

Module #7 The History and Legacy of Residential Schools

A. ERA OF EUGENICS, FRANCIS GALTON, COUSIN OF CHARLES DARWIN

The 19th Century aspired to be the Romantic era, yet it saw the birth of science as a profession. The term scientist was coined in 1833. It was also the Victorian age, the age of imperialism. United under parliament and the queen - as head of the Anglican church, the industrialized military that had emerged from the Napoleonic Wars advanced inexorably until the sun never set on the British Flag. It was a time when the ethos of Muscular Christianity emerged, in a normalized version of this ethos – it was the public-school spirit, the games ethic, moral masculinity, the strenuous life. Although not an organized philosophy it was potent; therefore, it was appropriated by the state to support imperial military and colonial projects. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century apologists and critics alike widely understood Muscular Christianity to be a key engine of British colonialism.

Into this environment Sir Francis Galton, first cousin to Charles Darwin, introduced the heady concept of eugenics. According to the National Human Genome Research Institute of the U.S. National Institute for Health:

“Eugenics is the scientifically erroneous and immoral theory of “racial improvement” and “planned breeding,” which gained popularity during the early 20th century. Eugenicists worldwide believed that they could perfect human beings and eliminate so-called social ills through genetics and heredity. They believed the use of methods such as involuntary sterilization, segregation and social exclusion would rid society of individuals deemed by them to be unfit.

Scientific racism is an ideology that appropriates the methods and legitimacy of science to argue for the superiority of white Europeans and the inferiority of non-white people whose social and economic status have been historically marginalized. Like eugenics, scientific racism grew out of:

- *the misappropriation of revolutionary advances in medicine, anatomy and statistics during the 18th and 19th centuries.*
- *Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution through the mechanism of natural selection.*
- *Gregor Mendel’s laws of inheritance.*

Eugenic theories and scientific racism drew support from contemporary xenophobia, antisemitism, sexism, colonialism and imperialism...”

Herein was the philosophy to be seen in the legacy of Duncan Campbell Scott, the famous Romantic Poet and contemporary of Joachim Von Ribbentrop in Ottawa society. The man who presided over the “*Final solution to the Indian problem*” as Deputy Director of Indian Affairs. The entrenched philosophy of Muscular Christianity fit hand in glove with the churches, both Protestant and Catholic, through the Doctrine of Discovery proclaimed in

1493 by Pope Alexander VI, empowering Christians to seize all lands not held by Christians and convert the inhabitants. The Doctrine of Discovery has not been repealed.

B. AGENCIES INVOLVED

The first recorded residential school dates from 1831. Records show that from 1870 to 1997 150,000 students attended Residential Schools. Of these students 90 to 100% suffered severe physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. There was a 40 – 60% mortality rate in Indian residential schools. Many children, including our relatives and friends, were unwilling participants in bio-medical experiments. My own mother died at an early age from the lingering effects of the experiments conducted on her.

Residential Schools were established under the authority of the Government of Canada and operated by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and United churches. Under Canadian law final authority over the schools was linked to fiscal authority, and that meant the Department of Indian Affairs.

The administration of the schools by the various agencies resulted in widely dispersed records held by various churches and government agencies. Some records are still held by churches, some records remain with Indian Affairs and its successors, and some in Western Canada are held at the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Center.

Recently the location of approximately 6,000 unmarked graves at the sites of Indian Residential Schools has raised awareness of the genocide conducted through the residential school system. Holding the agencies responsible for Residential Schools accountable for their conduct has been so tenuous that there is no point getting into who apologized for what, and what exactly did they apologize for?

Years ago, when the Genocide was just becoming breaking news to non-indigenous people I met a room full of lawyers who wanted to discuss the genocide and reconciliation. They were appalled to learn the truth of Residential Schools, and clearly saw the emerging truths as an indictment of Christianity. One lawyer tried to argue that the crimes were the sole responsibility of the individuals, and that the past crimes could not tarnish the founding and benevolent philosophy of Christianity; I could only reply to him that I thought that would depend on your proximity to the genocide.

I suppose it is a point of law as to who is responsible for the genocide, and to what degree, and the issue of responsibility, when it comes up, is tossed around like a hot potato. In 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on behalf of the government of Canada. Just a couple of weeks earlier the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church in Canada publicly confessed “*a role in the oppression of First Nations people, whether by action or passive inaction, past or present.*” The Anglican Church apologized in 1993 for physical and sexual abuse – but not for spiritual abuse, The Catholic Church’s’ leader Pope Francis said “He is sorry” about the treatment at Residential Schools but did not acknowledge any wrongdoing by the institution of the Catholic Church. In 1994, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted the Confession to God and to Indigenous people for its role in the Indian

Residential School System. The church is committed to walking with Indigenous people on a journey toward reconciliation and living out the spirit of its Confession.

C. DUNCAN MACKENZIE SCOTT AND DR PETER BRYCE

During our daily life people use the ethics and values that they live to shape the world for future generations. Dr Peter Bryce, Chief Medical Officer of the Dept of Interior & Indian Affairs was a man of ethics and integrity who stands out in contrast to that personification of Eugenics, Duncan Mackenzie Scott. Although defeated in his day, his vision of an ethical world has in the end prevailed. It is well worth considering Dr Bryce in his struggle to represent the genuine morality claimed by the British Empire and Canada. Peter Hendersen Bryce was born in 1853 and passed away in 1932. The Canadian Medical Association Journal says of him, *“Peter Hendersen Bryce stands as a hallmark of the moral conviction and courage it requires to enact the Hippocratic Oath and to transition reconciliation from an ideology to a reality.”*

He became the first Chief Medical Officer of the Department of the Interior in 1904. *The Indian Act* mandated residential and day school attendance as compulsory for Indian children, Bryce was therefore responsible for the health of Indigenous children in the schools. In 1907, Bryce released a report drawing attention to the fact that roughly one-quarter of all Indigenous children attending residential schools had died from tuberculosis: *“of a total of 1537 pupils reported upon nearly 25 per cent are dead, of one school with an absolutely accurate statement, 69 per cent of ex-pupils are dead, and that everywhere the almost invariable cause of death given is tuberculosis”*.

When Duncan Campbell Scott, the same man who coined the phrase *“the final solution”* in 1910, became Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in 1913, he informed Bryce that his annual medical reports on tuberculosis in residential schools were no longer necessary given that the information was costly to produce and the department had no intention of acting upon it. Bryce’s funding for research was thereafter cut and his presentations at academic conferences heavily interfered with by Scott.

Dr Bryce fought back by publishing a pamphlet exposing *“the national shame”*, and through front page newspaper stories. Their feud continued for years. Eventually Dr. Bryce was forced into retirement in 1921. The CMAJ also says of Dr. Bryce, *“he lamented the indifference of Canadians to the medical wellness of First Nations children and underscored the extent to which the mass apprehension of Indigenous children was not merely a cultural but a biological genocide. He also risked his professional career to do so.”* The CMAJ also linked past indifference of Canadians to the current Federal Government decision to appeal the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Decision awarding compensation to former students. The Canadian Medical Journal Association stated, *“The decision of Prime Minister Trudeau to appeal the CHRT ruling shows us that the federal government is making the same mistake twice and continuing to count on the indifference of the Canadian public to the well-being of First Nations children. In addition, the failure of the federal government to promptly deliver financial compensation to the families victimized by the mass apprehension of Indigenous children will cause further delays to the delivery of much-needed services. As one of us stated*

before the CHRT in January of 2017, “when the federal government is presented with concrete credible solutions to support and rescue Indigenous children at risk, the current bureaucracy will not or cannot respond and children are dying as a result”.

D. BIO-MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS AND TORTURE

Allison Daniel, a Nutrition Researcher, wrote in “Kids at Residential Schools used as test subjects,” *Nutrition researchers ran experiments, depriving malnourished children of the calories and nutrients they needed. Published by The Conversation, Jun 29 2021* that:

“Frederick Tisdall — famous for being a co-creator of the infant food Pablum at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto — along with Percy Moore and Lionel Bradley Pett were the main architects of the nutrition experiments.

They proposed that education and dietary interventions would make Indigenous people more profitable assets to Canada, that if Indigenous people were healthier, transmission of diseases like tuberculosis to white people would decline and assimilation would be easier.

They successfully pitched their plan for nutrition experiments to the federal government. Tisdall, Moore and their team based their pitch on the results they found after subjecting 400 Cree adults and children in northern Manitoba to a range of intrusive assessments, including physical exams, X-rays and blood draws.

The pitch from Pett and his team centred on determining a baseline. They wanted to give children at the Alberni Indian Residential School a low amount of milk for two years, enough to substantially deprive growing children of the calories and nutrients they needed.

Other experiments involved withholding essential vitamins and minerals to children in control groups, while preventing Indian Health Services from providing dental care under the guise that this could impact the study results.”

Watstenaat was my mother. She was sent to Port Alberni Residential School, from there she was later transferred to the Coqualeetza Indian Experimental Hospital where she was placed in a control group for bio-medical experiments. All the children in the control group were the children of hereditary Chiefs and Shaman. Many Musqueam were sent to Port Alberni. Another Elder, a friend whom we have worked with was for years in the nutritional experiment control group where she was starved.

Torture was brutal in Residential Schools. Nolan and I had an uncle who was hitched to a wagon like a mule, and whipped by a priest on the wagon, hauling apples in the school orchard until he bled from open wounds. He carried the scars on his back to his grave.

I had a younger friend that experienced the worst sexual abuse beginning at the age of ten. When he passed away at the age of 52 the only surviving member of his grade four class alive was committed to an insane asylum. Of all the other children in that class my friend was the last to die free.

Perhaps the casual cruelty of residential Schools was the worst torture of all. A younger cousin told me that in her dormitory when she was 12 or 13 years old there was an infant of

two years age. No one knew what she was doing there. She cried endlessly, even though the girls took shifts to be with her. As long as that man lives in the insane asylum, as long as that woman who was an infant in Residential School remains traumatized, the genocide is not over.

E. INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

The origins of the Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission stem from the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. This report led to an agreement in principal called the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) between thousands of former Residential School students represented by legal counsel, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives, the General Synod of the Anglican church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church and the Catholic Church. This resulted in the Indian Schools Settlement Agreement which saw 1.9 billion dollars allocated for the “Common Experience Payment” to former students and prompted the Apology on behalf of Canada by Prime Minister Stephan Harper on June 11, 2008.

The IRSSA also set aside \$60 million for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to document and preserve the experiences of survivors. The Commission was launched 2 June 2008. On 15 October 2009 Justice Murray Sinclair, an Ojibway-Canadian judge and First Nations lawyer was appointed Chairman of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. By August 2012, the federal government had released over 941,000 documents to the TRC related to residential schools.

In June 2015, the TRC released an executive summary of its findings along with 94 "calls to action" regarding reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. The commission officially concluded in December 2015 with the publication of a multi-volume final report that concluded the school system amounted to cultural genocide. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, which opened at the University of Manitoba in November 2015, is an archival repository home to the research, documents, and testimony collected during the course of the TRC's operation, there is another repository at the UBC Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre.

The Calls to Action include as Call to Action # 92:

“Business and Reconciliation

We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

- i. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.*
- ii. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.*
- iii. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will*

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require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.”