



Two hundred and fifteen

Two hundred and fifteen. Two hundred and fifteen lives *taken*. Not a footnote for Canada's history books. Not part of a "dark chapter", as if it were a story told long ago and now just remembered or revealed to the original authors with surprise. No, 215 lives, the lives of children violently ripped from families, from their communities, their cultures, their languages, their lands. Children whose ruptured and denied histories transmitted trauma out for generations of their loved ones. Two hundred and fifteen that stand now as symbols of this country's ongoing genocide against Indigenous peoples and nations, symbols of Canada's lack of commitment to the healing and reconciliation it claims to desire and work towards.

Alongside Indigenous colleagues, and Indigenous communities, we mourn. We share in your grief and anger.

These 215 children were denied their voices, their potentials, their cultures and futures as human beings, and ultimately their lives. We cannot deny the ongoing racism, overt, systemic and deeply embedded in Canada's politics and culture; to do so is to re-erase these children, rubbing out the destruction of them and their families.

Erasure has long been a key feature of Canada's ongoing denials of anti-Indigenous racism – and it perpetuates a status quo that ignores that this "history" continues in the present day, is omnipresent in the lives of Indigenous people and communities, where a health system allows Joyce Echaquan to be killed by racism in the hands of those with a responsibility and duty to care; where politicians accuse Indigenous leaders of vaccine queue-jumping; where the very Prime Minister of Canada, whose government presides over the creation of pipelines through Indigenous lands, and who has not met commitments to end boil water advisories in Indigenous communities, [attempts to erase the connection](#) between the lives of the 215 children in Kamloops and the ongoing systemic racism in every single Canadian province and territory that continues to this day, and who doesn't lower flags to mourn the dead until *asked in a letter*.

The destruction of these 215 lives, and tens of thousands of others by residential schools, the Sixties scoop, a broken foster care system, and subsequent government programs at all levels, designed to remove Indigenous people from their cultures and communities, is abhorrent, murderous and hideous. The reaction, and lack of reaction, to these facts, the lack of action to address the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is shameful, and deeply connected to Canada's need to deny and erase its role in hatred and violence against Indigenous people, and to "move on" without addressing the trauma that continues to this day. These are not "scars to heal", they are open wounds – untended, ignored, and complete with gaslit narratives from all corners of the political spectrum, including until recently from [the Senate of Canada](#).

What the discovery in Kamloops shows most clearly is the violence of colonialism, its ongoing impacts on Indigenous lives and communities, and the culture of the entire society of Canada that perpetuates it, while placing the burden for reconciliation on Indigenous people. This isn't so much a wake-up call

(those have happened, and you can see them laid out in media over the last 30 years), or a reckoning. This is a siren, an alarm that's been going off for years, that we can all hear again, while Indigenous people have heard it blaring throughout their lives.

The time is NOW to recognize we, settlers, and settler organizations, the leaders of settler governments, must chart new paths that lead head on into hard and difficult truths, about white supremacy, about the ongoing effects of colonialism in policies that impact Indigenous health, lands, languages, and ways of knowing and being throughout the lands that we call Canada.

What's needed? The same things that called for for years and years. For settlers and white people to do the work to understand their history, its roots in genocide, and the ongoing impacts of anti-Indigenous racism throughout society. For a full, whole country approach to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, [all 94 of them](#). And not just by governments – but organizations at all levels, by businesses, by individuals. Wondering where you fit into that? Visit the [On Canada Project's Settlers Take Action](#) webpage to learn more. Perhaps you're a health care provider, policy-maker or planner, or a manager in health or social care services. Learn more about the [Indigenous Cultural Safety program](#) here in Ontario through the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council. This training is one of the first steps towards more understanding, less division and hate and risk for Indigenous people living in Canada today, and it's made up of steps for non-Indigenous people to take. The Ontario program is built off of a similar program in British Columbia, the [San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training](#).

More than anything, though, we all must realize that 215 lives taken, among thousands of others, and those destroyed and traumatized, require an urgent response, a sustainable course of action, and the engagement of all citizens to set a new path. We cannot and must not just “move on” when the atrocities of history are present and alive in our country today.