

To begin, I would like to comment how well this article was written in comparison to many others I've read on the topic. Having worked for 5 years in the Indian Residential Schools Resolution section of Department of Justice, even I found myself surprised by the depth of research and description the author found and how well the issue was outlined.

This article makes a striking distinction between BC First Nations and those of First Nations people from other provinces with regards to their attitudes towards education. At the time that BC joined confederation, BC First Nations were positioned positively – they had a lack of poverty and European dependency. Students were already attending schools with white pupils without much protest when racist policies derailed things.

The IRS and Day schools were a step-back for all the students attending them. Disregarding any abuses that took place there, students still ended up working long hours doing chores or labor and spending many hours in religious study. Though this schooling cost the First Nations people nothing monetarily, it could be argued that the money paid by government to the churches was not for education at all. The church was paid to indoctrinate the First Nations children into the Christian (European) way of life – a goal the church had anyways.

Religious teaching and farming or chores cut drastically into the hours available for First Nations to learn the same material covered by non-First Nations students in White schools. Students quickly fell behind. Many were intentionally failed, and those that excelled found the schools limited them to achieving grade 8 educations at the most.

There is an argument in the article that the schools claimed they were underfunded. For what they offered, and based on my own personal experience, I consider that to be a false statement. There is an account of nuns eating elaborate dishes while the First Nations students eat what could be compared to gruel. I would therefore challenge the author on this fact.

Another statement in the article refers to a lack of money for good teacher's salaries resulting for long-term under-funding and financial decline. This I find confusing, as most of the teachers were brothers of the church, and the church would pay their salaries regardless of what the government paid them. I will admit to some underfunding compared to 'White' schools. But in addition, a posting in a British Columbia or rural Canada IRS was considered to be the worst posting imaginable and I find it hard to believe that many good teachers would take such a position – document I've seen show that some teachers worked in IRS's specifically because they had blemished records and had nowhere else to work. Church documents available to public record clearly show that young priests and priests with bad reputations or disciplinary issues were assigned to these postings on purpose, to both protect the church from their actions and as a test. Reassignment from one school to another was common when a priest was

found abusing students. Finally, I would point out that just because one was a priest, this did not make them a good teacher. Priests join to focus on religion, not teaching.

Resistance to the schools was not organized, uniform, or done by a group with any sort of political clout. Escape attempts by students were treated as truancy and were against the law. Families were fractured apart, and the family relationship was the core of the First Nations society. The law forbade natives from entering regular public schools. Once the law finally permitted this, integration in schools began, yet social segregation continued. Even today, First Nations have yet to catch up to other groups. They have been schooled for inequality.

This article does a good job at highlighting the problems with residential schools. The thesis, that current issues facing First Nations people result from the subjugation of First Nation's culture that these schools caused, is well supported, even if a few details were not totally correct. Information on this topic has been suppressed by both the churches and the government, one of the large issues this subject has to deal with. Even now, evidence of abuses can amount to here say or personal accounts by people with displaced or fragile memories. This subject deserves as much study as possible before it is too late.