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The Neglected Human

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The Neglected Human

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Muriam Fancy is a second year student at University of Toronto studying Indigenous Studies and Peace, Conflict, and Justice in hopes to become a human rights lawyer. She began her own organization in 2011 called "One Nation, Two Words" (www.onenationtwoworlds.com) which aims to bridge the gap in education and health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through advocacy work. One of Muriam Fancy's accomplishments is presenting to over 800 students and faculty in school and organizations in Toronto regarding the history and injustices Indigenous youth face living on reserve. Some examples of venues that she has spoken at are University of Toronto Dalla Lana School of Public Health and International Development Conference. Additionally, Muriam Fancy has also sent 500 pounds of winter clothing and school supplies to Indigenous communities in northern Ontario.

The Canadian government has defined the capabilities of First Nation parents in terms of "neglect." It is because of this term that many children are taken away. However, the term neglect receives its meaning from concepts of poverty, poor housing, and substance misuse which is ultimately correlated to the intergenerational trauma of residential schools that many First Nation parents continue to suffer from. It is the differences in ways of life that led the federal government to treat the Indigenous children living on-reserve and in the Yukon with racial adversity; a genocide spanning over a 150 years through a merciless system described as residential schools; schools replete with rape, deaths (without reporting names of the deceased), and institutionalized child neglect. It was and continues to be genocide through schooling, constructed after Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonal, described educated Indigenous children living with his or her parents as "...simply a savage who can read and write" (TRC, 2015, p.2).

The closure of the merciless schooling system, "commenced in earnest in 1970, [and] was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of [Indigenous] children [taken] into care by child-welfare agencies" (TRC, 2015, p. 69). By 2010, approximately 27,000 Indigenous children were not in their parents' or grandparent's hands and homes (AFN, 2013). Many of the children were placed with non-Indigenous families. A major cause for this was due to significant underfunding by the Canadian federal government. As Dr. Cindy Blackstock observed, an Indigenous child living on reserve in Canada means receiving "less government funding for statutory child welfare services than other children even though there are more First Nations children in child welfare care now than at the height of residential school operations" (Blackstock, 2009, p.89). It has always been harder for the Indigenous peoples to receive the most basic treatment as human beings in Canada and the Indigenous child is no exception to this oppressive, unwritten rule.

Dr. Blackstock testified to these events at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. This trial brought light to the fact that neglect for First Nations children is a result of a country who has neglected the First Nations children by discriminating in funding amounts to First Nations agencies and communities. The tribunal was filed because Dr. Cindy Blackstock and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) saw a human right violation which was First Nation children receiving exponentially less welfare funding than the rest of Canada. In 2016, the Tribunal ruled in favour of First Nation children on reserve, concluding that there was discriminatory funding as between such children and children off reserve. Moreover, the adverse impacts of significantly less funding for Indigenous children on reserve arose "only because of their race and/or national or ethnic origin. Furthermore, these adverse impacts perpetuate the historical disadvantage and trauma suffered by Aboriginal people, in particular as a result of the Residential Schools system" (First Nations, 2016, p.162).

History for the Indigenous community in Canada has been similar to a tornado, never stopping, always swirling and bringing new adversities in its path. Despite such apparent injustice through demonstrative evidence, time and time again Canada has yet to see with its heart rather than through its eyes; Canadians only see differences amongst each other, never unity or commonality. As a non-Indigenous youth I have understood this ruling as a chance for Canada to make amends, to make a difference, and to allow reconciliation to begin. It is through the winning decision of this Human Rights Tribunal that the first step of reconciliation has been taken, and that this government has had no choice but through the Tribunal to hear multitude of stories of individuals who were silenced that had to face the brutality of the welfare policy in Canada. The Tribunal outcome is one that should be celebrated and not forgotten. From my perspective, as a youth who is actively trying to be an ally to Canada's Indigenous community, this is a step in the right direction. It seems that we as Canadians do not yet know what we are capable of when standing in solidarity with a community that has faced generations of unimaginable brutality; our ability to make change at all levels of life faces no barriers when we stand together.

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