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## TOP STORY

### Action must follow residential school apology: professor

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The historic apology made Wednesday by Prime Minister Stephen Harper to former students of Indian residential schools was long overdue, but must be followed by action to keep things moving forward, says a University of Lethbridge professor who's published numerous works on the issue.

Brian Titley, an educational historian, watched the live broadcast this week with great interest.

"I thought it was a significant historical event, because 30 years ago or 40 years ago it was something that would not have happened. There wasn't even the knowledge out there that this kind of stuff had gone on. Nobody had written about it, nobody had spoken about it."

One of his books, the 1986 volume, "A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada," was among the first to be written in Canada about Indian policy. It focused on policy including residential schools under Scott's leadership, who was deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs for 20 years.

It was Scott who said in a speech, "Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian problem." In 1920, he made it mandatory for all native children between the ages of seven and 15 to attend residential schools. Campbell brought Christian missions from mainstream churches "to take the Indian out of the Indian." Titley said Scott's actions reflected the mindset of his countrymen.

"He was responsible for all kinds of repressive action — it was pretty nasty," he said. "But, you can never blame one individual, because the things he said in many ways represented the outlook of Canadians at the time. He was part of the elite and he was an articulate spokesman for the attitudes that existed at the time. And it was one of assimilation, radical assimilation, and certainly they saw these schools as part of that process."

Titley said an aspect of the legacy of residential schools that was missing from the apology was forced conversion to Christianity.

"We now have this huge compensation package, which I think is worthwhile, costing us something like \$2 billion," he said. "My problem is that the taxpayer is basically paying for this — which is fine, I think we need to. But the churches have really escaped responsibility to a large extent there, and I don't think that that's right. Because when you look at the abuse, the abuses that took place were largely the work of employees of the church.

"And the churches were aware that these individuals were doing it, and I know of no instance where any church authority handed over their own members, their own employees, to the justice system saying, 'this person has abused children, please arrest him and charge him.' That, to my knowledge, has never happened. So it's only when they get caught that they apologize."

Titley said he perceived the speeches made in the House of Commons to be genuine and powerful — a step in the right direction.

"If you look at the way Canadian history was done, back in the 1960s and even into the 1970s when I came to Canada, I came in 1967, aboriginal people weren't there. They weren't even in the history."

"They'd get a mention in the fur trade, or the fact that they met Jacques Cartier when he arrived in the St. Lawrence. But I do think that there has been a total rethinking of the way we do history and rethinking about what's important in history and I would say the same not just about aboriginal people but about women, and about the working class, and about minorities whose histories didn't even exist until about the last two or three decades. The old way was all about great men, railways and nation-building."

Residential schools were concentrated in the Prairies, one reason being that up until the mid-1880s, aboriginal people were the majority of the population on the Prairies and in B.C., which made government authorities nervous.

"One official called J.M. McCrae actually proposed after the (Northwest) Rebellion that they expand the number of residential schools as a way of taking the children hostage for the guarantee of the good behaviour of the parents." The big-rethinking about residential schools began after the Second World War, with a Parliamentary inquiry into the Indian Act. One of the things proposed, Titley explained, was a policy of integration for education which led to a national push through the 1950s and '60s to take Indian children off reserves to go to school with the rest of Canadian children. The cost of maintaining residential schools was prohibitive, as well, which reinforced the emerging feeling that segregation was not working. Even though very few scandals had come forward, the schools began to be phased out, with most of them gone by the 1970s.

To move forward, Titley says, the government needs to re-define its role in Indian Affairs, but do it in harmony with aboriginal people.

"Unfortunately, it was never a genuine partnership, it was always something that was imposed, with models of control and authority. I think that we have to get rid of that, any kind of paternalism has to go, and I think what we need is dialogue, partnership and a kind of good will. And we can do this for two good reasons — it's the action that follows the apology, and you can also make an argument just based on social justice. If people are going to live on reserves,

then I think there has to be some model of economic development to make life meaningful. People need work.” Titley believes the level of public ignorance regarding residential schools is waning to a degree, but is still too great. Academics, he feels, could do more writing for public consumption in order to help raise awareness.

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