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## **Compulsory Attendance of Residential Schools in 1920**

Imagine being forced from your home at the young age of seven years old. Away from your parents, your culture, and your old self. Imagine being brought, against your will, to a place where you are harassed for who you are and for what you believe in. This was a reality for over 150,000 Inuit, Metis, and First Nations children when they were taken to Indian Residential Schools. A day of half labour and half school was ordinary, but many of these institutions also had harsh conditions that were hidden from the public eye. These schools were seen as a tool to assimilate First Nations children into Canadian Society as the government thought they were not “civil”, or what was thought of as “Canadian.” The compulsory attendance of Residential Schools in the 1920’s stripped Aboriginal children of their culture and language. This effectively led to the tremors of intergenerational trauma Canada is still reconciling a hundred years later, revealing the significance of this devastating event.

Although students study Residential Schools today, many don’t know the specifics of why they were established. After the Indian Act was put in place in 1876, the first schools were opened, bringing thousands of attendees from across the country. “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone..... Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question.” This was a

remark made by Duncan Campbell Scott, “the architect of Indian policies.” To achieve this goal of assimilating First Nations into Canadian Society, children were forcibly removed from their culture and sent to these harsh, boarding-type schools. Their time was divided between academic learning, religious prayer, and labour, a constant among all 130 Schools opened in Canada between 1831 and 1996.

Residential schools were extremely abusive organizations, and the events associated with them have left deep scars of Intergenerational Trauma on the whole of Canadian society. The events that occurred at these schools are seen as verbal, physical, mental, and sexual abuse that have created negative consequences in First Nations communities to this day. Electrical shock, racist language, and use of toxic chemicals on skin, are just a few examples of punishment at school. Although some teachers tried to be parent-like, the harsh setting defeated even the best of intentions, and eventually the trauma of this experience turned into something much bigger. Intergenerational Trauma occurs when there has been a history of stress related trauma experienced by a specific generation. These feelings of anxiety and depression get passed on through generations of children and grandchildren, resulting in family violence, suicidal and homicidal thoughts and addiction. Many survivors of Indian Residential School and their families suffer from Intergenerational Trauma and it's effects, causing further erosion of First Nations Communities and their culture.

It took over ten years after the last residential school closed it's doors for the Canadian government to start apologizing and giving back to the Indigenous people

who suffered. In 2006, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was established, creating funding, truth and reconciliation, healing, and health services for thousands of First Nations Peoples across the country. This agreement has given communities the chance to regain the culture and tradition that was taken away from them a hundred years ago. As a country, Canadians are still working toward a stronger future for the Aboriginal population and making big strides to a better future. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper of the Conservative party, apologized on behalf of Canada for failing to protect the impacted children, showing the significance of the sad event years later. “Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools. The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history.....The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly”, Stephen Harper, 2008.

The significance of Residential Schools and their effects resonate throughout Canadian History. In what was supposed to be “The Roaring 20’s for all”, Aboriginal children were taken away to Residential Schools, where their language and culture was ripped away from them. Intergenerational Trauma, addiction, and depression, are a few outcomes, groups of Aboriginal People are still struggling with today, but we are making progress in reconciling and giving back to those who suffered. The fact that we, as a country, still learn about Residential Schools in class and within our communities is enough to show the extreme significance of this sad event that occurred. Imagine, being victimized by a system made to convert you into something

you aren't. Imagine, having everything you know and love ripped away from you, changing your life forever. It is important that we continue to reconcile as well as discuss and learn about Residential Schools as it has showed our country, and the world that systems such as this one are more damaging than beneficial.

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