

"Killing the Indian in the Child"



State and the Church ran a school system dedicated to eradicating the country's native cultures.

By Guillermo Alvarado

I offer my apologies for the harshness of the title of this commentary, but that phrase, "Kill the Indian in the Child," clearly describes one of the most brutal ethnocides perpetrated in the history of our continent, of which little by little more details are becoming known.

It was under the cover of this idea that a policy of "assimilation" was applied in Canada for more than a century, which consisted of erasing by ignoble methods the fundamental traits of indigenous culture, language, history, customs, spirituality and community life in hundreds of thousands of children.

State officials, politicians, congregations of the Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent the Methodist Church, participated in this system, and would have made Adolf Hitler and the followers of the "final solution" against Jews, Gypsies and other peoples considered inferior, pale with envy.

The infants were taken from their communities - by law since 1920, parental consent was not required - and taken to the Indian Residential Schools, where upon arrival they lost everything, including their name, which was replaced by a number.

Using their native language, recognizing each other or showing any form of ancestral culture carried harsh punishments.

The misnamed schools were centers of massive mistreatment, sexual and labor abuses, psychological and physical pressures amounting to torture, and thousands of children died and were buried clandestinely.

Between 1890 and 1997, some 130 "residences" of this type operated in Canada and between 150,000 and 200,000 children were confined in them, and although there was talk of what happened in them, it was not until the discovery of the first graves that the scandal shook Canadian society.

A few days ago, the remains of 93 more unidentified graves, located in a Catholic mission in British Columbia, reopened the wounds of this shameful episode for Canada.

Although the current and former prime ministers, Justin Trudeau and Stephen Harper, respectively, apologized and some bishops, not all, regretted the events, there is still no official pronouncement from the Vatican for linking the Catholic Church to such crimes.

Tribal chief Willie Sellars denounced that religious authorities, the federal government and the Canadian Mounted Police misled the public opinion about what was happening in the boarding schools and, he said, there were even officials who destroyed documentation on the matter.

Many of the survivors will never get over the damage they suffered and their broken lives will point to a society that must assume this pain as part of its collective history, there is no other alternative.

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