

**The Truth Behind the Lies: The Canadian Federal Government's Intentions Behind the  
Creation of Residential Schools**

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By

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## **Abstract**

In this paper I discover the intentions of the Canadian federal government behind the creations of residential schools, educational institutions that were erected to control and alter the identity of Indigenous children and assimilate them into Canadian society. While assimilation was the promoted product of the federal government's actions, there has remained an inconsistency with the belief that assimilation would occur as intended. In truth, there would always remain a divide between the Indigenous people and the forming Canadian nation whether this be racially, spiritually, or culturally. These elements would weigh upon the formation of a cohesive nationalistic identity, something that the Canadian government wanted desperately as they tried to form their own nation separate from the French and British. Through the exploration of federal government legislation, government department reports, survivor testimony, photographs from within the schools, and statements from federal leadership, it is clear that the government's intentions were never to make Canada a cohesive entity with shared principles and an equality for all. Rather, the Canadian federal government sought to exert control over the Indigenous people in a desire to alter and mold who they were, with the aims of making them into subservient beings that would not cause dissidence but ones that would instead provide Canada with compliant members of the unified nation.

## Introduction

Canadian residential schools, established in the 1880s, were educational institutions promoted by the government to assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian society, with a focus upon removing their cultural identity and forcing them to accept Christian enlightenment. Children were removed from their homes under the threat of legal repercussions against their families if they failed to attend, and as such over the course of the late 1880s through the late 1990s, 150,000 children attended residential schools throughout Canada. A dark reputation rests upon the legacy of the institutions, as rampant abuse of the children were all too frequent occurrences. During the era in which the schools operated, the utilization of strict procedure and policy were enacted to control the influences upon the Indigenous children. This included removing them from their communities to separate them from their traditional values, expressions, culture, and people so that the government and churches were able to maintain a consistent narrative that dominated the children's lives. They were not allowed to speak their native languages within the schools, their traditionally long hair was cut, and their clothing was fashioned in such a way as to conform with White, Anglo-Saxon standards.<sup>1</sup> This manipulation and control resulted in the fragmented identity of the children that attended these schools, and caused generational trauma that continues to permeate the community today.

## Background

Residential schools have been known by many names across the span of their existence including Indian boarding schools, or industrial schools dependent on the creator and time of the

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<sup>1</sup> While it is being noted as White, Anglo-Saxon, I will be referring to these standards as Canadian or Western throughout.

information that someone explores.<sup>2</sup> Institutions designed to assimilate and control the Indigenous population were rooted amongst the Canadian landscape. Prior to the establishment of Canada, school systems had been created with a focus upon assimilating all peoples into the ways and thoughts of the colonizers. The schools began operating in Canadian territory in the early 1600s under French leadership with the aid of Catholic missionaries.<sup>3</sup> While the French failed to form any lasting system of Indigenous education in Canada with their defeat by the British in 1763, the position held by the French towards the Indigenous peoples, one of superiority and dominance, was shared by their British counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

The British however, did not focus upon Indigenous education once they had control until in the mid-1800s as their purpose of uniting Lower and Upper Canada under their control dominated the forefront.<sup>5</sup> The British held full control of the territory until July 1, 1867, when the British North American Act was passed, also known as the Constitution Act, which cemented Canada's sovereignty. The Canadian federal government did not have control over residential schools until they separated from the British in 1867 under the Constitution Act. Due to this legality, the timeline of residential schools frequently does not begin until the late 1880s when the federal government authorized their creation.

Prior to the establishment of the Canadian nation in 1847, Dr. Egerton Ryerson, the chief superintendent of education in Upper Canada, received a request from a member of the Indian

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ryerson, chief superintendent of education in the mid-1800s, referred to the institutions as industrial schools. Whereas the Indian Act, federal government legislation, utilized both industrial and boarding school phrasing throughout the Act.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. Miller, *Residential Schools and Reconciliation: Canada Confronts Its History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 12, Google Books.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Affairs department regarding the education of Indigenous children.<sup>6</sup> Ryerson provided the department with his proposal toward educating the children, but did note that the focus of these institutions would be directed toward making the children into productive and prosperous workers.<sup>7</sup>

Canada was not an independent nation during the time of Ryerson's report as they were still under British rule. Although they conducted themselves in a manner of self-governance (similar in fashion to the colonies of the United States pre-constitution) the desire for autonomy drove their plans to form a distinct identity separate from the British overseas. However, the Indigenous people had lived and thrived on the lands for generations and had formed their own distinct identity and nation prior to the arrival of Europeans. This established nation threatened the blossoming Canadian sentiment, as there were people that were living against the ideals set out by the Europeans upon arrival. The connections to the lands and the world that surrounded them resonated deeply with many Indigenous groups across the nation, but to the settlers it was simply seen as a commodity and something one should own.

Land was frequently seen as a point of contention between the Indigenous peoples and the government, as land rights were viewed differently amidst both groups. However, power and control globally are measured by the wealth a nation holds and the lands in the Canadian territory are fertile and hold immense access to resources. Yet, the Indigenous peoples present had been established upon the lands for generations and had powerful claim to the lands. This threatened the forming nation as the government's power was challenged by the rights of those residing upon the lands prior to the European establishment. These conflicting ideologies determined the

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<sup>6</sup> Egerton Ryerson, *Report of Dr. Ryerson on Industrial Schools* (Toronto: Education Office, 1847), <https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9435>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

ways in which the developing nation interacted with the Indigenous people; a sentiment that focused upon removal of all aspects deemed dissimilar to Canada's forming principles.

In 1876, the federal government passed the Indian Act, providing legal authority over the Indigenous people to the government, and restricted their cultural and religious/spiritual rights and practices.<sup>8</sup> In 1879, N.F. Davin was requested by Canada's first Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, to provide the government with a report on the Indian Boarding Schools present in the United States.<sup>9</sup> In March of that year, Davin sent correspondence to MacDonal on his findings from his visits to the United States where he detailed his belief in the successful nature of the boarding schools across America.<sup>10</sup>

In 1883 Macdonald, equipped with the information from Davin's report, addressed the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada and spoke about the creation of residential schools, explaining his belief that they would benefit the people and aid them as they assimilated into the nation. Macdonald is known as a pivotal figure for the creation of residential schools, as he had great power during his time as Prime Minister and utilized his control to implement policies that were crucial to the establishment of the schools. In 1884, the government had begun to form plans for Indigenous education by providing religious institutions the ability to operate and control the daily functions of school that were already established on the lands at that time.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (Canada), *Consolidation of Indian Legislation. Volume II: Indian Acts and Amendments, 1868-1975*, compiled by Gail Hinge, 1985, [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2017/aanc-inac/R5-158-2-1978-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/aanc-inac/R5-158-2-1978-eng.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> N.F. Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 1879, <https://dev.nctr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Davin-Report.pdf>; Nishnawbe Aski Nation, "The Davin Report, 1879," Nishnawbe Aski Nation Indian Residential Schools in Ontario, 2005, <http://rschools.nan.on.ca/article/the-davin-report-1879-1120.a>; *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Nicholas Flood Davin," by Lee Gibson, accessed February 03, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nicholas-flood-davin>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (Canada), *Consolidation of Indian Legislation*, 104.

In 1886, an amendment was made to the Act that formed the legal framework for the creation of residential schools. In 1894, and subsequently in 1920, amendments were made solidifying the control and power of the government both of which forced the children to attend or fear that their families would face legal repercussions.<sup>12</sup> While the Indian Act was directed towards First Nations individuals, Métis and Inuit children also attended the schools. It was not until 1982 that the federal government altered the documentation to include Métis and Inuit peoples legally under the control and distinction of the Indian Act.<sup>13</sup>

Residential schools operated across the Canadian provinces and territories, apart from New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.<sup>14</sup> While the Canadian federal government set the policies and structures of the school, churches from various Christian denominations controlled the daily operations of the schools and implemented the government's policies. Christian sects involved in the schools' operations included Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic, although some of the schools were non-denominational.<sup>15</sup> In 1925, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches in Canada joined under the name The United Church of Canada, shifting the control of the schools they operated under this newly formed entity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Indian Act," accessed February 18, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act>.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Canada, *Constitution Act, 1982*, 1982, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100014413/1535468629182>.

<sup>14</sup> *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Residential Schools in Canada," by J.R. Miller, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

The Gordon Residential School was the last federally funded school which closed in 1996 in Punnichy, Saskatchewan.<sup>17</sup> However, the last residential school to close was the Qu'Appelle Residential School which ceased operations in 1998.<sup>18</sup> In 1973, the control of the school was given to the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School Council and as such is not noted as the last Canadian residential school as the government had not been involved since the early 70s.<sup>19</sup> The school has also been called St. Paul's, Whitecalf and the Lebret Residential School.<sup>20</sup> During the Canadian residential school era 3,200 children died within the institutions, some believing the number to be nearer to 6,000.<sup>21</sup>

The history of residential schools is dominated by the governments perceived intentions. We are taught that the government wished for assimilation and a united Canada, hoping to guide the people towards enlightenment and a better future that they believed they had achieved. This narrative does little to delegitimize the government's power and control throughout this time and aims to dampen the harsh reality of the intent and outcome of the schools. We now must understand that the governments intent was never to help the Indigenous people proceed into what they believed was the best world, forged by their own ways and principles. Rather, it was an abusive system perpetuated by governmental policies and practices aimed to control and

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<sup>17</sup> *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Residential Schools in Canada"; "Gordon's," National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://nctr.ca/residential-schools/saskatchewan/gordons/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Lebret (Qu'Appelle)," National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://nctr.ca/residential-schools/saskatchewan/lebret-quappelle/>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Holly Honderich, "Why Canada Is Mourning the Deaths of Hundreds of Children," BBC News, July 15, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57325653>.

dominate the Indigenous people, keeping them from cultivating their own identity separate from the forming national sentiment. The concept of assimilation blurs the complexity behind the government's intent. The Canadian federal government sought to exert control over the Indigenous people in a desire to alter and mold who they were, with the aims of making them into subservient beings that would not cause dissidence but ones that would instead provide Canada with compliant members of the unified nation.

### **Methodology**

My analysis uses a postcolonial lens focused on Canadian political and educational history in relation to residential schools. My focus is directed towards the intentions of the Canadian federal government regarding the control and coercion enforced during this period of assimilation. Exploration of the residential school system will be conducted through journals, academic theses, and books to form the foundation towards the broader narrative surrounding the conduct and impact of the schools. These sources reveal the influence and power of Christianity amongst education at the schools and its role for governmental purposes, the health and well-being of the children, the resurgence of coercion and control by the federal government in the mid-1900s, the operations of the schools as noted through government documentation for plans and framework as well as the exploration of the schools through documentation kept for record keeping during the daily operations, and the residual trauma and impact the institutions are having currently. This will best encompass all aspects of this devastating era.

Key documents were accessed through Canadian federal government archives based on knowledge gained through the Canadian educational system, notably the Indian Act 1876, and all amendments to present.<sup>22</sup> The Indian Act and a variety of the reforms made were consulted

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<sup>22</sup> Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (Canada), *Consolidation of Indian Legislation*.

throughout the paper as its legislative powers dictated the conduct of the government's interactions and control over the Indigenous population.<sup>23</sup> The Davin Report will be utilized as its recommendations and exploration of the conceptual elements of the institutions became the cornerstone for the creation of the Canadian establishment of residential schools.<sup>24</sup> This report is available through the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.<sup>25</sup>

Survivors' accounts of their experiences in the schools will be engaged to best understand the environment which the children were subject to from an intimate point of view, including (but not limited to): Bev Sellars book *They Called Me Number One*, and *I Am Not a Number* by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer.<sup>26</sup> I will also be using interviews (either through oral testimony or written in an article) including: "Stories From Canada's Indigenous Residential School Survivors" conducted by Jonathan Chang and Meghna Chakrabarti, and "What Survivors Said About Life At The Kamloops Indian Residential School" conducted and written by Leslie Young.<sup>27</sup> A variety of survivors' testimony was retrieved from popular media outlets, or through independent publication of one's experiences in books and autobiographies. Photographic evidence from the institutions will also be used to provide a visual component to depict the rigorous and harmful nature of the schools, accessed through government archives.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Nishnawbe Aski Nation, "The Davin Report, 1879,"; Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools*; "Residential Schools in Canada: Education Guide," Published by Historica Canada and Heritage Minutes, 2016, [http://education.historicacanada.ca/files/103/ResidentialSchools\\_Printable\\_Pages.pdf](http://education.historicacanada.ca/files/103/ResidentialSchools_Printable_Pages.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools*.

<sup>26</sup> Bev Sellars, *They Called Me Number One* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2013); Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer, *I Am Not a Number* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, Regis Pecos, and John Jones, "Stories From Canada's Indigenous Residential School Survivors," interview by Jonathan Chang and Meghna Chakrabarti, *WBUR: On Point*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2021/07/28/stories-from-survivors-of-canadas-indigenous-residential-schools>; Leslie Young, "What Survivors Said About Life at the Kamloops Indian Residential Schools," *Global News*, June 2, 2021, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7915520/kamloops-residential-school-survivors-stories/>.

## Literature Review

Literature pertaining to residential schools has varied over time in its direction and focus. However, there are four dominant themes amongst the texts, the government's narrative, educational institutions, religion, and family environment. Amongst the assorted works there is a linking narrative throughout regarding the schools and those which ran them. The scholarship towards residential schools predominantly indicates that the Canadian federal government sought to exert control over the Indigenous people by forging legal control over their rights and actions. By implementing strict policies towards education of the Indigenous youth, the government exposes the desire to alter and mold who they were and as such has caused mass cultural and ethnic devastation to the Indigenous population.

### The Government's Narrative

The earliest conversations were dictated by the government's hold over the narrative being spread, one that formed itself as a benefit to the people and an expansion into the enlightened world.<sup>28</sup> The origination of such narrative was driven by those in power including Sir John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, who expressed his desires for a strict assimilation policy.<sup>29</sup> However, as people's awareness of the true nature of these institutions began to expand, the narrative shifted away from the government's own rhetoric into one of dysfunction, brutality, and an exposure into the true environment of the schools. Denise Hildebrand in her work *Staff Perspectives of the Aboriginal Residential School Experience: A Study of Four Presbyterian Schools, 1888-1923*, for example argues that the staff were frequently unprepared for the totality of their position and all the elements that they would be

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<sup>28</sup> "Residential Schools: Education Guide," Published by Historica Canada and Heritage Minutes.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

entrusted with within the residential schools. Hildebrand additionally argues that without the government providing enough support, notably financial, that the institutions could not run properly.<sup>30</sup> Whereas *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools* by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada argues that the Canadian government committed cultural and physical genocide on the Indigenous peoples through their actions and conduct by removing their rights, freedoms and identity through various acts including through the implementation of residential schools.<sup>31</sup>

### **Educational Institutions**

The earliest conversations did not pertain toward the Indigenous population, such as George Henry Penrose's article *The Educational Significance of the Home and School Movement*, which focused upon the education system itself as it began to form within Canada.<sup>32</sup> Penrose argued that a balance must be struck between home life and a composed educational system that would supplement learning needs that were not readily available within the home.<sup>33</sup> This desire to expand upon the educational system was, as Penrose notes, driven by public demand for greater access for the nation's children to learn from established institutions.<sup>34</sup> Penrose noted a prevalent narrative amongst governing bodies directed towards its aims of education expansion, a narrative dominated by the need to build a nation upon harmonious

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<sup>30</sup> Denise Hildebrand, *Staff Perspectives of the Aboriginal Residential School Experience: A Study of Four Presbyterian Schools, 1888-1923* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2003), <https://dam-oclc.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/0e76523d-96f2-471d-b8ac-ed428290b6e>.

<sup>31</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> George Henry Penrose, *The Educational Significance of the Home and School Movement* (Montreal: McGill University, 1945), <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/w9505365b?locale=en>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 99-102.

foundations that would allow for prosperous citizenry and a bountiful nation in return, all being controlled and instituted by the education system.<sup>35</sup>

Much of the corresponding work that encompasses the residential school era did not come to fruition until the late twentieth century through the early twenty-first century, arguably linked to the schools remaining open until the late 1990s and as such, interest on them did not arise until they had begun to close. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada investigated the residential school era extensively with immense comprehension of all elements that played a role within this period.<sup>36</sup> A book written by the commission, *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools*, explores the events that transpired during the residential school era in Canada's history.<sup>37</sup> The commission argued that the Canadian government committed cultural and physical genocide on the Indigenous peoples through their actions and conduct by removing their rights, freedoms and identity through various acts including through the implementation of residential schools.<sup>38</sup> The book provides key dates and information that highlight the shifting focus and relationship between the people as a whole, and the institutional system as run by the federal government.<sup>39</sup>

## **Religion**

As the narrative alters to uncover deeper elements of the institutions, a rise of a critical lens towards Christianity as a whole and the churches role in the schools came into question in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>36</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *A Knock on the Door*; Murray Sinclair, Marie Wilson, and Wilton Littlechild, *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939* (CreateSpace Publishing, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *A Knock on the Door*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

the literature.<sup>40</sup> Author Brian Stanley, in his book *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*, explores Christianity as the world grappled with wars, political change, racial issues, and the evolution of moral concepts.<sup>41</sup> Stanley argues that Christianity saw both a growth and a decline in its influence in the twentieth century due to human expansion in thought and their interaction with external forces that would challenge their connection to their religious ties.<sup>42</sup> Amongst the various global exploration Stanley takes the reader through, part three of chapter eleven focuses on the Christian involvement in residential schools in Canada.<sup>43</sup> As the power of Christianity waned during the twentieth century, the perception regarding the control and dominance of the church system within the schools would also begin to falter. People began questioning whether these institutions were morally acceptable, and as Stanley notes in his book, this changed the way people were interacting with Christianity itself.<sup>44</sup>

### **Family Environment**

The environment between the Indigenous peoples and the federal government was perpetually tumultuous throughout the twentieth century, an environment driven by the government's increasing control and oppressive actions aimed to assimilate the Indigenous people into the colonial nation. From the 1960s and continuing throughout the 80s, the Canadian government authorized the abduction of Indigenous children from their homes without agreement or understanding of the communities or families of these children and adopting them

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<sup>40</sup> Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 357-366.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 255-263.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

into homes across North America, allegedly for bettering their environment.<sup>45</sup> Natasha Stirrett, in her work *Re-Visiting the Sixties Scoop: Relationality, Kinship, and Honouring Indigenous Stories*, explores this dark period through the utilization of contemporary theories, stories shared from those who were removed from their homes, and an analysis of the child welfare system as a colonial institution.<sup>46</sup> She questions the fabric and true nature of the child welfare system, from the beginning of its inception amongst the environment of racism, to the utilization of this system as a form of control over the Indigenous peoples.<sup>47</sup> Stirrett argues that by removing the children from their own environments, notably their families and cultural foundations, the government reinstates the assimilation mentality and does so through the resurgence of their power by forcefully removing children from their families.<sup>48</sup> The author additionally argues that this legitimized the power of the government and their belief structure, one that encouraged White households and families as the standard for citizens.<sup>49</sup> Stirrett aims to expose the government's intentions to control and change the Indigenous people through their youngest generation by placing children into predominantly White homes in order to control the environment that surrounds the children away from their traditional and ethnic roots.<sup>50</sup>

Scholars have also addressed the formation and implementation of these schools across generations, as the damage caused is not solely felt by those who entered their doors. In

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<sup>45</sup> Natasha Stirrett, *Re-Visiting the Sixties Scoop: Relationality, Kinship and Honouring Indigenous Stories* (Kingston: Queen's University, 2015); *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Sixties Scoop," by Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Sharon Dainard, accessed January 19, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Stirrett, *Re-Visiting the Sixties Scoop*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

“Canada’s Residential Schools and the Right to Integrity,” authors Amy Anderson, Dallas K. Miller, and Dwight Newman, explore the legality of familial separation and how it has impacted the Indigenous community.<sup>51</sup> They argue that the destruction caused by the residential schools did not end when the institutions ceased operations, instead it has formed lasting impacts on the psychological structure of the victims who face disintegration within their personal lives, resulting in a disconnect within their family units.<sup>52</sup> The authors explore how the schools were being portrayed to the Indigenous communities and notes the roles and importance of familial connection throughout this era.<sup>53</sup> The article exposes the rhetoric that was shared to families, one of benefit and development for their children within an evolving social and political structure, and as such indicates the inherent intentions that the government and its agents held.<sup>54</sup>

There is a wide array of source material that covers a vast demographic of subject matter regarding the schools, as noted throughout this section. However, this paper will shed light upon an area that is less focused upon, as the sentiment towards the government during this period is one steeped in understandable anger. Often the dialogue which surrounds the government’s role in the residential school system focuses solely upon their policies and roots of assimilation. While there is a general understanding of assimilation practices that spans further and deeper than the roots of the Canadian nation, what occurred in Canada at the hands of those in power has its own unique motivations and desires. There is a lack of coverage towards the government’s

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<sup>51</sup> Amy Anderson, Dallas K. Miller, and Dwight Newman, “Canada’s Residential Schools and the Right to Integrity,” *Dalhousie Law Journal* vol. 41, no. 2 (October 1, 2018), 336-338, <https://digitalcommons.schulichlaw.dal.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2102&context=dlj>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

intentions and role during this era, as much of the dialogue produced focuses solely upon the nature of assimilation and its work throughout the world. Yet, we muddle our understanding of Canadian residential schools by blending it with other institutions and structures that occurred prior or during. By understanding the desires of the federal government, we can best understand what occurred, and as such have a clearer path forward for reconciliation.

### **Government Reports & Legislation**

This section explores primary source documentation including reports and acts that built the foundation for these institutions, what happened to the children within them, and where the government's focus remained throughout the time the schools were in operation. Three foundational documents influenced the formation and operations of the residential school system under the Canadian federal government: the Ryerson Report, the Davin Report, and the Indian Act.<sup>55</sup> The unifying factor amongst all the documents is the development of educational institutions within the Canadian residential school system. Education was the mechanism used by the government to implement its plans of assimilation. The residential school system in Canada has its own unique identity, and while it might mirror others in practice, it has its own form that must be explored through its operations. Education amongst the primary source material does not have a singular form, as the government's plan to utilize education as a tool for authority and power over the Indigenous communities had a multitude of themes. However, there are three main themes that prevail amongst the sourced material linked through education: profitability, obedience and control, and a nationalistic impulse.

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<sup>55</sup> The Ryerson Report and the Davin Report are common terms used to identify these documents and will be referred to by their common titles within the paper. However, the original names for the documents are the *Report of Dr. Ryerson on Industrial Schools*, by Egerton Ryerson, and the *Report on Industrial Schools for Indian and Half-Breeds*, by N.F. Davin.

## The Ryerson Report

In 1846, the Common School Act was passed, led by Dr. Egerton Ryerson the chief superintendent of education in Upper Canada. Upon receiving a request from the Assistant Superintendent of Indian Affairs George Vardon, seeking direction for the instruction of Indigenous children, Ryerson provided the Indian Affairs department with a short document outlining his proposed educational plans concerning the Indigenous youth that resided upon what is now Canadian lands.<sup>56</sup> Ryerson argued that the schools should be created with a focus towards education away from labour, and as such the name of the institutions should reflect this focus.

In regard to the designation and objects of such establishments, I would suggest that they be called Industrial Schools; they are more than schools of manual labour; they are schools of learning and religion; and industry is the great element of efficiency in each of these. I should therefore, prefer the designation of industrial school to that of manual labour school.<sup>57</sup>

Ryerson's report was heavily focused upon the educational benefits and guidance that would be provided to the children, yet amongst the allotted plan that he proposed to the department, elements of the true nature of the government's intentions were exposed. Ryerson spoke of the government's plans in his proposal, explaining the desired result from educating Indigenous children. "In the contemplated industrial schools, I understand the end proposed to be the making of the pupils industrious farmers, and that learning is provided for and pursued only so far as it will contribute to that end."<sup>58</sup> The desire to educate the Indigenous youth was driven by the desire to produce workers that would economically benefit the nation.

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<sup>56</sup> Ryerson, *Report of Dr. Ryerson*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

While education was the guise placed upon this proposal, even Ryerson understood that the true nature for requesting such a plan was only done so that the government may control the Indigenous population to be in line with the expanding nation's ideals and practices. Dr. Ryerson's report for Indian Affairs, while short in nature, exposed all three themes by outlining plans for the Indigenous children's education. It was not a simple school curriculum framework; rather, as noted above, Ryerson planned his proposal in a way that would achieve the desired outcome the government was looking for. Profitability not only meant that the government wanted the school system to be one that generated some form of profit (whether a monetary influx or not) but by utilizing unregulated child labour, they would gain from the children performing various positions that possibly would not have been filled by others in the Canadian territory. This also allowed for the rest of the Canadian population to fill roles that were seen as superior to manual labour and leave the ones seen as lesser than to the Indigenous children (and in turn, the adult Indigenous population later). "Superior positions" were ones that often required an educational background, leading into avenues of business, law, and politics. While many of these superior positions were taken by White Canadians, it cannot be solely explored as White versus other, as there is some discrepancy towards nationality that plays a factor into the positions people held.

Ryerson outlined a daily schedule for the children adding that the seasonal shift would bring with it a change of structure, but the schedule was noticeably focused upon the work the children would be tasked with:

In regard to the pupils, I think the time occupied in labour should be from 8 to 12 hours a day during the summer, and instruction from 2 to 4 hours, and that during the winter the amount of labour should be lessened, and that of study increased. During two or three

weeks of planting in the spring, of harvest in the summer, and of seed-sowing, &c., in the autumn, it may, perhaps, be well to omit instruction altogether.<sup>59</sup>

Based on the plan laid out by Dr. Ryerson, the children would be tasked with some form of undertaking (labour or instruction) for much of the waking day. During the time of Ryerson's report children across Canada were being subjected to suboptimal standards when it came to working conditions and the lax restrictions placed upon businesses towards employing children meant that many were forced into environments that would even negatively impact grown adults.<sup>60</sup> Some children began working in mines across Canada by age eight, and some had begun working with their families by the time they had reached four years old.<sup>61</sup>

While perhaps this indicates a normalcy towards the educational structure as proposed by Ryerson it is important to note that the Indigenous children were appropriated from their homes and forced to conform to practices and ways that were abnormal and uncomfortable for them, often in fear of violence against them. This rigorous attitude that the government held towards the Indigenous children is one done without care for their mental and physical well-being as it provided the government with an avenue to manipulate the future generations of the Indigenous peoples through their youth. They removed all elements of traditional structure and expression by replacing their environments with Western, Christian thoughts and practices to alter who the children were.

Obedience and control are found throughout the various presented passages, but the way in which Ryerson outlined the control of the government was an incredibly curious element to

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<sup>59</sup> Ryerson, *Report of Dr. Ryerson*, 75.

<sup>60</sup> John Douglas Belshaw, "Children at Work," in *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation* (BC Open Textbooks, 2015), <https://opentextbc.ca/preconfederation/chapter/12-5-children-at-work/#footnote-6650-3>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

his proposal. Within his report he outlined a separation between the government and direct control over the institutions themselves, leaving others (notably the churches) to handle the daily operations:

I think, therefore, the interference or control of the Government should be confined to that which the Government can do with most effect and the least trouble, namely, to the right of inspecting schools from time to time by an agent or agents of its own, to the right of having detailed reports of the schools as often as it shall think proper to require them, at least once or twice a year, and the right of continuing or withholding the grant made in aid of these schools. It is this power over the grant, the exercise of which will be determined by the inspections made and the reports given, that the paramount authority of the Government, in respect to these schools will be secured, while the endless difficulties and embarrassments arising from fruitless attempts to manage the schools in detail will be avoided.<sup>62</sup>

While the government wanted control over the schools in terms of policies and practices that would commence within their schools' walls, they wanted to keep everything at an arm's length distance. This indicates that they never wanted to get their hands dirty and left the daily interactions and operations to that of the Christian churches. If they remained removed enough from the institutions, they would avoid "embarrassments arising from fruitless attempts to manage the schools," indicating they understood the schools would not be ones without fault and conflict from external parties.<sup>63</sup> Nationalistic impulse is notably found under Ryerson's plans for the children's educational material, as the government's aims of assimilation were targeted towards removing all elements of Indigenous culture and heritage that may threaten the foundation of the developing Canadian nation.<sup>64</sup>

Due to its concerns, the government formulated the children's academic structure to be one aligned with subjects of importance to the children's prospective futures and disciplines the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>64</sup> At the time of Ryerson's report, Canada was not a unified nation and was still under British control.

government believed would benefit the nation once the children left school. Ryerson outlined the structure of the educational curriculum within his report:

The course of instruction should include reading and the principles of English language, arithmetic, elementary geometry, or knowledge of forms, geography, and the elements of general history, natural history and agricultural chemistry, writing, drawing and vocal music, book-keeping (especially in reference to farmers' accounts) religion and morals.<sup>65</sup>

By directing all education through Canadian culture and belief, the government would be able to control the narratives that were being exposed to the children and as such could remove any barriers, they felt threatened the nation. The Indigenous people for generations had formed their own foundation amongst the Canadian lands and lived amongst themselves dictated by their own rules and regulations that were formed over time. As the colonists began to expand their territory, the government felt that the presence of another established peoples threatened their expansion and ways of life.

### **The Indian Act**

In 1868 the Canadian federal government produced and passed the Indian Act, which formed legislation dictating the interactions and legal holdings of the Indigenous people.<sup>66</sup> Through this legislation the federal government now had legal control over the Indigenous population, fortifying their influence and power. On May 9, 1883, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, gave an address to the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada referencing the creation of residential schools within the nation:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that the Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way

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<sup>65</sup> Ryerson, *Report of Dr. Ryerson*, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (Canada), *Consolidation of Indian Legislation*.

to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.<sup>67</sup>

This narrative perpetuated by the Prime Minister permeated the minds of many and began to form the foundational rhetoric that dictated much of the conversations throughout the expanse of the residential school era. While government notably refers to the entity, it is important to understand key figures such as Macdonald, as they were influential in proposing and driving the narratives that the government was forming. Macdonald's nationalistic propaganda focused upon the separation of Indigenous peoples from the rest of the nation, and in many forms his speech indicated his belief that the creation of the school system would provide immense benefit for the people so that they may interact and live prosperously within Canada. This savior mentality allowed for people to become entranced in this concept and ultimately led to many supporting the school system upon creation.<sup>68</sup>

It was not until 1886 that an amendment was made to the Indian Act that specifically referenced boarding or industrial schools (the phrasing that was originally used for these institutions prior to the term residential schools).<sup>69</sup> There was prior legislation within the Act with respect to schools, but these sections only spoke of religious members holding a position within already present educational institutions.<sup>70</sup> In 1886, the government included legislation to

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<sup>67</sup> John A, Macdonald, Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada, 1883, 1107-1108.

<sup>68</sup> This support would later dwindle in the 1920s and onward, with various periods (including the 1960s-80s) having a further decrease in support. During the 1960's through the 80s the federal government reinforced its control over the Indigenous people by kidnaping children from their homes and adopting them into other families, predominantly White households. This era is known today as the 60s scoop and is explored further in the literature review section.

<sup>69</sup> Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (Canada), *Consolidation of Indian Legislation*, 164.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

allow for the establishment of residential schools and outlined the parameters of who would be attending the schools:

The Governor in Council may establish an industrial school or boarding school for Indians, or may declare any existing Indian school to be such industrial school or boarding school for the purposes of this section. 2. The Governor in Council may make regulations, which shall have the force of law, for the committal by justices or Indian agents of children of Indian blood under the age of sixteen years, to such instructional school or boarding school, there to be kept, cared for and educated for a period not extending beyond the time at which such children shall reach the age of eighteen years.<sup>71</sup>

This legislation not only provided the government legal rights to form residential schools across Canada, but it also gave them the ability to force families into sending their children to the schools or fear legal repercussions.

### **The Davin Report**

Based on the foundation and proposed outlines for the schools from Ryerson for the Department of Indian Affairs, the government now equipped with this information, would have required a faithful and reliable example present at that time to base the creation of the institutions on. The United States, being a close neighbor, posed the perfect example for them as a version of the residential school system was present within the U.S. at that time through Indian boarding schools. Nicholas Flood Davin, a lawyer, journalist, and later a politician, was requested by Sir John A. MacDonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, to investigate the boarding school system in the United States and report on his findings.<sup>72</sup> On March 14, 1879, Davin sent correspondence to MacDonald on his findings from his visits to the boarding schools in the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools*; Nishnawbe Aski Nation, "The Davin Report, 1879"; *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Nicholas Flood Davin."

United States. Davin addressed his original correspondence to the Right Honourable Minister of the Interior, a position held by Macdonald at that time.

The report from Davin included an array of information pertaining to the operations of the Indigenous boarding school system including financial records, church cooperation, educational structure, and staff members that were tasked with operating the schools. During the time that residential schools operated there were other institutions erected to control the Indigenous population including day schools or residences. These did not have the rigorous structure as the residential school system as they would release children to their homes at night. Davin however, believed these institutions posed little benefit for the government:

The experience of the United States is the same as our own as far as the adult Indian is concerned. Little can be done with him. He can be taught to do a little at farming, and at stock-raiding, and to dress in a more civilized manner, but that is all. The child, again, who goes to a day school learns little, and what little he learns is soon forgotten, when his tastes are fashioned at home, and his inherited aversion to toil is in no way combated.<sup>73</sup>

Davin argued that without removing the Indigenous child from their homes and the environments which surrounded them, then there would be no benefit to educating them. Davin believed that those who had passed a certain milestone in their life would not be susceptible to the desired changes to adopt Canadian culture and thought. The children however, posed a possibility to alter and mold into what the government would deem acceptable for the expanding nation.

Ryerson and Davin both believed that the children's education should focus upon skills and tasks that would gain them beneficial and profitable careers once they had left school. The division amongst the two reports came from the recommendations for government involvement, as Davin differed from Ryerson, believing that the government should have a closer and more

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<sup>73</sup> Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools*, 2.

direct role within the schools to circumvent any tensions between the Indigenous people and the government later:

With reference to the management of an Industrial School, I beg leave to suggest that, in order to accomplish the commendable object the Government have in view, to ameliorate the condition of the Indians of this Superintendency, it should be conducted in such a manner so as to impart a practical knowledge of the arts of husbandry and mechanics, as well of the other useful industries, to the Indian youth of both sexes; and that to prevent dissensions among the Indians and complications with the Department in the future, it would be, in my opinion, most advisable that the institution proposed be conducted on strictly non-sectarian principles, and that it be absolutely under the immediate direction and control of the Government.<sup>74</sup>

This report indicates that Davin believed that strict control over the Indigenous peoples was necessary to avoid issues from arising but thought the way to achieve this desire was through the government directly involving itself within the school system.

While ultimately the daily operations of the schools were not under the government but rather the various Christian churches, the direction and control were still dictated by the government's plans and structure. This is not entirely abnormal as most school systems in North America today are dictated in some form by the government (usually provincial, territorial, or state based jurisdictions), but it seemed that Davin recommended the connection between the government and the schools to be more direct than was posed by Ryerson. While the reports and the Indian Act provide context into the foundational principles that the government held towards Indigenous people and how they should be treated legally, it is crucial to understand what occurred when the schools began officially.

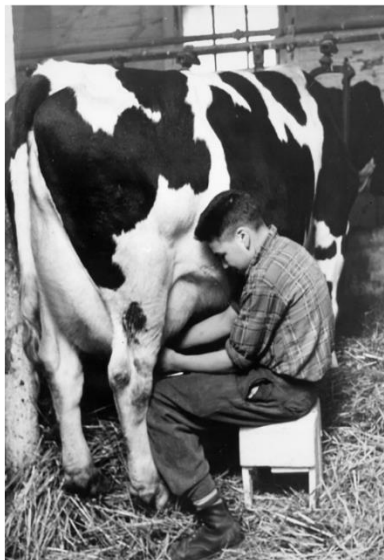
### **Profitability**

While it is unclear whether the government maintained the rigorous schedule recommended by Ryerson in his report, children were subjected to labour throughout their school

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<sup>74</sup> Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools*, 17.

attendance. The duties the children had been tasked with do not seem to be consistent throughout the institutions and were subjected to the administration at their school. During the mid to late half of the twentieth century, the tasks seemed to revolve around chore-based duties, tasks that other children outside of the schools would have been tasked with. The image below, listed by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration: Information Division, spoke of the structure of the instruction for students: “Reading and ‘riting and ‘rithmetic are NOT taught to the tune of a hickory stick at the Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School. And though the traditional “Three R’s” are still the basic subjects on the school curriculum, there are lots of other exciting and interesting things for the school’s 130 boys and girls to learn and to do.”<sup>75</sup> The image depicts a young male student milking a cow, a task common for younger individuals who lived on lands that had livestock (farms, ranches, etc.).



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<sup>75</sup> Department of Citizenship and Immigration: Information Division (Canada), *Boys and Girls Have Busy Program at Indian Residential School*, Government of Canada, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Search?q=residential+schools&num=50&start=100&DataSource=Images>.

Fig. 1: Winnipeg Tribune, *Boys Help with Barn Chores*, Government of Canada.<sup>76</sup>

However, having unregulated child labour did mean that the government had gained an advantageous savings structure from the schools, as they did not have to pay for external staff to work the fields and livestock.<sup>77</sup> Profitability does not solely focus upon the direct monetary influx that the government would obtain from the schools, but it also includes structuring the children's instruction towards careers that the government believed would be beneficial for the nation, in turn molding them into workers that would pay taxes and therefore compensate the government for their original investment.

Profitability did not only pertain to the government either, or it is worth noting that the various Christian churches had formed their own lucrative self-sustaining economic structure throughout the schools. Bev Sellars, a residential school survivor who attended the St. Joseph's Mission at Williams Lake in British Columbia, wrote in her book *They Called Me Number One*, that school administrators frequently looked for children to admit as they gained income based on their student count:

The reason for the range of ages was that some students didn't start school until the Department of Indian Affairs and the churches had finally caught up with them and got strict about getting them to enrol. School authorities were paid per child and they needed the money, so they rounded up as many Indian children as they could find, even though some of them were already ten or eleven years old.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, *Boys Help with Barn Chores*, Government of Canada, accessed on February 4, 2023, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Search?q=residential+schools&num=50&start=100&DataSource=Images>.

<sup>77</sup> Unregulated labour refers to the fact the children were not employed, only students at the schools and were not employees who required a wage. Therefore, the schools were able to use the children without providing them benefits that they would have received if they were to be employed outside of school walls.

<sup>78</sup> Sellars, *Called Me Number One*, 35-36.

Bev Sellars' passage indicates that the residential schools were profitable for the entities involved so long as their admissions continued to increase. Due to the lack of structure placed upon child labour within the schools, the churches benefited from having more children attend their schools as they gained more unregulated labour from it. Under the guise of benefit to the children towards enlightenment, the government and those involved were reaping reward off the institutional abuse rampant within the schools.

### **Obedience and Control**

The abuses within the institutions were extensive and ranged in severity. Some caused great emotional anguish upon the children such as cutting their traditionally long hair and forcing them into clothing that removed all remembrance of their people and heritage. Some abuses arose from the lack of care and importance placed upon the lives of the children including failing to provide them with the necessities of life through inadequate medical care or the lack of nutritious foods. However, the totality of the violence that occurred within the schools' walls frequently flared to the extremes. Rape, sexual assault, torture, and murder were present within many of the schools that ran during the era of operations. John Jones is a survivor of the Alberni Residential School, and briefly described the abuse he faced during his time there:

I'd seen one of my friends with a chocolate bar, and I asked him where he got it, and he said he got it from a male supervisor called Mr. Plint. You know, so I went and asked him if I could have a chocolate bar. And he said he hasn't got one, but if I go back while everybody's asleep, he'd give me one. So, I waited for everybody to fall asleep. And I went to him, went to his office. And he showed me into his bedroom that was attached to the office, and that's where the sexual abuse happened.<sup>79</sup>

The man in question, Arthur Plint, was convicted of child abuse with eighteen victims presented during that case at his trial in 1995.<sup>80</sup> The constant abuse and fear of punishment left

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<sup>79</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, Pecos, Jones, "Stories from School Survivors."

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

many children afraid to cause any disagreement with the staff and as such a pattern of obedience formed through their worries. Those who took advantage of the authority they held over the children preyed upon the environment of the schools, ones of seclusion and removal from the prying eyes of societal concern and family care. During my own research I have been forced to combat numerous external concerns regarding the connections towards the environment of other students within Canada at that time, many issues being raised as to whether the conditions that the Indigenous children were in were abnormal or inconsistent with other schools during this time. Discipline took countless forms throughout the expanse of the residential school era, and varied greatly depending on the area (province, city, etc.) that a student lived in, and was also dependent upon the structure of the institutions, whether it be religious, public, or private for example.

While abuse, notably conducted through beatings, took place in other institutions throughout Canada the comparison is blinded by blurring the lines of intentions and standards placed upon the situations that unfolded. The Indigenous children were abducted from their homes, forced into facilities in the aims of removing the essence of who they were so that they would conform to the standards placed upon them by the governing agents and the societal environment at that time. To blindly compare these events to others does little to aid our understanding of what occurred, as the comparison forms the assumption that the variances have equal identities and structures. A way of controlling the children and forming obedient behaviors was to remove all aspects of individuality from them. A photograph taken by William May and Jean L. Halliday, depicts a group of male students at a school in Alert Bay, British Columbia.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> William May Halliday, and Jean L. Halliday, *Group Photo Showing Indian Boy Students at Schoolhouse in Alert Bay, BC*, Royal BC Museum, ca. 1897-1933, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/group-photo-showing-indian-boy-students-at-schoolhouse-in-alert-bay-bc>.

The composition mirrors many school photographs, with rows of children lined and posed so that the camera may glimpse their faces as the image is captured. However, it is the elements present within the photograph that expose the control over the children.



Fig. 2: William May Halliday and Jean L. Halliday, *Group Photo Showing Indian Boy Students at a Schoolhouse in Alert Bay, BC*, Royal BC Museum, ca. 1897-1933.

While uniforms might not be unconventional in educational institutions at the time the photograph was taken, the clothes are designed in such a form that removes all aspects of who the children are, the individuality being ripped from them. The photograph depicts only male students, and it is noticeable that no student has hair past ear length, their hair done into traditional Western styles popular with the masses at the time. However, long hair was traditional amongst both men and women in many Indigenous groups, and this connection to their roots and culture had been torn from the children. While some might not be able to fully comprehend the connection one has to their hair, remember that it is an important part of who they are, and where they came from. By stripping the children of their identity and making them no less unique than their counterparts the institutions forged a controlling dominance over who the children were, and in turn made them obedient to the whims and powers that they held.

### Nationalistic Impulse

The government's intentions behind the creation of the schools had been driven by its nationalistic mindset, a position directed towards the formation of the nation under a unified identity and purpose. Forms of cultural expression were looked upon poorly by the school administrators, part of a strict regime that intended to remove all Indigenous aspects from the children. A Kamloops Residential School survivor Sarah McLeod spoke of an incident that occurred during her time there, where one of the nuns told her she had to get rid of a totem pole miniature that she had been given as a gift for her birthday.<sup>82</sup>

I looked at her. I said, 'But that's my birthday present.' 'No, that's no good. That's all devil you see in that totem pole. It's all devil, can't you see all the devil in there? You throw it away right now.' And she made me throw it in the garbage, and it was, I didn't know, I said to myself, 'Oh, my gosh. All this time I was, I was hugging this devil?'<sup>83</sup>

Many students were made to feel ashamed of their culture, of who they were. The threat of alternative identity, one separate from the growing Canadian narrative (dominated by White, Christian ideology) greatly influenced the actions of those in the policies and practices as conducted by school administration.

The instruction provided to the students focused upon Christian ideological principles and structure as a way of bringing in the nationalistic sentiment towards how one should conduct their lives and interact with those around them. However, Bev Sellars explained that although they were being taught through the Christian principles, the staff continuously held much of the material from them and failed to explain the concepts to the children in a way they could understand:

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<sup>82</sup> Sarah McLeod, "What Survivors Said About Life at the Kamloops Indian Residential Schools," Interview by Leslie Young, *Global News*, June 2, 2021, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7915520/kamloops-residential-school-survivors-stories/>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

We went to church on Sundays. The Catholic mass at that time was recited entirely in Latin. We had lessons every day to practice how to respond to the priests during mass. We practiced until we got it right, with proper pronunciation of the Latin words and when to say them, but the meaning was not translated into English for us. We were, as usual, just little robots programmed to do everything on cue. We were not at residential school to get a well-rounded education.<sup>84</sup>

The idea of the children becoming “little robots” perfectly explained the attitude held towards educational instruction throughout the residential schools.<sup>85</sup> The government and its employed bodies did not want to advance the Indigenous people so that they might truly assimilate into the Canadian culture and nation as another member of society. Rather, they wanted them to always be one step behind, constantly putting them at a disadvantage so that the government's control and power over the Indigenous people maintained its strength.

### **Conclusion**

The Canadian federal government sought to exert control over the Indigenous people in a desire to alter and mold who they were, with the aims of making them into subservient beings that would not cause dissidence but ones that would instead provide Canada with compliant members of the unified nation. This began through foundational legislation that removed Indigenous people's rights and freedoms and was cemented by the removal of their children into institutions rife with abuse. While the government sought to control the Indigenous people through early policies such as the Indian Act, their efforts began to falter once the schools had begun operation, and as such a resurgence of their power was exerted through various amendments to the governing documents and by the later execution of child abduction carried out by government agencies. Regardless of the ways in which the government attempted to exert

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<sup>84</sup> Sellars, *Called Me Number One*, 45.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

their control over the Indigenous people, they failed to quell the power of Indigenous culture, heritage, and identity.

There is little trust between the government and the Indigenous peoples, as the hurt they have endured has seeped into the very fabric of their relationship with one another. Many do not want to be united under the “Canadian” identity and have become incredibly disconnected toward the Canadian sentiment, which has unfortunately and misguidedly been engrained within colonial principles. We cannot reconcile without understanding why the Indigenous people feel the way they do today, and why they do not feel as if those in power are (or ever have been) willing to understand or listen to the hurt they have endured. The importance of exposing the intent behind the creation of the residential schools is that it enables us to understand why the institutions were able to run for such an extensive period of Canadian history, long into a time where the sentiment towards equality and freedom had shifted vastly from the days of residential school inception. By understanding the intent of the government, we can move towards more honest education and a more enriched form of reconciliation.

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