

The Indian Act 1876

"Canada, you have committed cultural genocide" - Justice Murray Sinclair.

The Indian Act of 1876 was a legal document created by the Canadian Government that instigated mass cultural genocide and human rights violations which have impacted many generations of Indigenous People. One outcome of the Indian Act was the establishment of Residential 'Schools' by the Canadian Government working with missionaries from Catholic, Anglican and United Churches. Approximately 150,000 Indigenous children between 7 and 16 years of age were forced to attend these Residential 'Schools' and thousands died due to disease, neglect and suicide. The children were prevented from speaking their languages, segregated by gender, subject to sexual, physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual abuse and forced to convert to Christianity. Thousands of unmarked graves have been discovered in the last year, confirming what the Indigenous People knew all along about the Residential 'Schools' and the horrors that they facilitated. Another outcome of the Indian Act was that Indigenous Peoples were forced to live on Reserves, where Indian Agents controlled their food, sales, and movement. Food rations were often denied, forcing many Indigenous women to trade their bodies in exchange for food for their families. The Indian Act also outlawed all gatherings and ceremonies which resulted in a loss of culture. The Indigenous People were further handcuffed by the Act because it prevented Indigenous People from hiring lawyers to make claims against the Government. All of the gruesome experiences resulting from the Indian Act have led to Indigenous Peoples experiencing trauma which has had intergenerational impacts that continue to this day. It is clear that the Indian Act instigated unimaginable horrors that should never have occurred and has left deep scars on Canada's history and national identity. Through Truth and Reconciliation we can hope to look towards a future where Indigenous Culture is restored, celebrated and included in the concept of Canadian nationalism.