

Meditation: “Genocide”

Scholars question the historical accuracy of the story of Esther. There is not other corroborating evidence to support the story of Esther. This is the only written record of the story. However, it is the foundational story for the festival of Purim. Purim is sort of a cross between April Fool’s day and Hallowe’en. It mixes hilarity with costumes.

Ahasuerus, aka Xerxes, aka Artaxerxes, was a Persian king in the fifth century BCE. Esther, according to the story, is his second wife, and a Jewess. The first refused to appear at a banquet to show off her beauty as the king wished and so she was either executed or banished. A close reading reveals that it may have been that she was ordered to appear before the king’s buddies in her birthday suit. Good for her to refuse such an appalling order. Haman, the other key figure in today’s reading, has risen to a position of importance in the court of King Ahasuerus. He was a knob, full of his own self-importance.

Now Mordecai, a Jew, and also Esther’s uncle and guardian, sat outside of the palace gates every day. And every day when Haman entered the palace, people would bow and scrape in front of him. All except Mordecai. Mordecai would not show obeisance to anyone but God alone. This infuriated Haman. Haman grew angrier and angrier every day when Mordecai refused to bow and scrape before him, so he sought revenge for the slight he perceived. He asked the king for permission to kill the peoples who lived in the kingdom but who did not worship the king. The king granted his wish, and Haman had a gallows constructed in front of his home. He was going to hang Mordecai on that gallows and watch him die. Now, here’s the rub, Haman, with the king’s signet ring, had issued an edict throughout the

Persian empire that any Jew was to be killed and their property seized. So it wasn't just Mordecai who was to die, but all Jews, hence Esther's words, "For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated."

Tomorrow is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. It is also known as Orange Shirt Day, to commemorate the day that Phyllis Webstad arrived for her first day at school wearing a brand new orange shirt, which was immediately taken from her by the people running the residential school. The orange shirt now commemorates Residential School survivors and those who died in the Residential Schools. It aims to raise awareness of the intergenerational impacts of the Residential School system. It was cultural genocide.

I watched a number of videos this past week, all of which are too long to play in their entirety here today. So, I will give you the Cole's notes version of Canadian History and the Residential School System as we never heard it in public school.

1497 first contact with European fishing fleets – John Cabot

1534 European explorers were looking for a new trade route to the orient – Jacques Cartier.

1542 – 1670 French explorers established settlements and the beaver pelt trade.

1580 – 1670 British colonies were founded along the eastern seaboard

1670 – The Hudson Bay company took over what was called Rupert's Land.

There were lots of wars, and different indigenous groups sided with the English and the French.

1754 – The Indian War

1759 – The Plains of Abraham – the French ceded to the British.

- 1763 – Royal Proclamation was made and the British crown assumed responsibility for the welfare of indigenous people.
- 1812 – 1815 – the war for the west.
- 1846 – Oregon treaty ceded land to the US and the present day border along the 49th parallel all the way to the Pacific was established.
- The indigenous peoples of the east were eager for education in European technology. At the behest of many chiefs, schools were established where feasible.
- 1831 – Mohawk Residential School in Brantford opens.
- 1844 – the Bagot commission recommends separating children from their parents to aid assimilation.
- 1847 – Ryerson (Superintendent of Education) says that First Nations education should consist of religious instruction and agricultural training.
- 1857 – Gradual Civilization Act in Quebec offers all indigenous people who can read, and who renounce their status, the right of enfranchisement – that is, they could become feudal British subjects.
- 1867 – BNA Act
- 1869 – Act for Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians made enfranchisement compulsory, and resulted in loss of status.
- 1876 – The Indian Act made Indians wards of the state and imposed the band/council structure. The federal government assumed responsibility for the education of first nation youth. A superintendent general was appointed to oversee Indian agents who would oversee and control all aspects of life and freedoms.
- 1879 – the Davin report recommended a system of industrial schools to teach English culture. By 1880, 11 schools were operating.
- 1883 – Western Canadian Residential Schools were called for.
- 1884 – Indian Act amended – potlach and gatherings were banned.

Education of children was entrusted to the churches.

1885 – the transcontinental railroad was completed.

The Northwest Rebellion happened, and was put down by troops rushed in by rail. Riel was hung. Poundmaker jailed.

1886 – Pass Laws were instituted. A pass was needed to leave the reserve. Passes were provided by the Indian agent.

1892 – the federal government made Residential School Agreements with the churches.

1893 – Duncan Campbell Scott became the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. His stated objective was assimilation. He served in that role until 1932.

1896 – 45 Residential Industrial Schools were operating.

1904 – the federal government was under fire for spending too much money on Indian education. The government said that the policy was not to have Indians compete with whites in the labour force.

1906 – Indian Act amended. Indigenous people can be forcefully removed from reserves in or near towns of 8,000 or more.

1908 – Dr. Bryce, medical inspector for residential schools, released a report, much of which was suppressed, which showed a 30 to 60% mortality rate over 5 years at residential schools.

1919 – the position of medical inspector for residential schools was abolished.

1920 – attendance at residential schools is made mandatory for those aged 7-15. The police were sent to arrest children and deliver them to the schools. The schools were chronically underfunded.

1922 – Dr. Bryce released a public report titled “A National Crime” about the state of conditions in the residential schools.

1940 – provincial educational standards and regulations were starting

to be applied to residential schools and integration of the schools was planned.

- 1949 – Indians were allowed to vote, for the first time, in BC
- 1951 – Indian Act amended to allow gatherings and potlaches in the west. 100 years of residential schools showed that Indians were not being assimilated and that education levels were poor.
- 1958 – Indian Residential School closure was recommended. There was a move to integrate the schools with provincial public schools. Indian day schools were set up on reserves.
- 1960 – status Indians were allowed to vote in federal elections.
- 1969 – the federal government took full control of residential schools from the churches.
- 1979 – 12 schools remain with 1200 students.
- 1984 – the last Indian Residential School closes.
- 1996 – the last band run school closes.

- 1991 – Oblates of Mary Immaculate apologize
- 1993 – Anglican church apologizes
- 1994 – Presbyterian church apologizes
- 1998 – UCC apologizes for its role in the Residential Schools
- 2004 – RCMP apologize
- 2008 – federal government apologizes

- 1996 – Royal Commission on Aboriginal Persons is released. Recommends a full public inquiry on the effects of the residential schools.
- 2010 – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission starts.

What were the effects of the residential schools on indigenous peoples and communities? I'll let Phyllis tell you herself.

Play video starting at 20:50

Esther stood up, at the very real risk that the king would execute her for speaking out, to save her people. Uncle Mordecai issued an edict that the days when Haman and his followers died would be a festival of celebration – the festival of Purim.

I wish I could tell you how things will turn out here and now.