

**CANADIAN ANTHROPOLOGY SOCIETY  
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE D'ANTHROPOLOGIE**



October 6, 2015

**RE: Support for the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Final Report.**

The Canadian Anthropology Society welcomes the Final Report Summary of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. Having concluded an exhaustive analysis of accounts and data from across the country, the Commission provides a telling account of the ravages wrought by the policies pursued by the Canadian state. These policies were firmly rooted in beliefs that were profoundly ethnocentric conforming to textbook definitions of ethnocentricity, judging other cultures by the values of one's own. To cite the summary of the final report:

The residential school system was based on an assumption that European civilization and Christian religions were superior to Aboriginal culture, which was seen as being savage and brutal. Government officials also were insistent that children be discouraged—and often prohibited—from speaking their own languages. The missionaries who ran the schools played prominent roles in the church-led campaigns to ban Aboriginal spiritual practices such as the Potlatch and the Sun Dance (more properly called the “Thirst Dance”), and to end traditional Aboriginal marriage practices. Although, in most of their official pronouncements, government and church officials took the position that Aboriginal people could be civilized, it is clear that many believed that Aboriginal culture was inherently inferior. (Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, page 4).

Thus, armed with this ethnocentric worldview that sought to eradicate aboriginal cultures, policies were instituted to use residential schools as a means to eliminate the language and culture of indigenous Canadians. The report affirms that this was

an act of cultural genocide, one that sought to eliminate cultural and social affiliations, thus rendering moot government legal obligations as secured by treaties and aboriginal sovereignty long denied by the Canadian state.

The Commission and the report they authored highlighted the role of the residential school survivors in pushing for reconciliation and ensuring that the Commission could document the events of the past. However, as the authors of the report highlight, this is merely a first step as a report is not the final outcome. To cite the report, reconciliation is an ongoing process whereby “we restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned” (Honouring the Truth, page 6). Rather, the true work of reconciliation has only begun.

As anthropologists, and as Canadians, the Canadian Anthropology Society wholeheartedly supports the goal of reconciliation, and accepts the definition put forward by the Commission:

To the Commission, reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior (Honouring the Truth, page 6).

The work conducted by numerous Canadian anthropologists highlights the continued consequences of colonization and state-instituted residential schools in areas of health (physical and mental), social well being, language loss and attempts to revive and revitalize Aboriginal languages that have become endangered precisely because of assimilationist policies. A host of other challenges can be tied to the policies of the past and the harm inflicted. Anthropology is a holistic discipline, seeing how any aspect of culture and social life is tied to every other aspect of culture, and as such recognizes that the effects of residential schools invariably permeated the lives of survivors and their communities.

In order for communities to heal, it is necessary, as the Commission notes, to fundamentally change the foundation of Canada’s relationship with Aboriginal peoples. CASCA thus endorses the goal set out by the Commission:

Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share (Honouring the Truth, page 7).

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to take action and to act upon the recommendations. For this reason, CASCA encourages all political parties and governments—municipal, provincial and federal—to incorporate the Truth & Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations into their platforms and policies, and thus to use a better understanding of the past to guide future actions. Likewise, we do encourage all Canadian public institutions to promote education about Canada’s Indian Residential School system so all Canadians can better understand our past, and with this knowledge to foster true dialogue on Aboriginal issues in a respectful manner that ensures the fostering of a decolonized state. It is essential that the perspectives of Indian Residential school survivors and communities be integrated into a local, provincial and national dialogue to promote both awareness and justice and thus move us towards the goals of the TRC Final Report.

For all these reasons, we encourage all Canadians to be active and critically aware citizens. As the report states in its concluding remarks: “Reconciliation is going to take hard work. People of all walks of life and at all levels of society will need to be willingly engaged” (Honouring the Truth, page 364).

The report summary is available online ([http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec\\_Summary\\_2015\\_05\\_31\\_web\\_o.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf)) and a petition is now being circulated in support for the Final Report ([http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/498/604/856/?taf\\_id=13896970&cid=fb\\_na](http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/498/604/856/?taf_id=13896970&cid=fb_na)).

We encourage an informed populace and hope that the report recommendations will not languish unheeded. For this reason, CASCA encourages all Canadians to read the report and armed with a broader knowledge of the past, to become engaged citizens.

Respectfully,



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President  
Canadian Anthropology Society