

## **Cultural genocide in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States: The destruction and transformation of Indigenous cultures.**

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*This article examines the nature of cultural genocide and recent efforts to stem its ongoing effects in the only four countries that voted against the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It gives a brief chronicle of the destruction and transformation of Indigenous cultures through a history of assimilationist schooling in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States from the nineteenth century to the present day, examining what aspects can be considered cultural genocide and what can be considered voluntary cultural change. It then examines current efforts to reverse assimilation and revitalize Indigenous cultures through immersion language programs and concludes with samples of the current rhetoric on the treatment of Indigenous peoples characterized by the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the recent apologies by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Canada.*

Polish scholar and attorney Raphaël Lemkin coined the word genocide in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* and defined it as,

*a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.... The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups....*

*Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. (Lemkin 1944 79)*

This definition includes ethnocide or cultural genocide, the destruction of a people's culture (see Nersessian 2005).

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This article focuses on the impact of cultural genocide on the Indigenous populations of four former English colonies--Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States of America (USA)--and current efforts to heal the wounds caused by this genocidal activity. Cultural genocide is much more widespread and ongoing than the murder of ethnic minorities, and in the four countries under discussion government policies promoted English-only schooling and conversion to Christianity, making schools instruments of cultural genocide. If indigenous students resisted, they were further marginalized and if they attempted assimilation they often found that their skin color still excluded them from full citizenship.

Some people think that democracies are immune to genocide, but through the “tyranny of the majority” laws can be passed that suppress minority languages and cultures as do the various “English-only” and “Official English” laws in effect in some states in the USA today (e.g. Crawford 2000). Lemkin in his original discussion of genocide included the “prohibition of the use of their own language by the population of an occupied country” (Lemkin 1944, ix). The 1868 Report of the U.S. Indian Peace Commission stated, “Schools should be established, which [American Indian] children should be required to attend; their barbarous dialect should be blotted out and the English language substituted.” Besides suppressing indigenous languages, colonial governments suppressed Indigenous cultural practices, including Potlaches, Sun Dances, and other religious activities.

Since the End of World War II and Lemkin’s defining of the crime of genocide the United Nations (UN) has issued a series of declarations promoting human rights, condemning various forms of genocide, and affirming the rights of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples to self-governance. The most recent of these declarations is the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which only Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the USA voted against. Since then Australia and New Zealand have reversed their positions and Canada and the USA are currently reassessing their positions. These four English dominant countries have a history of English-only assimilationist education dating to the nineteenth century and before.<sup>3</sup> Unlike most colonized countries in Africa and Asia where the colonized populations have largely taken back control from the colonizers, the settler population in these four democracies rapidly “out-populated” the Indigenous peoples so that when the colonized groups finally got to vote in the twentieth century, they could be outvoted in any but very local elections in what attorney Lani Guinier has called the “tyranny of the majority” (Guinier 1994).

European immigrants, with more efficient agricultural practices that could support larger populations tended to displace Indigenous populations. Such displacement is not new. Herders of cattle and other animals tend to displace Indigenous hunter-gatherers because herding can allow for denser populations, and farmers displace herders because farming can support even larger populations if the land is arable. That larger population, constantly added to by immigration from Europe in the case of the four countries under discussion here, usually overran the Indigenous populations, killing or pushing them aside. Besides the experiences by Indigenous peoples in Asia and Africa, the continued existence of the New Mexico Pueblos, shows that it was harder to displace settled Indigenous farming populations.

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<sup>3</sup> For information on the situation in Australia see the lengthy government report *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Wilson & Dodson 1997), for Canada see Milloy 1999; for New Zealand Judith Simon and Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s 2001 edited volume; and for the USA see Adams 1995. For the special case of Hawai‘i see Benham and Heck 1998).

Added to the population pressures of immigrants to Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas was the depopulation that occurred because of virgin ground epidemics killing many Indigenous people.<sup>4</sup>

However, to describe the settler population as merely greedy power hungry rulers interested in overrunning Indigenous peoples is to ignore that many were Emma Lazarus's "huddled masses" and "wretched refuse" displaced from Europe, like the Indigenous people of Ireland escaping the potato famine that was exacerbated by the policies of their English colonial rulers. Trying to survive themselves, they helped threatened the survival of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Cultural change for Indigenous peoples, but not cultural genocide, was a given considering the many attractive things that European technology had to offer Indigenous peoples. Some cultural changes are voluntary; Indigenous people when they got a chance tended to quickly adopt guns, metal utensils, and horses that made hunting and other aspects of their lives easier. Today, it is electricity, running water, and automobiles that make life easier and presuppose living in a modern cash economy. These cultural adoptions could change Indigenous life radically as was the case with Plains Indians in the Americas adopting the horse to make hunting buffalo easier. Militarily defeated tribes sometimes voluntarily adopted Christianity, because its god appeared to be stronger than theirs, as shown by their prayers for victory not being answered. Sequoyah, a Cherokee, invented a syllabary to allow Cherokee to be a written language because of the advantages he saw that literacy gave the colonists.

To fully take advantage of all the labor saving technology brought by the colonists, some education was indispensable. Education is offered to Indigenous peoples by nation states in the name of progress and "civilization" and can be welcomed. As Gay J. McDougall noted in 2009,

*As the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, over the past three years I have travelled to countries in practically every region of the world. I have talked extensively to people who belong to disadvantaged minorities on every continent. When I ask them to tell me their greatest problem, their most deeply felt concern, the answer is always the same. They are concerned that their children are not getting a quality education because they are minorities. They see educating their children as the only way out of their poverty; their under-dog status, their isolation. (McDougall 2009, 7).*

Such education allows Indigenous children to survive in the modern world and brings about cultural change of necessity. Warnings about the loss of Indigenous cultures, often focused on language loss, are increasing exponentially as the globalization breaks down the isolation that in the past protected Indigenous populations. The National Geographic Society's Enduring Voices Project notes,

*Every 14 days a language dies. By 2100, more than half of the more than 7,000 languages spoken on Earth--many of them not yet recorded--may disappear, taking with them a wealth of knowledge about history,*

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<sup>4</sup> The Indigenous populations did not have centuries to build up immunity to small pox, measles, and other European diseases as had the colonists, leading to high death rates from these diseases. In addition, the forced removal to boarding schools, reservations, and reserves and other physical and cultural shocks, such as changes in climate and diet, that colonization brought to Indigenous peoples weakened their resistance to disease.

*culture, the natural environment, and the human brain.* (National Geographic Society 2009)<sup>5</sup>

Automobiles, airplanes, radio, television, and now the Internet, all things Indigenous people can embrace voluntarily, are rapidly breaking down the protective isolation that, even in the Amazon basin and the far north, allowed many Indigenous cultures to survive into the twentieth century. However globalization has also allowed Indigenous peoples across the planet to learn from each other's experiences and to lobby for support from the UN and other supranational bodies, which they often do not get locally because they often represent only a small minority of their country's population.

With cultural change inevitable for all people, when does that change become cultural genocide? A key question is whether the change is forced, especially in schools. What say do students' families and communities have in determining the kind of education their children receive? Especially important today is whether a national language and culture is taught as a replacement for or an addition to students' Indigenous language and culture. In the words of the USA's National Association for Bilingual Education and similar organizations, is it an "English Plus" or an "English Only" schooling that is being offered?

Too often, schooling is a matter of cultural genocide because it is presented as, and often accepted as by students and their families, an either/or proposition as indicated in the title of Karen Stocker's 2005 book *I Won't Stay Indian, I'll Keep Studying*. Stocker examined in Costa Rica a problem shared by Indigenous peoples worldwide that "the label *Indian* had connotations of backwardness and even inferior intellect.... Being Indian automatically set students up for being treated as inferior" and that "for most students from the [Indian] reservation, projecting an Indian identity seemed incompatible with school success" (Stocker 2005, 2). With this explanation one could argue it is a matter of cultural suicide rather than cultural genocide, but this is because colonial schooling tends to present a false dichotomy that one must choose the modern world and some "world language," often English, or remain "savage" or at least "backward" second-class citizens.

However, cultural change through schooling was much more than just "assisted suicide" for Indigenous peoples. The ethnocentric attitude of the colonizers was, while not universal, near universal. While there were a few isolated culturally sensitive recognition of strengths in Indian cultures<sup>6</sup> there was the pervasive contrasting of "civilization" with Indigenous "savagery." As teacher and Indian agent Albert H. Kneale noted, the U.S. government's Indian Bureau "went on the assumption that any Indian custom was, *per se*, objectionable, whereas the customs of whites were the ways of civilization" (Kneale 1950, 4). In the late nineteenth century Darwin's theory of biological evolution was corrupted into a theory of "Social Darwinism" that posited that societies evolved similarly to living things with the ethnocentric

<sup>5</sup> See also Crystal 2000, Dalby 2002 and Sutherland 2003.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g., the writings of explorer and first director of the US Bureau of Ethnology, John Wesley Powell who noted over a century ago, "so few Americans yet realize that of all the people on this continent, including even ourselves, the most profoundly religious, if by religion is meant fidelity to teachings and observations that are regard as sacred, are the American Indians, especially wherever still unchanged from their early condition, and this deeply religious feeling of theirs might, if properly appreciated, be made use of, not weakened or destroyed by premature opposition" in "The need of studying the Indian in order to teach him," (Powell 1896, 112-113).

addition that “white” western/European societies were at the top of this evolutionary heap with Indigenous peoples doomed to extinction through “natural selection.”

Historically the dominant theme in colonial education for Indigenous populations has been to blame the victim for their inability as a group to prosper given the schooling they were offered. Originally this blame was often based on racist ideas of non-White genetic inferiority. More recently it has been based on the idea of cultural deficit where Indigenous cultures do not promote the type of behavior needed for success in the modern individualist world. The latter idea promotes culturally genocidal educational efforts that see assimilation into the dominant culture as the solution to the economic and social challenges faced by Indigenous peoples. Recent examples of this are state-level “Official English” and “English Only” laws passed in the USA that in some states, namely California, Arizona, and Massachusetts, discourage or even ban bilingual education in public schools (Reyhner 2001, 22-25). Thus in the last decade, at least in the USA, there has been a step backwards from the efforts after World War II by the Civil Rights Movement and the UN that shifted the blame from the victim to the oppressor.

The open discussion of the cause of Indigenous students academic difficulties is hampered by what political conservatives call a fit of “political correctness” that stifles free discussion to the point where “only males can be described as sexist and only whites can be described as racist.” (Felson 1991) Māori author Alan Duff noted in 1993, “Racism, where many Māori are concerned, cannot possibly cut both ways. And the reason for this is the classic noble oppressed concept that the ‘victim is never very wrong’” (Duff 1993, 80). Duff found that white people are fed “a message of one-sided guilt, one-sided culpability, a message that was hammered and hammered from every angle, everywhere you went” (Duff 1993, x). From one extreme of “blame the victim,” Duff argued the Māori had gone to the other extreme of blame the “Pākehā” (non-Māoris). He and others like him point out the failures of their Indigenous cultures, and tend to be labeled cultural traitors who are selling out to the beliefs of the oppressor. Caveats such as, “Admirable though many aspects of Māori culture are, equally there are aspects which are not” are seen as inadequate (Duff 1993, 47). Some of the negative aspects Duff found in traditional Māori culture were its historical class structure with hereditary chiefs and second-class status for women. He criticized contemporary Māori culture for its lack of a work ethic and poor health habits, including smoking and drinking. His antidote for Māori social problems is education and self-help, which mirror individualistic Eurocentric cultural teachings and the Horatio Algers<sup>7</sup> “rags to riches” myth.

The central problem of blaming the “oppressor” is that you, as a member of a dominated minority, often cannot do much to change things because you are saying they are out of your control and in the hands of the white power structure. As Duff writes, “the great majority of Māori...do not accept for a moment that the bulk of their woes, if any, have a cause, let alone a solution in themselves.” (Duff 1993, 26) Duff criticizes the contemporary Māori lifestyle, but assimilating into the modern world too often means picking up a hedonistic and materialistic life style leading to obesity, diabetes, and other negative effects. However, Duff does not seem to be calling for “cultural suicide,” but angry responses

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<sup>7</sup> Horatio Algers (1832-1899) was a prolific American novelist who wrote about poor boys who only needed to work hard (and have good luck) to become successful.

to his book seem to make that claim. Duff notes, “New Zealand white people do have a lot to answer for on most of the matters aggrieving Māori. But equally Māori have a lot to answer to themselves on what afflicts them right now” (Duff 1993, 60). This seeming middle ground exposes the writer to criticism from both extremes.

Andre Eruera Vercoe, another Māori author, is one who took a violent objection to Duff’s ideas in *Educating Jake: Pathways to Empowerment*. He contrasted the Māori sense of community and values of “stewardship, trustworthiness, integrity and humility” to the Eurocentric mindset of individualism, power, and domination (Vercoe 1998, 18). Duff extols the possibilities of schooling that he thinks many Māori fail to appreciate, but Vercoe counters,

*Given the education system that we’ve been lumped with, I can honestly say that unless Māori have a greater input into how structural mechanisms are organized, it may be a waste of time sending their children to school. If anything, general “the school” remains the ideological and cultural enemy of the Māori. Ever since Samuel Marsden encouraged the Church Missionary Society to set up shop here, ideological suppression of tikanga Māori – no, of being Māori – has encapsulated the hidden agenda of provincial power, typically made up the from the white, male middle class (note, not Pākehā in general). (Vercoe 1998, 24)*

Vercoe writes, “we need the healer’s balm and, like all good medicine, it’s going to taste a little foul. For Māori, education needs to go back to the marae, to the home, back to where the generation are hewn and moulded into shape” (Vercoe 1998, 33-34).

Radical educational theorists following the lead of Ivan Illich (1971) have recommended that Indigenous people reject schooling because it destroys their cultures and communities (e.g. Prakash & Esteva 1998). But others see education, especially through community-controlled schools, as the only way that Indigenous people can learn how to protect their lands and communities in the courts and elsewhere from the onslaught of mainstream society (Enos 2002).<sup>8</sup> Supporters of Indigenous self-determination see Indigenous controlled schools as protecting Indigenous students from culturally insensitive textbooks, curriculums, and tests and promoting place- and community- and culture-based teaching methods and curricula that value Indigenous knowledge (e.g. Deloria & Wildcat 2001; May 1999).

Localizing education goes against the tide of modern one-size-fits-all mass production. As education became more democratized in the nineteenth century and schools were staffed with less educated teachers both for reasons of cost and availability, mass produced textbooks became increasingly popular as a crutch to help less knowledgeable teachers. Indigenous peoples were often absent from these textbooks or, when, included were portrayed as savages. Writer George Wharton James reported in 1908,

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of Indigenous peoples, often of mixed ancestry, who used their education to help their people include Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) in Canada (see Smith 1987) and the lives of the “cultural brokers” found in Margaret Szasz’s *Between Indian and White Worlds* (1994).

*Again and again when I have visited Indian schools the thoughtful youths and maidens have come to me with complaints about the American history they were compelled to study... “When we read in the United States history of white men fighting to defend their females, their homes, their corn-fields, their towns, and their hunting-grounds, they are always called ‘patriots,’ and the children are urged to follow the example of these brave, noble, and gallant men. But when Indians--our ancestors, even our own parents--have fought to defend us and our homes, corn-fields, and hunting-grounds they are called vindictive and merciless savages, bloody murderers, and everything else that is vile (James 1908, 25).*

In the late twentieth century more Indigenous culture, history, and languages were incorporated into schools for Indigenous students, but curriculum, especially textbook content even in many Indigenous controlled schools, still overwhelmingly reflects the dominant, non-Indigenous culture.

Extensive studies done in the USA, including the 1928 Meriam and 1969 Kennedy Reports (e.g. Reyhner and Eder 2004) describe the damage that ethnocentric and assimilationist schools can do. In 1975, Dillon Platero, the first director of the Navajo Nation’s Division of Education, described the experience of “Kee,” an all too typical Navajo student in the USA:

*Kee was sent to boarding school as a child where—as was the practice—he was punished for speaking Navajo. Since he was only allowed to return home during Christmas and summer; he lost contact with his family. Kee withdrew from both the White and Navajo worlds as he grew older because he could not comfortably communicate in either language. He became one of the many thousand Navajos who were non-lingual—a man without a language. By the time he was 16, Kee was an alcoholic, uneducated, and despondent—without identity. (Platero 1975, 58)*

More recently, Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord, the first Navajo woman surgeon, wrote in her 1999 autobiography *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear*, which called for a fusion of traditional Navajo healing and modern medicine,

*In their childhoods both my father and my grandmother had been punished for speaking Navajo in school. Navajos were told by white educators that, in order to be successful, they would have to forget their language and culture and adopt American ways. They were warned that if they taught their children to speak Navajo, the children would have a harder time learning in school, and would therefore be at a disadvantage. A racist attitude existed. Navajo children were told that their culture and lifeways were inferior, and they were made to feel they could never be as good as white people.... My*

*father suffered terribly from these events and conditions.* (Arviso Alvord and Van Pelt 1999, 86)

She concluded, “two or three generations of our tribe had been taught to feel shame about our culture, and parents had often not taught their children traditional Navajo beliefs—the very thing that would have shown them how to live, the very thing that could keep them strong” (Arviso Alvord and Van Pelt 1999, 88). As Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek) notes, “colonization teaches us to hate ourselves. We are told that we are nothing until we adopt the ways of the colonizer, till we become the colonizer” (Mankiller 2004, 62). However, despite this “selling out,” because of racial prejudice, often based on skin color, assimilation often did not end discrimination.

Despite decades of educational research, there still remains a popular belief that bilingualism is a disadvantage and that bilingual education harms children, a belief that Indigenous people can buy into. It is thought that when an additional language is introduced into a curriculum the child can become confused and that academic concepts need to be relearned in the new language, thus children should be introduced to the national language in their homes. The work of Stanford University Professor Kenji Hakuta and his colleagues (Hakuta 1986) as well as the experience at Rock Point Community School (*e.g.* Rosier & Holm 1980) and other bilingual schools provide clear evidence that a child who acquires basic literacy or numeracy concepts in their home language can transfer these concepts and knowledge easily to English. The literature is replete with examples confirming the importance of nurturing a child's mother tongue (Cenoz and Genessee 1998). In addition, the benefits of culturally responsive education that reverse the assimilationist history of colonial education are well documented (Brayboy and Castagno 2009). In the last two decades researchers have shown that students who maintain a traditional cultural orientation, including speaking their indigenous language, can be successful in school, even more successful than assimilated students (*e.g.* Deyhle 1992 and Willetto 1999).

Many UN declarations support the rights of parents. For example, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 26 that “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children,” and the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities declares in Article 1 that “States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity. Article 2 affirms that “Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities... have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.” Most recently the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has reasserted and extended these rights.

To reduce the extent of language and culture loss, parents would have to establish a strong policy to use their Indigenous language at home and provide ample opportunities for their children to expand the functions for which they use the mother tongue, including reading and writing, and the contexts in which they can use it, such as community mother tongue day care or play groups. However the very act of expanding language domains from orality to literacy leads to cultural change. Alan Duff repeatedly



emphasizes the need to emphasize literacy in the home if family members want their children to value it and be academically successful in school.<sup>9</sup>

School curriculums and teachers can also help Indigenous children build strong positive identities and retain and develop their mother cultures and tongues by communicating to them strong affirmative messages about the value of knowing additional languages and the fact that bilingualism is an important linguistic and intellectual accomplishment (Reyhner 2006, 8-9). Efforts at place-, community-, and culture-based education can overcome the ambivalent and even oppositional Indigenous attitude towards schools. As David N. Plank notes in his Foreword to Maenette K. P. Benham and Ronald H. Heck's *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawai'i: The Silencing of Native Voices*, there is a "fundamental ambivalence of subaltern peoples toward schooling" (Plank 1998). Benham and Heck in their preface write, "School learning tends to be associated with learning the culture and language of the oppressors." (Benham & Heck 1998, xi) National governments, when they do offer education to their Indigenous populations, often through the assimilationist nature of the education project an ideology of Indigenous inferiority. This way of thinking asks students to either to give up their indigenous identity and be educationally successful as the Indian student told Karen Stocker or to reject schooling and to retain their Indigenous identity (see Reyhner [in press]).

John Ogbu's research on the effects of this "fundamental ambivalence" on the educational achievement of what he termed "involuntary" ethnic minorities, which included in the USA the descendents of slaves, Mexican immigrants, and American Indians (Ogbu 1995). He described how they can form "oppositional identities" towards schooling, resulting in a achievement gap. While Ogbu did not specifically study Indigenous students, the sociologist Alan Peshkin examined one group of American Indian students in an Indian controlled school. He found students participated with sustained effort and enthusiasm in basketball, but "regrettably, I saw no academic counterpart to this stellar athletic performance" (Peshkin 1997, 5).<sup>10</sup> He witnessed a "student malaise" originating from an ambivalent attitude of the Pueblo Indians towards schooling. After more than 400 years of contact with Europeans, the Pueblos were suspicious of anything "white," and schools, even Indian-controlled ones with Indian administrators and Indian teachers, remain basically alien "white" institutions. Peshkin notes, "Schooling is necessary to become competent in the very world that Pueblo [Indian] people perceive as rejecting them"; school is a place of "becoming white" (Peshkin 1997, 107 and 117).

A counter example to the situation Peshkin studied can be found in the Rock Point Community School in the Navajo Nation that became community controlled in 1973. A bilingual education program that taught speaking, reading, and writing in the Navajo language as well as English was started because even the most advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching methodologies were not bringing student achievement up to national averages. Under bilingual instruction that was implemented at both the elementary and secondary levels, student test scores increased and were higher than comparable Navajo students in surrounding schools receiving only ESL instruction (Reyhner 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Benton (2007, pp 163-181) notes that there a danger in using an Indigenous language in schools because it can be transformed to represent the values and thinking of the colonizing society.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Duff 1993 notes in New Zealand that rugby has a similar draw on Māori youths' attention.

## **A History of Assimilationist Indigenous Education in the USA**

Assimilationist education, which is still ongoing, can devastate Indigenous communities. Schools were used in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the USA, and elsewhere to devalue and replace Indigenous cultures, especially their religions and languages. For example, non-Indigenous educators of Indigenous students tend to hold up patriarchal nuclear families as the norm in opposition to Indigenous extended families and promote individualism in contrast to the communitarianism of many Indigenous societies.

Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder in their history of American Indian education in the USA and Canada summed up the impact of boarding schools on American Indian students, who were sometimes forcibly removed from their homes to attend them,

*Upon enrolling, boarding and day school Indian students in the USA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were reclothed, regroomed, and renamed. They found it difficult to adjust to schools that devalued their family's way of life and taught in an alien tongue. Some were eager to learn and, despite hardships, adjusted well to their new settings. Others resisted by running away or by refusing to cooperate. Some, like the Stockholm hostages and kidnap victim and heiress Patty Hearst, began to identify with their captors and to despise their own upbringing. (Reyhner and Eder 2004, 168)*

The boarding schools for Indians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the USA were usually run as military schools where students were marched around and enjoyed little freedom. Students in these schools were often punished for speaking the language of their parents or practicing any Indian cultural activities. The U.S. commissioner of Indian affairs wrote in his 1866 annual report,

*Indians should be taught the English language only.... There is not an Indian pupil whose tuition and maintenance is paid for by the United States Government who is permitted to study any other language than our own vernacular—the language of the greatest, most powerful, and enterprising nationalities beneath the sun. (as quoted in Crawford 1992, 49)*

This ethnocentric attitude was nearly universal, but even in the nineteenth century Indians were not blamed for everything. In 1868 a congressionally appointed peace commission to deal with hostile Indigenous tribes, and which included the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs and four army generals reported to President Andrew Johnson,

*The history of the Government connections with the Indians is a shameful record of broken treaties and unfulfilled promises. The history of the border white man's connection with the Indians is a sickening record of murder, outrage, robbery, and wrongs committed by the former as the rule, and occasional savage outbreaks and unspeakable barbarous deeds of retaliation by the latter as the exception....*

However, massacres and other atrocities continued for several decades in the USA despite this rhetoric. Not all Indian students were forced to attend schools and some went voluntarily, however much too often education for American Indians in the USA was clearly a matter of cultural genocide, starting with the forced removal of children from their parents. Some of the worst examples include the 1886 report of the Mescalero Apache Indian Agent,

*Everything in the way of persuasion and argument having failed [to get parents to send their children to school], it became necessary to visit the camps unexpectedly with a detachment of police, and seize such children as were proper and take them way to school, willing or unwilling. Some hurried their children off to the mountains or hid them away in camp, and the police had to chase and capture them like so many wild rabbits. This unusual proceeding created quite an outcry. The men were sullen and muttering, the women loud in their lamentations and the children almost out of their wits with fright (as quoted in Adams 1995, 211).*

Willard Beatty, director of federal government's Indian education program from 1936 to 1952, related a story told to him by the first Director of Navajo Education Programs how he "recruited" Navajo students on "orders from Congress":

*He and a Navajo policeman had started out in a buckboard drawn by two horses and went from hogan [a Navajo home] to hogan looking for children. As they got in sight of a hogan and the Indians recognized who they were and guessed at their purpose, the children could be seen darting out of the hogan and running into the brush. Whereupon the Navajo policeman stood up in the buckboard and fired a shotgun into the air to scare the children and make them stop running—if possible. Then he jumped out of the wagon and ran after the children. If he caught them (and many times he didn't), he wrestled them to the ground, tied their legs and arms, and with the help of Mr. Blair put them in the back part of the wagon, where they lay until Blair had gathered in the quota for the day. Then they returned to the Albuquerque school and enrolled the children they had captured. (Beatty 1961, 12)*

Speaking no English, these children did not understand what was happening to them and no one at the school they were sent to spoke Navajo. Beatty reported, "The average Navajo parents felt a school education was a relatively useless thing, so far as they could see" (Beatty 1961, 14). Testimony in a 1929 hearing by the U.S. Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs affirmed the accuracy of the activities Beatty described (DeJong 1993, 117-118).

Overrun and out-populated by settlers, Indigenous peoples were, and still are, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. If they do not come to terms with the literate, technologically advance culture

that surrounds them, they were only further marginalized. In 1947 when some progressive reforms were made, a Navajo tribal council delegate spoke in favor of compulsory education,

*When I ran away [from school] they sent a policeman after me to bring me back and gave me whipping like that. That knocked some sense into me and I did not have the desire to run away. The Government says it [now] cannot whip children, cannot punish them. How can we get somewhere? I blame the Government.... I sent my boy to school at Bacone College. I realize that education is the only salvation for the Navajo tribe. (Iverson 2002, 102)*

Another council delegate declared in 1952 how he was glad that a policeman had been sent to return him to school after he ran away (Iverson 2002, 107). The Navajo Nation's population was rapidly increasing at the time and still is, making it more and more difficult to survive by sheep herding and dry land farming, the traditional pattern of Navajo life.

However, cultural change can be a two-way street. In 1917, the Ponca Agency Superintendent Oklahoma reported in 1917 the story of,

*an old Ponca Indian, now dead, once said that it takes Chilocco [boarding school] three years to make a White man out of an Indian boy, but that when the boy comes home and the tribe has a feast, it takes but three days for the tribe to make the boy an Indian again.<sup>11</sup>*

Fred Kabotie, a Hopi Indian, recalled,

*I've found the more outside education I receive, the more I appreciate the true Hopi way. When the missionaries would come into the village and try to convert us, I used to wonder why anyone would want to be a Christian if it meant becoming like those people (Kabotie 1977, 12).*

Based on testimony from hearings across the country, in 1969 the U.S. Senate's Committee on Labor and Public Welfare's Special Subcommittee on Indian Education issued a 210 page summary report titled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*. It declared Indian education in the USA to be "a national disgrace." (U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. 1969, x) A simultaneous U.S. government funded National Study of Indian Education led to the conclusion,

*With minor exceptions the history of Indian education had been primarily the transmission of white American education, little altered, to the Indian child as a one-way process. The institution of the school is one that was imposed by and controlled by the non-Indian society, its pedagogy and curriculum little changed for the Indian children, its goals primarily aimed at removing the child from his aboriginal culture and assimilating him into the dominant white culture. Whether coercive or persuasive, this assimilationist goal of schooling has been minimally*

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<sup>11</sup> *Returned Student Survey #24, Part 5, 1917, p 88. Manuscript in the Ayer collection of the Newberry Library, Chicago.*

*effective with Indian children, as indicated by their record of absenteeism, retardation, and high dropout rates.* (Fuchs & Havighurst 1972, 19)

In a special message to Congress in 1970, President Richard Nixon declared:

*The story of the Indian in America is something more than the record of the white man's frequent aggression, broken agreements, intermittent remorse and prolonged failure. It is a record also of endurance, of survival, of adaptation and creativity in the face of overwhelming obstacles.*

*It is a record of enormous contributions to this country— to its art and culture, to its strength and spirit, to its sense of history and its sense of purpose.*

*It is long past time that the Indian policies of the Federal government began to recognize and build upon the capacities and insights of the Indian people. Both as a matter of justice and as a matter of enlightened social policy, we must begin to act on the basis of what the Indians themselves have long been telling us. The time has come to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions.* (Nixon 1971, 575)

Nixon's declaration helped usher in a policy of Indian self-determination that continues in the USA to this day. The damning national study and Senate Subcommittee report led to the passage in 1972 of the Indian Education Act that provides funding for supplemental programs to help Indian students in public schools. In 1975 an Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act made it possible, among other things, for Indian Nations to take over federal Indian schools if they so desired. Today, over half of these schools are run by local school boards and the remainder have advisory school boards.

Along with the assimilationist English-only educational policies, the U.S. government also suppressed Indian religious beliefs, banning Sun Dances, Potlatches and other ceremonies in the late nineteenth century. It was not till 1978 that two laws were enacted to recognize the right of American Indians to religious freedom and family solidarity. One was the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the other was the Indian Child Welfare Act passed the same year, in sharp contrast to the individualism rooted in most American law, recognized Indian children as collective tribal resources, essential to Indigenous survival, and this law made it very difficult for non-Indians to adopt Indian children.

Using some of their newfound power under the Self-Determination Policy, Indian nations started taking over control of their lands. In 1984 the Navajo Tribal Council adopted education policies. In their preface the tribal chairman wrote, "We believe that an excellent education can produce achievement in the basic academic skills and skills required by modern technology and still educate young Navajo citizens in their language, history, government and culture" (Zah 1985, vii). However, these policies have never been fully enforced because funding for public and federal schools do not flow through the Navajo Nation.

In 1990 the U.S. congress passed a Native American Languages Act, making it the policy of the government to protect, promote, and preserve Indigenous languages and two years later a couple million dollars was authorized to fund language programs, but such efforts remain token today. In 1991, the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Education identified four important reasons why Indian nations were at risk. Its second reason was, “the language and culture base of the American Native are rapidly eroding” (Indian Nations At Risk Task Force 1991, iv). The Task Force set 10 national goals, with goal 2 being: “By the year 2000 all schools will offer Native students the opportunity to maintain and develop their tribal languages and will create a multicultural environment that enhances the many cultures represented in the school” (Indian Nations At Risk Task Force 1991, [inside front cover]). This goal was still far from being reached in 2010. In the Final Report’s transmittal letter, the Task Force’s co-chairs wrote:

*The Task Force believes that a well-educated American Indian and Alaska Native citizenry and a renewal of the language and culture base of the American Native community will strengthen self-determination and economic well-being and will allow the Native community to contribute to building a stronger nation—an America that can compete with other nations and contribute to the world's economies and cultures. (Indian Nations At Risk Task Force 1991, iv)*

The most recent reauthorization of the Indian Education Act of 1972 is Title VII of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The rhetoric about the need for culturally appropriate education remains in NCLB’s Title VII’s Statement of Policy,

*It is the policy of the USA to fulfill the Federal Government’s unique and continuing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children. The Federal Government will continue to work with local educational agencies, ensuring that programs that serve Indian children are of the highest quality and provide for not only the basic elementary and secondary educational needs, but also the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of these children.*

However, the overall thrust of NCLB was for a one-size-fits-all education that emphasizes academic accountability through the use of high stakes tests (Reyhner & Hurtado 2008). Illustrative of the thrust of this new law is the name change of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Bilingual Education and Multicultural Affairs to the Office of English Language Acquisition. Researcher James Crawford sees NCLB as a shift in focus from equal opportunity for America’s minorities to closing the achievement gap by bringing up scores on test that currently focus only on English literacy and mathematics, pressuring on schools to narrow their curriculum and to exclude “extras,” such as instruction in Indigenous languages (Crawford 2007).

On June 6, 2010, the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs held an Oversight Hearing on Indian education titled “Did the No Child Left Behind Act Leave Indian Students Behind?” At the hearing a former president the National Indian Education Association testified,

*There is policy incongruence between federal Native language policy and the implementation of NCLB. The federal policy focused on revitalizing and maintaining Native languages needs to find a viable functional reference within NCLB so that federal education policy enables rather than stunts existing school based efforts such as immersion schools and programs, language nests and other such efforts in state and BIE schools. (Senate Indian Affairs Committee 2010)*

## **Canada's Residential Schools**

Under British rule, the Proclamation of 1763 gave limited recognition to Indian territorial possessions, which continued into the nineteenth century. An 1857 Gradual Civilization Act promoted assimilation, including allotment of Indian lands. According to historian John S. Milloy, this law redefined civilizing Indians from developing community self-sufficiency to assimilating them individually. The passage of the British North America Act of 1867 defined the federal government's "responsibility" for Indians but that responsibility was only assumed under pressure in 1939 (Milloy 1999).

Canada's First Nations educational policies in many ways paralleled those of the USA. Its schools were unrelentingly assimilationist and designed to separate parents from their children so that the children could join modern society. Students were taught English and punished for speaking their Native language. However, Canada's residential (boarding) schools inadequately prepared students to live in white society or to return to their reserves. Milloy documents with government records the unhealthy brutal conditions in Canada's government funded but church-run residential schools that served about a third of Native children (Milloy 1999).

Milloy found Canada's residential schools were "marked by the persistent neglect and abuse of children and through them of Aboriginal communities in general" and characterized by widespread physical and sexual abuse till the last residential school closed in 1986 (Milloy 1999, xiii). In the "mini-monarchies" that were residential schools, "discipline was curriculum and punishment was pedagogy" (Milloy 1999, 34 and 134). Even worse, from the 1879 start of these efforts, the Canadian government chronically underfunded these schools, operated by Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans.

The 1924 *Memorandum* of the Convention of Catholic Principals declared,

*All true civilization must be based on moral law, which christian religion alone can give. Pagan superstition could not...suffice to make the Indians practice the virtues of our civilization and avoid its attendant vices. Several people have desired us to countenance the dances of the Indians and to observe their festivals; but their habits, being the result of free and easy mode of life, cannot conform to the intense struggle for life which our social conditions require. (Milloy 1999, 36-37)*

In 1938 a joint delegation of all the churches, declaring them essential, called on the government to provide school uniforms:

*There would be no true cohesion without a uniform. Further if modern Dictators [Hitler and Mussolini] find that a coloured shirt assists in implanting political doctrines and even racial and theological ideas, it would be obvious that the adoption of a bright and attractive uniform would assist in implanting all that we desire in the children under our care. (Milloy 1999, 125)*

In 1939 there were nine thousand students in 79 residential schools. After World War II, Canada worked to close Indian schools and integrate Indians into the provincial school systems. In opposition to the desires of the Catholic Church some residential schools were closed and day schools received more government support. In the 1950s the Canadian Parliament dropped sanctions against some Indian traditional practices and an effort was made to start parent advisory committees for schools, but these local committees had initially little real power.

While the U.S. phased out direct federal funding of mission schools for Indians in the 1890s, it was not till 1969 that Canada's Department of Indian Affairs took complete control of its schools for Indigenous children. As in the USA, orphans and children from dysfunctional families who were seen as having nowhere else to go increasingly filled the remaining residential schools.

Many First Nations students lacked adequate preparation for provincial schools, which often did little to accommodate their special needs, leading to an increased dropout rate. By 1969 only twelve residential schools remained. In 1970 the Blue Quills School in Alberta was taken over non-violently by local Indians when the government tried to close it.

As in the USA, a reevaluation of Indian policy occurred in Canada in the 1970s. The minister of Indian and northern affairs declared in 1972 that Indian education was "a whitewash... a process to equip him with white values, goals, language, skills needed to succeed in the dominant society" that served "no purpose in the child's world.... Rather it alienates him from his own people" (Milloy 1999, 199). In 1973 a Cree Way Project was started at Waskaganish on the eastern shore of James Bay, 700 miles north of Quebec, to "bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between two alien nations: the native peoples nomadic hunters and the European Canadians--once agricultural, now post-industrial city dwellers" (Feurem 1990, 7). The project's goals

*were to use Cree language in the schools to validate Cree culture and create a Cree tribal identity, to make reading and writing more important within their previously oral culture, to create a curriculum reflecting Cree culture and the Cree conceptual framework, and to implement that curriculum in the public schools. (Stiles 1997, 249)*

In 1975 the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement provided for Inuit and Cree self-governance, including running the schools serving their children. In 1978 the Kativik School Board serving schools in 14 villages became the first Inuit controlled school board in Canada. In 1989 the Nunavik Educational Task Force was set up to look at the languages of education, curriculum, teacher training, post-secondary education, adult education, and role of family and community in education in Northern Quebec.



However, self-governance in Canada as in the U.S. did not automatically lead to more culturally relevant education or greater student academic achievement. Ann Vick-Westgate in her 2002 study of Inuit-controlled education in northern Canada found that the “village school was, and still too often is, a Westernized formal institution that has excluded the knowledge and values of the community it serves and done a poor job of preparing young people for future roles.” (Vick-Westgate 2002, 13).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported in 1996 on the “grievous harms suffered by countless Aboriginal children, families, and communities as a result of the residential school system,” and in 1998 the Canadian Minister of Indian Affairs declared,

*One aspect of our relationship with Aboriginal people over this period that requires particular attention is the Residential School system. The system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their heritage and cultures. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse. (Milloy 1999, 303-304)*

### **Australia’s “Stolen Generations”**

The country of Australia was founded as a penal colony, a dumping ground, for English prisoners. Its harsh treatment of its Aboriginal population paralleled the English treatment of prisoners, but the descendents of those prisoners fared better than the Aboriginals. As in the USA frontier warfare ensued as settlers moved in on Aboriginal lands leading a “violent mindset” among settlers and genocidal activity that even in western newspaper editorials in the USA was expressed as “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.”<sup>12</sup> In 1865 a Queensland legal clause allowed the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families on racial grounds. These removals designed to assimilate Aboriginal children continued into the 1970s, creating what is known as the “stolen generations.” The removed children usually, as in the USA, received a largely “industrial” rather than academic education and their child labor was used both in schools and out of schools to teach them a work ethic (Robinson & Patten 2008). Unlike in the USA where the mixing of races was largely taboo and often made illegal with anti-miscegenation laws up into the 1950s in 28 states, in Australia miscegenation was seen as a way to eventually incorporate its Aboriginal population genetically into the mainstream population.

In 1997 the National Inquiry into the “Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families” issued its report *Bringing Them Home* documented the suffering of Aboriginal children removed without parental consent from their homes, a practice that continued into the early 1970s. An Australian example of the complexity of the cultural transformation of Indigenous peoples resulting from contact with European immigrants can be seen Graham McKay’s report *The Land Still Speaks*, where he writes,

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<sup>12</sup> The rabid frontier attitude towards Indigenous peoples in the United States is well documented in (Decker 2004).

*While most people . . . tended to see the term 'language maintenance activities' as including only formally organized language programs and activities, Saibai Island Council, in its response, made explicit what other communities assume: that traditional ceremonies and other traditional activities (they mention dancing, singing and story-telling -- others would include hunting) are an important means of keeping the traditional language strong. At the same time, the people of Saibai include church services and tombstone unveiling in this arena, showing that Christianity and other post-contact developments have been firmly adopted by members of the community in the ongoing development of their indigenous culture and life. The church has become part of their heritage . . . but not the school... (Mc Kay 1996, 110)*

### ***Aeotora/New Zealand Māori Immersion Schools***

The Māori of *Aeotora* (New Zealand) do not seem to have had some of the worst experiences of the Indigenous peoples of the USA, Canada and Australia. Making up about fifteen percent of *Aeotora*'s population of four million, the Māori's have been able to steer government policies, at least recently, considerably in regards to extending the use of their language and culture in schools. The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi between the Māori and the British colonial government, New Zealand's founding document, gave some protection to Māori rights, and like with nineteenth century Canadian and USA Indian treaties, the post-World War II Māori activism has reasserted treaty rights, some of which had long been ignored. Unlike the Treaty of Waitangi, many USA and Canadian treaties contained educational provisions, sometimes added at the request of the Indigenous parties to them.

A separate Native system of day schools was set up for the Māori in New Zealand in 1867 that continued to operate till 1947. While these schools were English-only, they were only set up originally when a Māori community asked for them and were partially locally funded. They were small day schools over which the local community had some influence.<sup>13</sup> Older students could transfer to a residential school, but it was not forced on them or their families. From the 1940s there was some Māori language and culture at teacher training colleges, and the Māori community treated teachers with respect and there is evidence that respect was returned (Simon & Smith 2001). According to James Belich, "it was not the Native school system, but mass urbanisation after 1945, that brought the Māori language to its knees in the 1970s." (Belich 2001, x)

In the 1960s a Play Centre preschool movement encouraged Māori mothers to use English with their children, and the spread of English language radio and television, accelerated Māori language loss to a point where only a very few children could speak Māori. To counter the accelerating Indigenous language loss, Māori leaders looked for ways to use still fluent elders to keep their language alive. In 1982 Māori grandparents volunteered to run day-care centers, *Te Kōhanga Reo*, featuring an immersion program in their language. Their success led to their rapid expansion. In 1988 there were 521 centers with 8,000 children, 15% of the Maoris under five years old. In 1998 there were more than

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<sup>13</sup> A classic account of teaching in one of these Māori village schools is Ashton-Warner 1964.

600. In an informal, extended-family, childcare setting, Maori preschoolers are saturated with Maori language and culture (Belich 2001, x). Part of the Ministry of Education, the Te Kōhanga Reo web site states that language nests have been established in every district and,

*Kōhanga Reo centres provide a location and a purpose for people of all ages to meet and work together. The Kōhanga Reo kaupapa is powerful in drawing people together to support each other and work towards the ultimate goal of a bilingual and bicultural nation. The programme reaches young families who would not otherwise have taken part in early childhood services.<sup>14</sup>*

Language nests provide strong support to families in the effort to preserve native languages and cultures, provide a valuable service to working parents, and strengthen the values associated with the traditional Māori extended family (Fleras 1989). Based on the success of the language nests and popular demand, Māori based education was extended into the elementary, then secondary, and now the university level.

In 1986 the Waitangi Tribunal acknowledged Māori language as a 'taonga' under Article II of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi and that the national government therefore has a responsibility for its preservation. In 1987 Māori Language Act declared “the Māori language to be an official language of New Zealand, to confer the right to speak Māori in certain legal proceedings, and to establish Te Komihana Mo Te Reo Māori” (Māori Language Commission).

### **Hawaiian Immersion Schools**

Facing the same drastic language loss and hearing of the success of the Māori, Native Hawaiians started their own Pūnana Leo language nests in 1984 (Wilson 1991, 9-10). The English translation of their mission statement reads,

*The Pūnana Leo Movement grew out of a dream that there be reestablished throughout Hawai‘i the mana of a living Hawaiian language from the depth of our origins. The Pūnana Leo initiates, provides for and nurtures various Hawaiian Language environments, and we find our strength in our spirituality, love of our language, love of our people, love of our land, and love of knowledge.<sup>15</sup>*

To extend Hawaiian language based education into the public schools of Hawai‘i it was necessary to repeal the 1896 law, passed after the Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown, prohibiting the use of Hawaiian in both public and private schools, which was accomplished in 1987. In 2003 there were 12 preschools and 23 public schools with immersion classes. In 1982 the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo started a Hawaiian Studies degree program taught through Hawaiian focusing on traditional Hawaiian language and culture. In 2004 the University of Hawai‘i Board of Regents approved a doctoral program in Indigenous language and cultural revitalization.

<sup>14</sup> Information retrieved August 27, 2009 from <http://www.kohanga.ac.nz/kohanga.html>

<sup>15</sup> Retrieved August 27, 2009 from [http://www.ahapunanaleo.org/eng/about/about\\_mission.html](http://www.ahapunanaleo.org/eng/about/about_mission.html)

In the mainland USA efforts to promote immersion schools for Indigenous students have been fewer and farther between. In the Window Rock Public Schools in the Navajo Nation most of the kindergarten students today enter school speaking only English. Students in the immersion school, which only has students voluntarily enrolled by their parents, are immersed the entire school day in Navajo in kindergarten and first grade. English is gradually added starting in second grade so that half the school day is in English by sixth grade. Its curriculum is determined by the Navajo Nation's 2000 *Diné Cultural Content Standards* and the Arizona state academic standards. Fifth grade English language achievement test scores for the immersion students show them substantially outperforming other district students in reading, writing, and math (Johnson & Wilson[Legatz] 2005, 31; Johnson & Wilson[Legatz] 2006, 26-33).

### **Recent Apologies Help Heal the Wounds of Colonialism**

Efforts to reverse assimilationist schooling in the former British colonies largely remain token. However, especially in New Zealand and Hawai'i these efforts are showing much promise, and recent United Nations declarations point towards a positive future for these and other efforts. Some of the most recent rhetoric bearing on Indigenous peoples includes the February 2008 public apology by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd:

*That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations—this blemished chapter in our nation's history. The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. (Rudd 2009)*

Rudd called for “a new beginning...to right a great wrong” that had continued into the 1970s. He quoted Nanna Fejo, a member of the stolen generations, “Families—keeping them together is very important. It's a good thing that you are surrounded by love and that love is passed down the generations. That's what gives you happiness.” (Rudd 2009)

Pressured partly by Rudd's apology, in June 2008, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper acknowledged in a speech to the House of Commons the ongoing, generational impacts of Canada's residential schools for Indians:

*We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow.... Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.”*

He concluded. “The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of aboriginal peoples for failing them so badly” (Harper 2009). However, unlike Australian Prime Minister, Harper did not promise to improve Canadian First Nations (aboriginal) social conditions.

High-minded rhetoric can count, even though sometimes it takes a very long time to see its promise realized. The phrase “all men are created equal” in the thirteen colonies’ 1776 Declaration of Independence helped lead to the end of slavery, but only after more than eight decades, and it took well over two centuries for a Black president to be elected to lead the USA.

## **Conclusion**

Education is not neutral, what children hear, read, learn, and do in school can help them build a strong positive identity or they may, through insensitivity and ethnocentric assimilationist curriculum and instruction, destroy cultural and family values and leave students susceptible to the allure of today’s negative peer and popular media-dominated consumer culture. Most of the history of colonialism in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the USA is a record of cultural genocide where Indigenous peoples were forced become assimilated into Euro-American society through English-only education to be successful and join the modern world (Reyhner & Eder 2004). However, students of whatever race or culture who are not embedded in their traditional values are only too likely in modern society to pick up a unhealthy lifestyle in what is increasingly a materialistic and hedonistic modern culture. They can also reject schooling in an effort to hang on to their traditional cultures. This oppositional identity hinders their success in the modern global economy and can relegate them to living in poverty with all its stresses.

Ethnic groups rightly tend to focus on their traditional moral and spiritual strengths, however it is important as Daniel Wildcat writes not to “romanticize the past” (Deloria & Wildcat 2001, 8). There is in fact a danger that indigenous and other minority groups can in fact define themselves as the “white man's shadow,” as opposite everything that the materialistic and individualistic “white man” is perceived as being (House 2002; Simard 1990). This is a topsy-turvy version of “blame the victim” becoming an unthinking “blame the oppressor” for everything that is going wrong in one’s life and one’s community. This victimization can lead to self-destructive anger, “red rage,” and hinder positive efforts towards decolonization.

More and more Indigenous peoples are working to reclaim basic human rights and heal the wounds resulting from the long history of cultural genocide and reverse its effects while giving their students an education that prepares them to live in our modern technology-dominated world. These efforts include language and cultural revitalization and are not anti-educational efforts that will hold back Indigenous students from academic success. Just the opposite, they hold the promise of closing the centuries-old

academic achievement gap that, aggravated by assimilationist education, is too often found between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

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