

Grave Error: The Lie of Indian Residential School Deaths in Canada

by [David Solway](#) (June 2024)



Indian Church– Emily Carr, 1929

The flight from truth makes true Reconciliation impossible.

–[Grave Error](#) (ed. Tom Flanagan & C.P. Champion)

A crucial issue currently troubling the country has to do with the suffering of native peoples in the now-abolished religiously oriented Residential Schools, which sought both to convert aboriginal students to Christianity and to integrate them into the wider culture. [Thousands](#) of Indian children were purportedly tortured, killed and buried in mass graves by Catholic priests and nuns in the period 1890-1969. The shame and resentment which followed the scandal became a national *cause célèbre*.

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up from 2008 to 2015, leading to a so-called national “conversation” and ongoing political controversy. Despite documentary records being scant and evidence largely anecdotal, the hearings resulted, in the words of [the TRC report](#), “in one of the largest settlement packages in the history of the country.” In an article entitled [The Assault on Aboriginal Memory in the Native Studies Curriculum](#), former Native Studies professor Jeff Muehlbauer of Brandon University in Manitoba argued that a “[new ideological preserve](#)” was established in which only one side of the story could be told–the politically correct side of relentless religious persecution and cultural genocide. The monostory of indigenous suffering and “settler” guilt had to be fixed in textual and funerary stone.

But there was another side to the story, namely, the experience of many indigenous individuals who claim to have benefited from their education in the schools and for which they were grateful, records of which have been purged by what Muehlbauer calls a “radicalized cloister” of faux scholars

“who don’t let data get in the way of a good model.” For such arbiters of collective dogma, “Identity is conditioned by ideology” and embedded in a preferential narrative. Muehlbauer does not downplay the often “horrific abuse” practiced in the system, but deplores that “the majority of historical aboriginal voices are being silenced forever,” in particular those that expressed “positivity towards the Residential School experience.” And certainly, volumes like Glecia Bear’s [Our Grandmothers’ Lives As Told in Their Own Words](#), support Muehlbauer’s case.

What is required, obviously, is not a prefabricated ideological myth that censors different or opposing views but a comprehensive study that tells all sides of the story in the interest of scholarly honesty and historical truth. And this is precisely what has not happened. Too many special interests and parasitic actors are involved to allow for an honest reckoning, and that is the real scandal. There is no denying that the strategy behind Canada’s [Indian Act](#) in its current form entails a partage system involving a veritable army of paid activists, academics, lawyers, consultants and Band leaders who have no interest in searching for the truth. Truth often tends to be unprofitable.



Students in class at a residential school in Lac La Ronge, Saskatchewan

As historian [Jacques Rouillard](#), professor emeritus at the *Université de Montréal*, has written: The government of Canada and the RCMP have left “the decision to investigate to Aboriginal communities which could be construed as having a vested interest in not investigating.” The intentionally charged narrative of “what could be the biggest crime in Canadian history,” driven in part “by political and financial motives, has taken precedence over the earnest pursuit of truth.”

The fable shows no sign of tapering off. British Columbia’s Kamloops Indian Reserve, for example, now [claims](#) that the remains of 215 children buried on the grounds of the school have been confirmed. But there are no data supporting this assertion. Despite the tales that mysterious and unnamed native “knowledge keepers” confidently dispense, ground

penetrating radar (GPR) surveys do not detect organic material in the presumed grave site. Writing in [The Dorchester Review](#), Nina Green points out that 2,000 linear feet of trenches running east-west were [dug in 1924 as a septic field](#) to dispose of the school's sewage. The "anomalies" in question may quite likely have been clay tiles.

Green continues: "Unfortunately [Dr. Sarah Beaulieu](#), Assistant Professor of Social, Cultural & Media Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley, didn't know about the 1924 septic field when she did her GPR work at the former residential school as she hadn't done the necessary archival research beforehand. She thus mistook the old septic field trenches for shallow children's graves, and the fact that they ran east-west for [proof that they were Christian burials](#)."

Furthermore, some of her GPR "hits" were actually shovel test pits from earlier archaeological work. Finally, we learn that "the Kamloops Band has a [large and very old community cemetery](#) on the other side of the Reserve at the historic St Joseph's Church. There would thus never have been a cemetery at the residential school." Interestingly, the Kamloops Band built its [Heritage Park](#) directly over the hypothetical graves, a rather odd thing to do in the circumstances, and an [alleged juvenile tooth](#) found on the site turned out to be non-human.

As the [Western Standard](#) reports, "The Kamloops discovery became Canada's George Floyd moment. There were angry vigils and public displays of grief and shame almost instantly. Flags on government buildings were lowered to half-mast for nearly six months. [Statues of former Canadian heroes](#) were defaced, destroyed, or removed, alongside growing demands to rename streets and public schools. At least 85 Churches were [set ablaze or vandalized](#) both on and off indigenous reserves." As for the prime minister, "It is unacceptable and wrong that acts of vandalism and arson are being seen across the country, including against Catholic churches," Trudeau [said](#). But he immediately went on to elutriate his pro forma indignation by

professing to “understand the anger that’s out there against the federal government, against institutions like the Catholic Church. It is real, and it’s fully understandable, given the shameful history that we are all becoming more and more aware of.” Again, Truth was not invited to sit at the TRC table or to enter the Prime Minister’s Office.

The fix was in. Rebel News [reports](#) that an RCMP investigation revealed no identifiable missing or murdered children. There are no names, no records of parents searching for their offspring, no accounts of boarding school murders. A seminal book on the subject, [Grave Error](#), edited by historians Tom Flanagan and Chris Champion, reveals that the Kamloops travesty is likely the greatest hoax in all of Canadian history, an egregious scam perpetrated by a virtue-signalling government, a *vendu* media, and Indian Bands that stood to profit from the alleged scandal. As Flanagan [writes](#), chiefs of the Lhtako Dene Nation, among others, denounced the book as “hateful,” “hate literature,” and “denialism” without ever having read it.

The Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations has spent almost [\\$8 million](#), only a fraction of the vast sums expended in the quest to locate the bodies of these indigenous children, but, as we have seen, not one body has been found to date, neither at the Kamloops Indian Residential School nor any other major site for that matter. The Counter Signal tells of a lesser event in which 14 “anomalies” at a former residential school in Manitoba “turned out to be [nothing](#) more than rocks and dirt.” This event went largely unreported. Indeed, no serious, large-scale excavations have been done even though the controversy would be quickly settled, one way or another, if these burial grounds were even partially disinterred. But partisan politics and a self-interested narrative are the order of the day.

Retired judge Brian Giesbrech [writes](#): “Stories about murderous priests and secret burials of 215 children, with the forced

help of six-year-olds, are simply conspiracy theories that have circulated for years in First Nations communities. Claims of thousands of 'missing children' are a distortion of reality." The major killers of these children were major epidemics, most documented. All available evidence, Giesbrech continues, "proves that deaths were carefully recorded, and proper Christian burials—usually on the child's home reserve, with parents present—were the norm."

Nonetheless, a manufactured chronicle of lethal violence has become an unassailable public dogma. Thus, thousands of Aboriginal children were said to have been murdered though not a shred of dispositive evidence attests to the claim. People have come fervently to believe in a false narrative of clandestine graves and missing children, which is nothing less than a national lie propped up by a duplicitous government, a decadent academy, and a reprehensible media consortium.

Of the first 40 sites and articles I canvassed on the Net dealing with the issue—I felt too jaundiced to go on—only two were evidence-based and skeptical of the vociferous allegations regarding the Residential Schools' presumed atrocities. That harshness and cruelty formed part of the pedagogical program is not in question. It was a practice for which there is no excuse. But wanton murders and furtive, nocturnal burials are most likely a complete fabrication. The pervasive tenor of such sanctimonious, unproven accusations is summed up in the heading "[Canada was founded on a national crime](#)." Just about everyone—from a scheming prime minister down to the most credulous man on the street—has either promoted or bought into the fiction even though not a single forensic archeologist has been commissioned to examine these Residential sites.

As noted, the facts we do have tell a very different story. Writing in the [Frontier Centre for Public Policy](#), Rodney Clifton cites the TRC report showing that the most common cause for the Residential School death rate was tuberculosis,

accounting for almost 50 percent of the deaths, followed by influenza, pneumonia, lung disease, meningitis, heart disease, whooping cough, and typhoid fever.

Failing a scrupulous excavation of the grave sites in question, the critical accounts of the prevailing narrative represent the closest approximation we have to the truth. As Conrad Black remarks in his Introduction to *Grave Error*, "There will be no reconciliation and there will be no resolution of these problems if one side requires as a precondition to any progress the acceptance of a false and defamatory version of a very important part of Canadian history."

But the prospect of a revival—if that is the right word—of professional integrity and ethical principle is poor. Those who refuse to allow ideology to distort their scholarship and who demonstrate moral probity, honest research and impartial, non-politicized analysis find they are living on the [Cacklogalinnian island](#) of giant chickens prone to cackling fits of envenomed pique against their sensible detractors. In a case involving no *corpus delicti*, the grievance of the native tribes with the complicity of an official profiteering class and a guilt-ridden population has buried the body of Truth.

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David Solway's latest book is [Crossing the Jordan: On Judaism, Islam, and the West](#) (NER Press). His previous book is [Notes from a Derelict Culture](#), Black House Publishing, 2019, London. A CD of his original songs, [Partial to Cain](#), appeared in 2019.

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