implementation of many commission recommendations and ignoring others entirely is a reminder that the outcome of such efforts remains in the hands of those who hold power and can effectively manipulate the legal system (See: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/critics-blast-catholic-church-1.6086030>).

While some form of monetary compensation is helpful and just, we should be cautious about monetizing pain and trauma, and then attempting to get closure by dispensing funding. Such efforts, when hastily implemented, can add fuel to the fires of trauma and stoke conflict within compensated communities. An example of this is Evanston Illinois' highly publicized efforts to compensate African Americans for a long history of exclusion for access to housing. Like the Saskatoon story noted above, the reality of what has been delivered is a minuscule fraction of what was promised in a feel-good program by the white community. (See: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/aug/18/evanston-illinois-reparations-plan-cautionary-tale>) For this author, who is an enrolled Potawatomi tribal member, the even larger irony is that Evanston is built on tribal homelands from which my ancestors were expelled. There is no plan for compensating that injustice.

Grant Paulson did not entirely dismiss the value of instruments of colonialism, such as Australia's National Sorry Day (See <https://nationaltoday.com/national-sorry-day/> in healing the wounds of colonial injustice and the "stolen generations" of indigenous children who were taken from their families. However, he pointed out that these actions originate in distant places of power (or not, as in the case of the United States Government which has not yet apologized for residential schools). And as such they are distant from the spiritual needs of indigenous people.

An important action that indigenous people really desire, according to Paulson, is "enshrining acts of healing in ceremony". This means literally (re)walking a pathway together and memorializing the acts of healing. Australian Aboriginal culture has at its core a notion of song paths which physically mark places of spiritual importance, and encode memory. Place-based ceremony and worship is also central to the indigenous peoples of North America. If those in the mainstream *really* want to facilitate acts of healing associated with residential school trauma, they need to get out from behind their desks and podiums and stand with indigenous peoples at former residential school sites where healing is long overdue. An Australian variation on this theme is the annual celebration of the Myall Creek Massacre of 1838. It is notable because this historical event marks a first: white perpetrators of the massacre were prosecuted and convicted.

This brings us to the thorny issue of accountability. The governments that designed and implemented residential schools are still in power. There has been little to no accountability of a criminal or civil nature. The same holds true for the many religious groups that operated the schools.

Resources: forthcoming

16. The healing actions described above take considerable time and typically involve competition for scarce resources. How can affected individuals take steps right now to begin the healing process?

Intergenerational trauma looms large in indigenous communities across North America as both physical remains and memories of what transpired at residential schools are exhumed. We cannot change the past. However, we can make choices about how we come to terms with the past and how we walk and lay down our own paths into the future. We can allow ourselves to be prisoners of our past, or we can begin to break free.

Indigenous people can learn from and take inspiration from those who have confronted genocide in their history. That possibility was suggested to us by friends who live in an intentional Christian community, the Bruderhof (<https://www.bruderhof.com/en/where-we-are/australia/danthonia>) Long before stories of residential school exhumations made front page news, the Bruderhof people were discussing work they had done on forgiveness with survivors of genocide in Rwanda, with Holocaust survivors, and with dozens of others involved in traumatic life circumstances that trigger anger and bitterness. This idea was planted like a seed in our consciousness. When news of residential schools hit, the idea slowly began to blossom.

We found ourselves having frequent Zoom discussions with our friends Bill Wiser and Grace Anna Wiser who live in Bruderhof's Australian community. We were aware of their work working with Aboriginal people to heal the land damaged by more than a century of colonial history. It was a small step from talking about healing the Earth to talking about healing the human spirit. The link was forged as Bill and Grace Anna recounted their own ministerial work introducing the concept of forgiveness to prisoners. As the conversation expanded we heard about a Bruderhof book, *Why Forgive*. This small book is a compelling compendium of stories unadorned and unburdened with theological rhetoric. The stories are brief testimonials by individuals who chose to forgive. The book opens with a quote from Nelson Mandela:

“Resentment is like drinking poison and the hoping that it will kill your enemies.”

Mandela, who spent twenty seven years in horrific prison conditions, came to this realization undoubtedly after a long journey.

We were then introduced to the life and work of Edith Eva Eger. Her memoir, *The Choice: Embrace the Possible*, describes her long journey which begins in a concentration camp where she was one of the children on whom the infamous Joseph Mengele experimented. Like Mandela, Eger discovered that bitterness was poison. As a result she spent decades as a therapist guiding others toward the first step on a path to healing: forgiveness.

Reading these stories while being overwhelmed with daily news about more gruesome discoveries at residential schools inevitably led us to ask; “why not us?”. We have explored that question in two of our *Indigenous Perspectives* streamed radio shows. As noted above, one of those shows is an interview with Grant Paulson whose own family experience echoes that of Native Americans. Nevertheless Grant and his family have found their way to forgiveness and they are assisting others. Rather than attempting to summarize the wisdom of forgiveness presented by the Wisers and Grant Paulson, we leave that treasure for you to discover. You can hear two 44 minute programs on that theme, or read the transcripts, at <https://www.ecologia.org/news/indigpers.html>

Anyone studying or writing about residential schools should become familiar with this answer to the question: how do we heal the wounds that residential schools inflicted on individuals and communities?

Resources: forthcoming

17. Are there firsthand accounts of life at residential schools written by indigenous authors?

The Canadian Broadcast Corporation published an annotated bibliography of 48 books written by indigenous authors who address residential school experiences. Most of the publications in this list are designed for use by young readers. <https://www.cbc.ca/books/48-books-by-indigenous-writers-to-read-to-understand-residential-schools-1.6056204>

There is also a substantial body of literature written as memoirs or historical analysis for older and adult audiences. Given the potential emotional impact of these writings we are not yet currently prepared to recommend individual authors and publications. We welcome reader recommendations in compiling this list, *especially* if they include clear guidance about age appropriateness. We do not want parents, educators, or descendants of survivors to be exposed to graphic accounts without adequate preparation and clear guidance.



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