

# The Impacts of Colonialism on Indigenous Children in Canada

FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE TWENTIETH TO THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Colonial historical narratives have long been at the centre of Canadian discourse, but by recognising and disseminating Indigenous perspectives and lived experiences, academics and educators can participate in the truth-telling that is a necessary prerequisite for justice and reconciliation.



## "Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952" – by Ian Mosby

- The Canadian government's underfunding of residential schools and Indigenous welfare relief programs during the interwar and WW2 years led to widespread hunger and malnutrition in residential schools and Indigenous communities.
- Nutrition experts saw this as an opportunity to run clinical trials on human subjects, without informed consent, using malnourished people as control groups for their experiments and leaving them hungry.
- Politicians and scientists exploited the malnutrition of Indigenous people to further their careers and political interests, rather than addressing the root cause of the problem or the government's culpability.



## 'Kill the Indian in the Child': Genocide in International Law – by Tamara Starblanket

- Children are essential to the future of a culture.
- By forcibly removing Indigenous children from their communities and violently imposing a new cultural pattern onto children at residential schools, the Canadian government was committing cultural genocide.
- While the last residential school closed in the 1990s, the child welfare system continues to disproportionately remove Indigenous children from their families and continues the legacy of cultural genocide.
- "Cultural genocide" has not been included as a crime under the umbrella of genocide in international law because cultural genocide is a necessary condition of colonialism. Without this legal recognition, Indigenous people are unable to make claims of genocide under international law, and it allows colonial objectives to go unchecked.



## "The Occasional Evil of Angels: Learning from the Experiences of Aboriginal Peoples and Social Work" – by Cindy Blackstock

- Indigenous children have experienced great harm in colonial Canada, from disease, starvation, and murder in their communities, to abuse, neglect, and deaths in residential schools.
- Despite knowledge of the deplorable conditions of residential schools, few human rights groups or social work organizations did anything to help. Many social workers saw the schools as necessary for assimilation and education, and continued placing Indigenous children in them until the late 1960s in the name of "child welfare".
- In the 1960's, the "60's scoop" also removed masses of Indigenous children from their homes to be placed in non-Indigenous homes.
- To pursue reconciliation, the social work profession needs to recognize its harmful past, decolonize its frameworks, and begin affirming traditional Indigenous values and methods of community support.



### Genocide in International Law

Genocide is defined as a "coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national [or ethnic, racial, or religious] groups, with the aim of annihilating the group themselves".  
(Starblanket, 2018)



### Did You Know?

The trauma of residential schools created the dysfunctional family conditions in Indigenous communities that the Canadian government then used as the basis for removing another generation of children via the child welfare system.  
(Blackstock, 2009)

## Conclusion:

Indigenous children have been, and continue to be, the primary target for the Canadian government's efforts to assimilate Indigenous people into settler society. To move forward, the government and other colonial institutions need to acknowledge their crimes, evaluate their structures to end genocidal practices, and respect Indigenous rights to self-determination on this land they have inhabited since time immemorial (Starblanket, 2018).

#### Information sources:

- Blackstock, Cindy. "The Occasional Evil of Angels: Learning from the Experiences of Aboriginal Peoples and Social Work," *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 4.1 (2009): 28-37.
- Mosby, Ian. "Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 46.91 (Mai-May 2013): 145-172.
- Starblanket, Tamara. "'Kill the Indian in the child': Genocide in International Law," in *Indigenous Peoples as Subjects of International Law* edited by Irene Watson (New York:Routledge, 2018): 171-200.

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