



A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015. 274 pages. \$19.95 paper; \$70 electronic.

A Knock on the Door is an abridged version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's six-volume final report, which addressed Canada's notorious, century-long policy of forcing indigenous children to attend residential schools (the main title, *A Knock on the Door*, refers to the arrival of police or "Indian agents" taking children away to residential schools). The design, operation, and impacts of residential schooling have already been charted by historians of both the academic and community variety, including books by John Milloy and Isabelle Knockwood, but the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) unparalleled document access and community outreach add authority, detail, texture, and wisdom to the record. The TRC was mandated by the Indian Residential Schools Agreement of 2006, an out-of-court settlement of several class actions that threatened the schools' joint administrators—the Canadian state and the country's largest Christian churches—with massive financial penalties in civil damages. The TRC's court-supervised mandate required the federal government and churches to hand over any and all relevant documents in their possession. The report rests on the TRC's own primary research and more than 6,570 survivor statements the TRC collected over seven years.

The 2008 official apology from Canada's then-Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, acknowledged the bare facts about residential schools: they were a deliberate assault on indigenous languages, cultures, and families; they were mass sites of physical and sexual abuse; and their long-term effects on individual survivors and their families continue to be sources of severe intergenerational harm in indigenous communities. But the TRC's main findings make clear that there is much more to know about residential schools. The schools were run by Canada's main Christian denominations in a public-private partnership that, rather than considerations of education or welfare, was driven primarily by cost concerns. For example, per capita expenditures on students were never better than one-third of the comparable amount spent on non-Native children in similar institutions (35). Students were fed meager portions of inferior quality food (6) while spending unconscionable hours working at menial labor to sustain the institutions in which they were effectively trapped (56). The schools were "badly constructed, poorly maintained, overcrowded, unsanitary fire traps" (16).

The effects of Canada's disregard for the well-being of indigenous children were plain to see during the life of the schools. Fifty-three schools were destroyed by fire, resulting in forty student deaths. Criticized by early-twentieth-century health officials as "incubators of disease," residential schools had tuberculosis death rates in the area of

25 percent; as recently as the early 1960s, student death rates were twice the average for school-age Canadians (78–79, 74). This systemic indignity extended to death itself. Citing costs, officials consistently refused to return deceased students' bodies for burial at home. These children were instead consigned to unmarked graves, which typically were left abandoned when a school closed (85–86).

A Knock on the Door gives us a sense of the magnitude of the abuse and of Canada's historic failure to address it. In a stunning gap between incidence and sanction, under the Independent Assessment Process provided by the Settlement Agreement 37,951 formal claims of abuse were made by survivors who lived to see the new millennium—a full 48 percent of the total number of registered living residential school survivors. Yet as of January 2015, a duration of more than a century, Canada had convicted only forty individuals for acts of physical or sexual abuse committed at a residential school (92–93). As the TRC reports, school personnel “placed their own interests ahead of the children in their care”; rather than reporting abuse, administrators and staff more often “covered up that victimization. It was cowardly behaviour” (91).

The administrative orientation of the schools can only be described as totalitarian. Students were assigned and referred to by number (13). Siblings were punished harshly for the mere act of conversing. The obsession with disconnection and reshaping even extended beyond the schools; for example, officials waged campaigns against indigenous community leaders whom they deemed to be insufficiently pliant, and variously schemed to both prevent and arrange marriages between graduates (6–7). The system barely paid lip service to its educational mandate. Staffed by underpaid teachers who were selected primarily for their piety and whose curriculum emphasized Euro-Christian superiority, the schools presided over woeful outcomes (47, 52). Graduates emerged stripped of their language and culture but still lacking adequate knowledge and skills as defined by the settler society (47, 63). In short, the whole thrust of residential schooling was deracination and belittlement. Institutions premised on an ethos of disrespect fostered still more overt forms of abuse. The report details instances of punishment including head-shaving (89), the forced eating of vomit (70), and beatings with such instruments as seven-thonged straps, riding whips, and hockey sticks (88, 90). Sexual abuse was also rampant, as survivors had been insisting since at least the late 1980s.

Often drawing on correspondence from Canadian archives, the report shows more generally that administrators and policymakers knew of but left unaddressed a host of other deficiencies, injuries, and evils. For example, Canadian and church officials were aware of the routine resort to discipline well in excess of any known norms or standards (87); inadequate funding (35); poor education outcomes (47); untrained staff (72); water, air, and sanitation problems (77); and inadequate diets, persistent health problems, and high death rates (83–84; 101).

Attempting to convey some of the human impact of residential schooling, *A Knock on the Door* turns from the words of officialdom to those of survivors. Drawing on former students' statements, which were made either privately to the commission or at its public events, we read of children who were “isolated and bereft of home teaching and protection” (98); in “constant fear” (14); suffering “disrupted families”

(127); enduring “self-destructive behaviors” (95); feeling the “burden of shame and anger” (129); and facing intergenerational cycles of dysfunction and abuse (130). The report also notes the different legacy of the tenacious survivors, whose thirst for justice enabled them to breach Canada’s wall of denial, fight for the Settlement Agreement, and create the TRC. The TRC report is their victory and tribute (8).

The report’s interpretive shift is perhaps its central contribution. In the early 1990s Canada responded to the first wave of abuse litigation by developing an emerging narrative that depicted residential schools as well-intentioned educational institutions that turned out to have harbored some rogue abusers. The activism of survivors then forced Canada to make deeper admissions. The 2008 apology reframed residential schools as products of a misguided policy that, driven by ideas of Euro-Christian superiority, sundered families, attempted to stamp out indigenous languages and cultures, and caused grave intergenerational harm. Drawing on contemporary scholarship in settler-colonial studies, Canadian and church archives, and its own interpretation of the record, the TRC report goes beyond the narrative proffered in the apology to provide what we can call the eliminationist interpretation of residential schooling. In its words, the residential schools were part of a policy of cultural genocide, which aimed to “eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties” and, by so doing, to “cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada” (3, 5). By forcibly separating generations of children from their families, languages, and cultures, the residential schools policy aimed to weaken the capacity of indigenous nations to resist colonialism and exercise their basic human right to self-determination.

Although debate is surely legitimate about TRC’s choice to use the qualifying adjective “cultural,” the phrase “cultural genocide” is nonetheless effective in placing Canada in the context of the more well-known twentieth-century cases. All were destructive attempts to neutralize distinct populations that posed obstacles to official campaigns of territorial consolidation and racist self-aggrandizement. In the words of the commission, “The Canadian federal 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” (5). To buttress this interpretation the report quotes notable Canadian officials who were responsible for the residential schools policy, including Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada’s first prime minister, and throughout its pages traces how the residential schools were designed and operated to further different incarnations of the overall eliminationist agenda.

“Reconciliation” has become the global keyword for reckoning with gross injustice, and Canada is certainly no exception. Although during its life the TRC treated reconciliation in the primarily affective and hortatory terms of testimony, acknowledgment, and forgiveness, the final report gives the concept a much more substantive meaning. Reconciliation in the wake of colonial dispossession and cultural genocide demands that “we restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned” (6). Accordingly, *A Knock at the Door* concludes with ninety-four “Calls to Action” that aim to put this more substantive meaning of reconciliation into effect. The Calls to Action address matters of social policy, education, crime and

justice, language rights, commemoration, governance relationships, and land rights. It insists that the overriding framework for reconciliation must be the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

How should we evaluate *A Knock on the Door*? We know that the TRC report was produced under very adverse conditions. For example, despite their clear legal obligation to do so under the Settlement Agreement, the federal government and churches consistently refused to provide the commission with timely and appropriate access to relevant documents. Although in 2013 and 2014 the TRC fought and won two court cases over these matters, the ensuing delays came with a significant price. Readers of this report will know where to assign blame for any shortcomings they may detect: Aimée Craft, director of research at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, reports in her afterword that “while the TRC was completing its final report, documents were still being disclosed by parties that had agreed to provide them” (190).

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An Oneida Indian in Foreign Waters: The Life of Chief Chapman Scanandoah, 1870–1953. By Laurence Hauptman. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2016. 232 pages. \$55.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper and electronic.

In *An Oneida Indian in Foreign Waters*, Lawrence Hauptman provides a vivid portrayal of Oneida Chief Chapman Scanandoah, whose life spanned some pivotal moments in Oneida history in addition to contemporary issues for Native peoples in the United States. This volume continues Hauptman’s impressive record of examining Iroquois history and its consequences for the Haudensaunee today. His work elsewhere and particularly in this study demonstrates two of Hauptman’s signature qualities: his meticulous research and attention to detail and his respect and admiration for the people whose history he has devoted his professional life to uncovering. This book, however, marks a departure from most of Hauptman’s other work in its primary narrative focus on one individual. But as a historian, Hauptman well contextualizes Scanandoah’s life and experiences in the situation of the Oneida community as well as the national and international currents of the day.

Chapman Scanandoah was born in 1879 in the Oneida community at Windfall in central New York State, land that the Oneidas had never relinquished despite pressures from state officials and private land speculators. His mother, Mary, was an influential leader of the Oneidas within the matrilineal system of tribal authority and a stalwart protector of traditional Oneida values who was especially concerned with defending rights to ancestral land. In his adult years Scanandoah continued in his mother’s footsteps, lending his voice, courage, and expertise in court cases and in 1922, in a ruling handed down by the United States federal Court of Appeals, was eventually awarded the return of thirty-two acres of land that his family had long possessed before New York State had unilaterally extended its jurisdiction. Although the acreage