



A Reasons to be Cheerful project

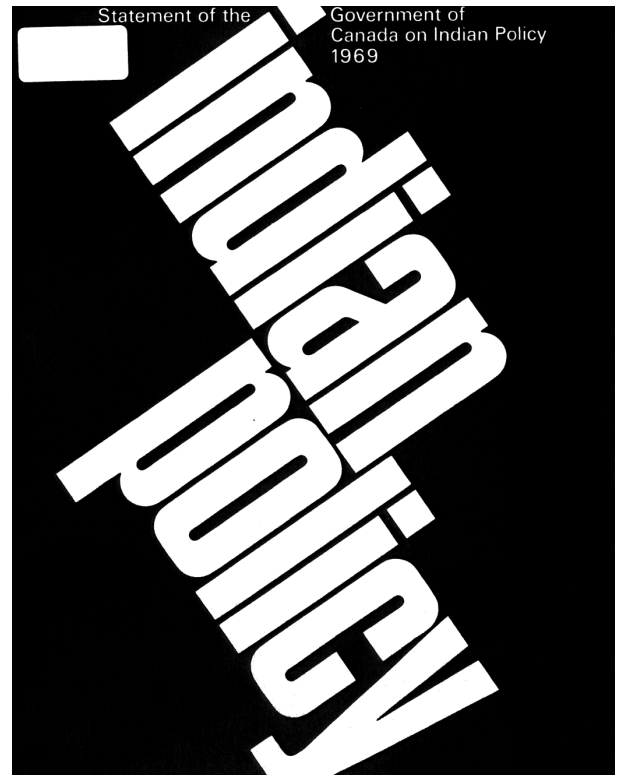
Bridging Divides: Ry Moran

Director of the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation

Ry Moran faces a weighty task: To guide Canada's journey to righting a horrific wrong. Through the TRC, the country is working to reconcile decades of forced assimilation.

Scott Shigeoka: You know, the work that we're trying to focus on with this video series is all about building bridges and building understanding. And one of the things I just heard you say is, you know, the work of bringing together non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. And I'm curious, could you tell us a little bit more about your role? Because from what I understand, survivor statements and having non-Indigenous people understand what happened to Indigenous families and Indigenous people during this time is really core and important to your work. So could you just bring us into how you were able to foster that understanding, especially between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?

Ryan Moran: So often when we talk to people inside of the Indigenous community across the country, what we hear is the words stated that truth has to come before reconciliation and that we're still very much in the time of sharing our truths as Indigenous people, helping Canadians understand what it is that has happened and The harms that Canada has inflicted upon Indigenous peoples. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission focused squarely on talking to as many survivors as we possibly could. The lived experiences, the oral histories of those survivors are of paramount importance as we collectively try to put the pieces together in terms of what this terrible history of residential schools has meant and what the lived experiences were inside of those schools. But I think one of the most important of all the aspects that we did at the TRC was we provided survivors with a microphone, an amplifier and an audience. And what's so powerful about their testimony is that it reveals the the profound human rights failures of this country, profound disrespect shown to indigenous peoples, and as we welcome thousands, hundreds of thousands of non-Indigenous Canadians into spaces and places where these statements are being shared, the change that occurred within many of those people was inevitable because we couldn't listen to these statements and not feel that sense of injustice. All Canadians have to understand this history, have to understand what it is that's happened, and then equally to respond with open hearts and open minds in terms of what the path now needs to look like moving forward to ensure that we actually establish these respectful relationships.



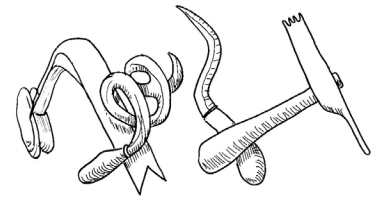
Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian policy (The White Paper, 1969)

WE ARE NOT DIVIDED

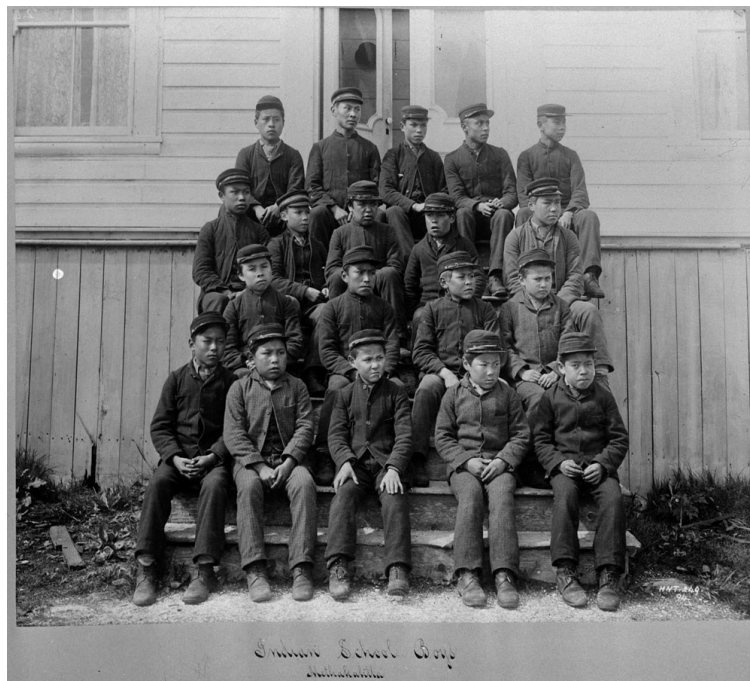
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SS: And I know, you know, the TRC in this case is centered around Canada, and I'm curious, are there lessons here for other countries like us in the United States and the treatment of Indigenous people here or Black people here in our country? What can we learn from the work that you have done with the TRC in Canada here in the United States?

RM: We have to remember that not listening is a form of privilege. Not listening, not paying attention, not tuning in is a way of maintaining an inequitable status quo. This work of listening and this work of hearing is in everybody's collective interest, because the pursuit of human rights is in everybody's interest. Human rights are indivisible. They're inherent. They're interdependent. That means that when one group or one identity's human rights are being infringed, society itself, the human family itself is weakened fundamentally. That's where the collective work in this is so fundamentally important.



SS: I'm curious, you know, the way this work is, from your perspective, one of the important parts of this work is about giving the mic to survivors and amplifying messages. And I'm wondering, what are some of the messages, you know, that that came up that are important for us to share right now in this space for those who might have not had an opportunity to yet hear those stories or who haven't yet understood or heard what has happened to Indigenous people in Canada and also around the world.



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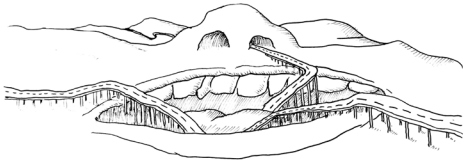
RM: Some of the main themes that we heard were certainly the stories of abuse, of neglect, of loneliness. There were there were so many survivors that had absolutely horrific experiences occur to them inside of those residential schools, and I remember speaking to one survivor we talked about (how) once a month or so, they would have a movie night in the residential school where they would all huddle around the projector and they would watch various movies that were put up. And this was in the nineteen fifties when the cowboys and Indian movies

were really popular. And he said, 'You know, when I first went into that school, I was cheering for the Indians. I was cheering for what I saw as being my people.' And he says 'In hindsight, I knew things were getting really strange for me, really confused in my mind, when after about six months I started cheering for the cowboys. And that's what those schools were doing to kids. Those schools were teaching them to dislike themselves — dislike who they were, who they are, who they would always be.

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SS: So when you hear the words bridging divides — and this is all a part of our project, we are not divided — what does that mean to you and in the context that you're sitting in? What does it mean to bridge divides? And why is this important for Canada, for us here in the United States, for any country to really think about as a society?



RM: It is insufficient to say — ‘You know, we’re all part of one human family and let’s just get along.’ That’s the goal, but fundamentally in that we also have to understand that we’re coming to this conversation today in 2020 or 2021 with many different pathways into this. And some of those pathways have been very, very horrific. So that’s the importance to the truth telling part is that we have to understand how we got to this through this conversation in the first place. Then we have to sit in the present and really look at how we’re going to now build a better future together. And that’s where I think the unity piece really comes in, that building the better

future together. We can’t change the past, but we can change how we understand it and how we respond to it and what we’re going to do to correct the great failures that we’ve seen across our human family. So I think the opportunity here is to recognize the challenges are great — and so too are the opportunities — but we have to work on this together. And what we really need in this time is to ensure that as we move into this work of building a better future, that we’re very deliberately and consciously dismantling the systems of oppression, racism, discrimination, systems of colonization that are impairing us as a human collective from reaching these goals. And that’s where the path of human rights and human dignity, justice, are absolutely the cornerstones of this work moving forward.



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