

Residential Schools

The last Residential School closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan. The goal of the schools was to assimilate children into the Eurocentric culture and to separate them from their families' culture and way of life. Schools were mostly run by churches with the aim of converting students to Christianity.

The Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources. If every Aboriginal person had been 'absorbed into the body politic,' there would be no reserves, no Treaties, and no Aboriginal rights.

– Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future:
Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, p. 3

Assimilation: is a process of social integration that requires adopting, by choice or necessity, the ways of a different and often hegemonic culture or society.

Genocide: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

[Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#)

Cultural Genocide: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) referred to Canada's residential school system and other policies against Indigenous Peoples as a "cultural genocide". The TRC defines cultural genocide as:

“...the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.”

[Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)

Cultural genocide is not in the UN definition of genocide. Some have argued that the term detracts from the definition of genocide (which generally involved the *physical* destruction of a people) while others have argued that the term detracts from what happened to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, namely *genocide*. Residential schools involved the forcible removal of Indigenous children to another group, which is in the UN’s definition of genocide. For fulsome discussion of the terms see <https://www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools/chapter-7/cultural-genocide>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/05/did-canada-commit-a-cultural-genocide/>

Intergenerational Trauma: Psychologists have begun to study how trauma can be passed down through generations, particularly in groups of people who have faced significant oppression and group trauma such as Holocaust survivors, descendants of African-American slaves, and residential school survivors. Many residential school survivors were abused, stripped of their language, and made to feel ashamed of their Indigenous culture. They were rendered ill equipped to function in either settler society or their families’ community. Trauma has manifested in substance abuse, mental health issues, and high rates of homelessness, incarceration and suicide. Read more:

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/intergenerational-trauma-and-residential-schools>