

The effects the residential school system had on the culture of the Aboriginals

The residential school system was implemented by the Canadian government in order to assimilate Indigenous children. In Canada, residential schools had been operated by the government for about a century, and the system left many negative effects on First Nations' culture as a result. Aboriginal people lost their traditions and languages, and also have been suffering intergenerational traumas which lead them to mental disorders or alcohol addiction. The current Canadian society should learn from the tragedy to retrieve First Nations' lost culture and restore their honour.

In residential schools, Indigenous children were detached from their own families and placed under Catholic influence. The purpose was to remove the children from their own culture and assimilation into whiteness because Indigenous cultures were seen as savage and inferior to European culture that white people brought into the North American continent. Even though the last Indian school closed in 1996, people who do not know about the school system can learn from books. One of the Indigenous authors was Richard Wagamese and he precisely described the situation in a residential school and how the system influenced First Nations people over generations in one of his books. In his novel "Indian Horse", Wagamese (2012) showed how the protagonist's parents were brainwashed in a residential school and lost their tradition. In his novel, when the protagonist's sibling passed away, his mother insisted on conducting the funeral in a Catholic way, not in a traditional Ojibwe way that their ancestors had done for a long time. This example shows how the school system invaded and damaged Indigenous tradition.

The school system also destroyed First Nations people in their languages. In residential schools, speaking in Indigenous languages was banned and the children were punished if they did so. Most of the children in the schools were forcibly taken apart from their family when they

were little and before they fully learnt their own languages. Also, the punishment instilled fear and trauma in the students to speak their own language. Even if they could return to their family or community, they were not able to communicate with their people in their own language. This did not only result in forfeit of Indigenous languages; the children isolated themselves from their own people feeling identity loss.

Because of the traumas and distress from the experience in the residential school, as well as social isolation in their Aboriginal community, residential school survivors often have problems with their mental health such as PTSD and depression or suffer from alcohol abuse. Without being able to develop who they truly are, people often feel loss and are disrupted into an identity crisis. This issue is not only for a generation who attended the residential schools, also younger Indigenous people are affected negatively. Because attendees at residential schools were poorly treated, fed and educated, the survivors would treat their own children in the same way. In addition, offspring of the residential school survivors also oftentimes struggle with forming their identity in Indigenous society.

It is obvious that the residential school system had negative impacts on First Nations people in Canada and it was not just a past incident; Indigenous people and their communities are still facing issues caused by the system. Furthermore, it is not only an issue of Indigenous society. People in this entire nation should learn from history, educate themselves, and think about how they can help to solve it.