

The media and Trudeau have yet to return to reality

Truth and untruth and reconciliation and orchestrated antagonism are not the same things.

By Conrad Black

The controversy over the alleged surreptitious burial of 215 Indigenous children who had supposedly died at the Kamloops Indian Residential School has been extremely damaging to this country, because it has naturally inflamed the grievances of natives and incited the guilt of a huge number of Canadians, but is based on suppositions unjustified by the known facts. As with other contemporary controversies, dissent pending receipt of evidence tends to be greeted by a storm of reproach that the individual who is unconvinced of the conventional explanation for these alleged graves is not only a "grave-denier," like someone who denies the overwhelmingly documented horrors of the Holocaust, but is also an anti-Indigenous racist and even a closet apologist for genocide against the native peoples of Canada.

In an address to the Western Association of Broadcasters in Banff two weeks ago, in response to a question from the president of the association, I criticized both the prime minister and most of the Canadian media for falling in behind the story with insufficient evidence. In the case of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who had previously caused this country falsely to be labeled guilty of genocide at the United Nations, he embarrassed and humiliated Canada by lowering official flags, including the embassies to befuddled foreign powers, for the unheard-of duration of nearly six months. For criticizing the Canadian media for its propagation of the story of the graves of missing native children, I was apparently contradicted by one member of the audience, though

with such admirable Canadian restraint and courtesy that I was not aware of it, and several people, allegedly including officials of the CRTC, left in protest. I did not notice that either, and only became aware of it when I saw a description of the meeting in an Internet publication of the broadcasters association. They had a special meeting of directors after our session and rebuked their president for not questioning me more aggressively and effectively apologized for my "incredibly hurtful and disrespectful" remarks.

I was disrespectful of the media and of the prime minister, but not because I have ever been anything except an admirer of the native people and highly critical of past and present treatment of them. I have never ceased to insist that as a society we had to do better in working with Indigenous people. I think there is an overwhelming consensus on that point: we must work out with their ablest and most respected leaders a new basis of their relationship with Canada and found that initiative properly and see it through to success. But no part of the solution consists of falsely accusing ourselves and propagating a blood libel against the English and French-speaking Canadian peoples historically, that any form of genocide was ever intended for the natives, or that such a heinous accusation as the mass graves affair should be launched on anything less than convincing evidence.

Let's review the facts. The 215 children's graves at the Kamloops Indian residential school were first reported on May 27, 2021, by Tk'emlips te Secwepemc First Nation Chief Rosanne Casimir, who referred to the discovery by an anthropologist, Sarah Beaulieu, using ground penetrating radar (GPR), of anomalies in the soil of an apple orchard near the old school at Kamloops. Chief Casimir stated that these were the graves of "missing children" who represented "undocumented deaths" and that their fate had long been a matter of "knowledge" in the community. She did say that the findings were "preliminary." GPR does not identify human remains but reveals

soil disruptions and variations. These could be any number of different anomalies. A press conference was held on July 15, 2021, after the story had caught fire across the country and in the world. Beaulieu reduced the number of potential graves to 200 and referred to previous surveys on the site for a variety of agricultural and infrastructure purposes. She did not claim that children's remains had been found and only said that there were "probable burials" and "targets of interest." Beaulieu referred to the discovery of a child's tooth, [which was in fact not a human tooth](#), and to a juvenile rib found by a tourist 20 years before, but its human origin was never tested and its presence is not now known. The recollections of elderly Aboriginal "knowledge keepers" were referred to but none of them have been substantiated or were purportedly based on first-hand observations.

Beaulieu said that to confirm burials she would need "forensic investigation involving excavation." But the band also said that Ms. Beaulieu's full research "cannot" be released to the media and chief Casimir was ambiguous about whether there would be any excavation. The Band Council stated its intention to engage the B.C. Coroner. On the initial information, and just three days after chief Casimir's comments, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pretty much accepted that there had been murders and hidden burials. The initial reports were everywhere taken as fact and led directly to the burning down, vandalization, or desecration of 83 Canadian churches. The Prime Minister said that these acts were "unacceptable and wrong" but "fully understandable, given the shameful history that we are all becoming more and more aware of."



On the same day, the flags came down for six months "in memory of the indigenous children who were sent to residential schools, for those who never returned home, and in honor of the families whose

lives were forever changed." This constituted an admission by the government of Canada that children were buried near a number of residential schools and it gave the decision to lower the country's flags officially to the Assembly of First Nations, which has its prerogatives but does not speak for the entire country. The flags were only raised again after five and-one-half months to enable them to be lowered again for one day as is traditional on Remembrance Day, Nov. 11. The flags were raised finally on Nov. 12.

This issue ramifies considerably beyond the important subject of past, current, and future aboriginal policy. Practically everyone accepts the desire for truth in recording the history of the subject and reconciliation now and in the future. But these goals will not be advanced by the circulation of what appear after three years to be untruths, and by inciting both native Canadians and those who came after them to believe that atrocities were committed of which there is no probative evidence. I and many others are not "grave deniers." We are evidence seekers. It has been alleged that the suspicious anomalies at Kamloops shouldn't be excavated because it would violate a sacred burial ground. This obviously will not do, given the proportions of this controversy, as burial grounds can be carefully explored without any disrespect to human

remains found in them. After we have labeled ourselves as a genocidal country and the Prime Minister, shooting from the hip, has draped this entire nationality in sackcloth and ashes, we are entitled to find out what actually happened. Truth and untruth and reconciliation and orchestrated antagonism are not the same things. And Canadians, if we wish to be taken seriously in the world, or even to take ourselves seriously, must not so easily be plunged into an orgy of national self-hate on the hair-trigger of a profoundly unsubstantiated allegation. Serious nationalities behave seriously and do not instantly condemn those who seek to maintain responsible standards of historical deduction. Canada has behaved more responsibly as a nation than almost any other country and we must maintain that course: proud but not arrogant, always ready for self-criticism but not for mindless self-hate.

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