

BC Town Council's Censure of Mayor Over Book Yet Another Instance of Canada's Cultural Self-Hate

By Conrad Black

The unanimous decision of the town council of Quesnel, British Columbia, to [condemn the book "Grave Error"](#) by the distinguished public intellectuals C.P. Champion and Tom Flanagan because some claimed that it disputed that cultural genocide occurred in the Indian Residential Schools, is another powerful illustration of the extent to which this country is falling into the habit of uncritically accepting even the most heinous charges against Canada's ethical and moral history.



This gullible condition is confirmed and aggravated by the government's false admission that Canada committed cultural genocide against indigenous people.

There is, in fact, no such thing as cultural genocide. It is known as assimilation, and is the ancient fear of the French Canadians: that they are surrounded by so many more English-speaking Canadians that they will ultimately be assimilated into English Canada. This has happened with many French Canadians in predominantly English-speaking jurisdictions, such as parts of Western Canada, Louisiana, and the United States generally, where many hundreds of thousands of French Canadians emigrated, knowing that they would be assimilated.

There has never been any probative evidence that it was the task of the residential schools to deprive indigenous children of the knowledge of their culture and language. The purpose of the schools was to enable them to participate fully in Canadian life by being educated as other children were educated and made fluent in one of the two official languages. Almost all of those indigenous children were subject to the legislation governing the increasing requirement for all Canadian children to be educated, and the great majority of them were taken from homes voluntarily, where they would otherwise have grown up illiterate and in grinding poverty, defenceless against the challenges of adult life.

No doubt, many unfortunate and even terrible incidents occurred in the residential schools, but the purpose of them was not evil or racist, and the spirit in which they were operated, mainly by the principal Christian churches, was positive and respectful of the indigenous peoples. But "Grave Error" (for which I was honoured to be asked to contribute a preface) did not primarily discuss the residential schools. It was prompted by the announcement two years ago of unmarked graves of indigenous children, furtively buried without notification of their families or any record of their deaths, which were presumed to have been caused by negligence or outright homicide. These apparent graves were allegedly discovered adjacent to a cemetery in Kamloops, B.C., near the location of a former residential school.

It was a story that naturally horrified all Canadians and any foreigners who heard of it, and there was an [instantaneous rush to judgment](#). The prime minister ordered all official Canadian flags to be lowered to half-mast, where they remained for six months. As part of the same general campaign of national self-chastisement for the treatment of indigenous peoples, Canada manfully volunteered itself before the United Nations as a country that had attempted a form of genocide.

It is unfounded nonsense that Canada ever attempted anything of the kind, and that is one of the reasons why the indigenous population is many times larger than it was when these alleged misdeeds occurred in the residential schools in the 19th century. On the matter of the mass graves of children, the discovery was by ground-penetrating radar, which merely reported some anomalies. In the furor that followed the announcement in May 2021, the facts were lost sight of, as there was no evidence that these so-called anomalies were in fact graves, and if they were graves, there was no evidence of who might be in them.

Parliament [devoted \\$27 million](#) to get to the bottom of who, if anyone, was buried there, but this has not been done, largely because of the objections raised by indigenous leaders that sacred burial grounds could not be violated.

All children who attended the Indian Residential Schools were scrupulously recorded and accounted for. Tuberculosis was a substantial problem, even in the most prosperous households and communities, and a large number of indigenous children undoubtedly died from that disease. Families were notified, and the causes of death were always provided. This entire story caused Canada to humble and defame itself before the world by voluntarily taking our place amongst those regimes that really were guilty of genocide, such as Nazi Germany, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the governing majorities in Rwanda, Darfur, and South Sudan, and the Turks in Armenia. There was not the slightest justification for doing so.

“Grave Error” is a rigorous and unanswerable presentation of the facts, and it leaves no room for the allegation of a

policy of negligently killing and furtively disposing of the corpses of indigenous children or anyone else. The wife of the mayor of Quesnel [distributed the book](#) to members of the town council to increase their awareness of the facts, and once some of them started to ask pointed questions about aspects of the unmarked graves atrocity, instead of addressing concerns or conducting the necessary research, the reaction was to leap to the conclusion that it was just the shabby and contemptible denial of criminal acts by forebears of the town councillors, and the distribution of the book temporarily ceased. But in fact, as often happens in matters of attempted censorship, its sales sharply increased.

There have been so many commissions and recommendations and so much cant and emotionalism on the subject. What is needed now is a commission on commissions: a commission comprised of people who have a proven record of adducing facts and making sensible recommendations about how to complete the task of suitable reparations for any legitimate grievances that the indigenous peoples have, while clarifying that in almost every case, the motives for what was done were not hostile, or even disrespectful.

Unless some drastic new information comes to light, any suggestion of attempted genocide must be banished, extirpated from acceptable comment, as such charges constitute a blood libel against English and French Canadians.

All Canadians know that this country is not without its faults, but in general its faults are fewer than most countries, and they do not remotely approach the attempted destruction of whole peoples, culturally or otherwise. The charge that cultural genocide was ever the policy of an official government in Canada is untrue, and prominent people who have uttered that, including the former chief justice [Beverley McLachlin](#), should be admonished to desist.

I have my doubts if there is any real enthusiasm in the indigenous community for reconstructing their life along traditional lines even with a modern level of services, but the indigenous people have to be consulted, and within reason, assisted along the preferred course they choose—retention of

traditional life or full integration. We will not improve their condition by heaping unjust abuse upon our own ancestors.

When we are well along in a comprehensive program to resolve legitimate indigenous complaints, we should commission a further study to determine why it is that Canadians have such an ardent longing for self-condemnation and why they spring like skilled athletes to charge our government and its predecessors with heinous offences, of which they were, in fact, innocent.

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