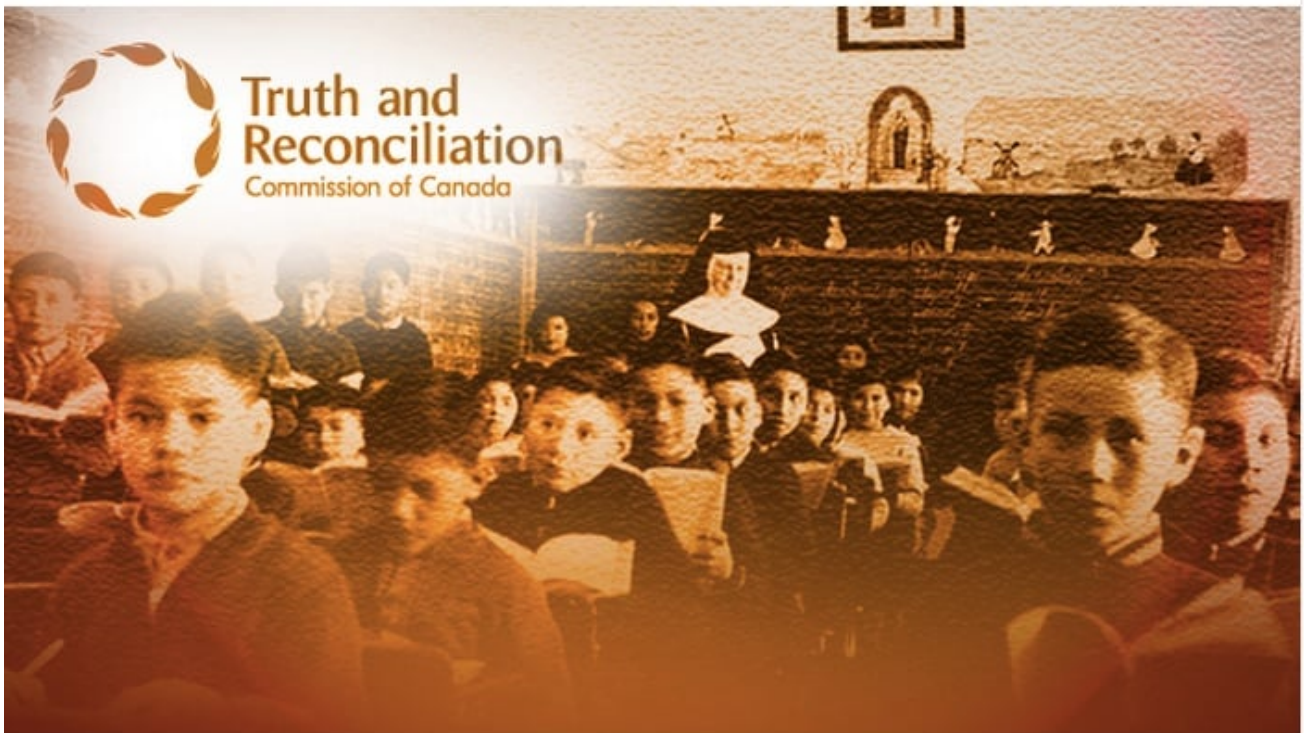


Facing the past to resolve some of Canada's most intractable issues

by Conrad Black

...assimilation was wrong and had no place in our country.



The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Canada must cease to humble itself in sackcloth and ashes and confess to having spent its entire history trying to exterminate its Aboriginal peoples – culturally and intermittently physically, as well. This is essentially the chief and almost wholly false contention of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) 2015 report on the Indian residential schools (IRS) and related matters. One more time, I offer, like the late night television advertisement health warning that a powerful laxative may lead to suicidal thoughts or abrupt heart failure, my profound respect for Aboriginal people, my acknowledgement that they have many grievances, that Canadian government policy as it pertains to

them has largely failed and my recognition that there is a great deal of interesting research contained within the TRC report.

The document has been heavily publicized and widely accepted, and has encumbered the Canadian consciousness with an albatross of collective guilt. The policy debate surrounding Native people absolutely must be taken away from the victim industry and radically reformulated. The first problem with the TRC report is the number and gravity of its dishonest and contentious claims and accusations. The "Summary and Legacy" volumes do not accurately represent the material presented in the preceding four volumes, which have been largely ignored by the media. Many of the negative generalizations in the summary volumes are not supported by preceding evidence. Extensive interviews in which the subjects espoused favourable opinions of the IRS were not reflected at all in the concluding volumes. Instead, there are a number of unsupported inflammatory claims. Volume 1 begins: "For over a century the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the treaties; and through a process of assimilation cause Aboriginal people to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as 'cultural genocide.'" "

As the excellent book I cited last week, "From Truth Comes Reconciliation," noted: "Finding a reference to cultural genocide at the very beginning of this important report probably forces readers to wonder why the Government of Canada signed treaties, established reserves, published dictionaries of Indigenous languages, banned relatively few Indigenous traditions ... and never forbade Indigenous people from speaking their languages in residential schools or anywhere else. Such puzzling questions remain unexamined in the TRC report and in

the public media. Just as worrying, the commissioners assert that Indigenous students attending residential schools were considered 'subhuman.' " No evidence was adduced to support such a claim, which is disturbing from a commission that promised the truth. Fewer than 40 per cent of Indigenous children attended residential schools, which seriously undermines the TRC's claims that "residential schools are responsible for virtually all the current challenges facing Indigenous people." (The large number of Indigenous people who had no formal education at all faced another set of hardships.)

Approximately 150,000 Indigenous people spent at least one year in the IRS system, some of them were rescued from miserable conditions, and while there were many inexcusable incidents of physical and emotional abuse, there are also a great many stories of Native people who felt that residential schools enabled them to have successful lives. Practically the entire administrative, investigative and judicial apparatus that oversees Indigenous matters was effectively bulldozed into a far more comprehensive and grave condemnation of the official motives and performance of the residential schools than was justified. Following the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996, which effectively called for one-third of Canada to be handed over to First Nations people to govern as they wish, with no taxation and all expenses paid by the rest of Canada, there came the Indian Residential School Agreement, with the stated purpose to "bring a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of the Indian residential schools." The tangible consequences were the Common Experiences Payments (CEP) and the Independent Assessment Process (IAP), under which approximately 110,000 alumni of the IRS received \$1.9 billion in CEP, including approximately \$100 million from the various Christian churches, and \$2.7 billion (which the TRC does not mention) from the IAP. This colossal slush fund of extravagant reparations has intensified rather than abated the rapacity of

the Native victimhood industry.

The TRC's demand for the unlimited surrender of Canada to all the accusations and demands levelled against it is based on the assertion that "Canada, as the party to the relationship that has breached this trust, has the primary obligation to do the work needed to regain the trust of Aboriginal peoples." This is where our governments have led us. Canada's First Nations have some trust-building to accomplish, too, and future arrangements must reflect that. The worst and most dishonest aspect of this cascade of failures has been the evil misuse of the phrase "cultural genocide," which was infamously legitimized by former Supreme Court chief justice Beverley McLachlin, along with reckless references to "colonization" and "survivors," all of which has dragged Canada somewhat under the moral aegis of the United Nations Genocide Convention, which has no earthly application to Canada, even though many of Canada's official policies in regards to its Indigenous people were misconceived and objectively bad and contemptible.

This tortured subject has become a Frankenstein monster of self-destructive policy and anti-Canadian blood libels. Almost the entire report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996 should be disavowed. There are over 1.6 million Aboriginal people in Canada, about four per cent of the population. A proportionate part of the country, with enough royalty income to fund the territory comfortably and with fully adequate year-round infrastructure, should be given to them as an autonomous First Nations-governed district of Canada, where Canadian rules of honest governance and human rights must be observed. Those Aboriginals who wish to integrate altogether into general Canadian society must be given every reasonable assistance in doing so.

We must recognize that every Canadian has an equal right to be here, and that all Canadians played a role in building this great country. Canadians – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike

– who wish to help resolve these very difficult issues must be empowered to do so, and those who try to get their point across through illegal means, such as last year's railway blockades, must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Bishop François de Laval, King George III and John A. Macdonald, denigrated as they are, did better on Native issues than we have in the last 40 years. The subject is indeed a disgrace, but not chiefly for the reasons that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission claimed to have identified.

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