

Learning about the Residential School Era

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During the residential school era, the government and churches did not recognize the positive elements of Indigenous family and community life. Rather, they viewed Indigenous peoples as different from, and in turn less than, Europeans and their culture and religion. They believed that this "difference" needed to be fixed and that Indigenous people needed to be more like European society. This process is referred to as assimilation and is not only harmful but is also violent in nature. Generations of Indigenous children were taken from their homes and communities to attend schools that were sometimes hundreds of kilometers from where they lived. It became illegal for Indigenous parents to keep their children at home if they were school age. Some students were taken at even earlier ages and some did not return to their communities until the age of 18, if at all. As a result, many lost connections to their home communities and did not grow up learning from their parents, grandparents, or community Elders or Knowledge Keepers. Instead, they were raised by nuns and priests and were purposely removed from their rich and vibrant communities and lives.

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In addition, generations of Canadians also were only taught about the negative parts of Indigenous life and community which perpetuated incorrect and harmful stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have many beautiful stories that include laughter, love, resilience, resistance, and joy. Indigenous peoples today live in many different communities in and outside of their homelands and many continue to practice their languages, cultures, and traditions despite the attempts made by the government and churches against them. It is important to learn about these stories alongside Indigenous experiences of oppression, racism, and trauma within Canada. As Justice Murray Sinclair, former Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission stated, "education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of this mess."

Source: <http://nccie.ca/reconciliation-and-nccie/>