

Part 1

Propaganda, Mind Control, and Undue Influence in Colonial Canada

Propaganda has always been part of colonialism. The Canadian government has used propaganda as a tactic to shape non-Indigenous views of Indigenous peoples and create a climate that enables the theft of land, children, and resources through mass displacement, starvation, suppression of culture and language, outlawing of ceremonies, assimilation attempts, and ongoing human rights violations.¹ The term propaganda first came into use in 1622 by the Catholic church to refer to its missionary activities, which sought to propagate, or spread, the Catholic faith to those considered heathens,² including the First Peoples of North America. The term now refers to the intentional spreading of information “in a biased and misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view.”³

According to Steven Hassan, propaganda is connected to mind control. Mind control is a “specific set of methods and techniques ... that influence how a person thinks, feels, and acts.”⁴ Colonial propaganda falls under the umbrella of mind control because it is a form of information control and thought control that aims to disrupt the “authentic identity”⁵ of individuals and groups, supplanting them with colonial ones. While the key targets of colonial mind control are First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, it also takes aim at the non-Indigenous public to foster dehumanizing and denigrating views of Indigenous peoples to legitimize immoral state actions.

As a form of information control, propaganda involves deception and the withholding of and/or distortion of vital information. As a



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Beginning in 1925, CN's Colonization and Agriculture Department exploited the myth of terra nullius (that Canada was the land of no one) to attract European settlers to Canada.

1 Cindy Blackstock, *Mind Control and Colonization*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYHuBgR-Otk&t=3350s>
 2 American Historical Association. "The Story of Propaganda." [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gj-round-table-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-\(1944\)/the-story-of-propaganda](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gj-round-table-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-(1944)/the-story-of-propaganda)
 3 *Oxford English Dictionary*
 4 Freedom of Mind Resource Centre, "Steven Hassan's BITE Model of Authoritarian Control": <https://freedomofmind.com/cult-mind-control/bite-model/>
 5 Authentic identity, for Hassan, refers to a divine spirit or essence everyone is born with; this essence is not tied to any particular religious or spiritual practice. *Mind Control and Colonization* (32:15): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYHuBgR-Otk&t=3350s>

form of thought control, propaganda is used to persuade people to adopt a “new ‘map of reality;” reducing complex ideas to clichés and buzz words, manipulating memory, and organizing people into “us” versus “them.” When used unethically, these elements, among others, work together to corrupt a person’s ability to think rationally and act independently.⁶

Canadian politicians, the media, and other influencers use propaganda to dehumanize Indigenous peoples and promote the fiction that Canada is a benevolent actor in relation to First

of the system of Indian Residential Schools, is a prime example of this sort of propaganda.⁷ While some call this “whitewashing history,” this is not entirely accurate, as it also serves to erase non-Indigenous contemporaries who opposed the wrongdoing. For example, Canada retaliated against whistleblower Peter Henderson Bryce when his report documenting the poor health conditions in residential schools swept across the front pages of newspapers in 1907, ensuring his memory was erased from the official history.⁸

Other attempts to maintain the fiction that Canada is a fair and benevolent country come to us as outright lies. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s assertion during the 2021 English-language leaders’ debate that Canada was not taking Indigenous children to court when, in fact, it was doing exactly that the very next day, falls into this category.⁹



By warping history and distorting the reality of ongoing human rights violations, Canada encourages non-Indigenous Canadians to adopt a map of reality that denies Canada’s colonial history and stifles critical thinking. This may help to explain why we often hear non-Indigenous Canadians asking why Indigenous people cannot just “get over” residential schools, and how outrage

about discoveries of children’s unmarked graves at former residential schools one week can be totally forgotten the next. People who believe colonial propaganda have no desire to understand and think critically about Canada’s past and present. This mindset is necessary to maintain colonial power relations and enable ongoing abuses.

Pam Palmater argues that colonial propaganda works to silence, villainize, and control First Nations people who intervene in the discourse of “Canada the good.” She also says

Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, making it easier for colonizers to abuse and violate human rights. Controlling the historical narrative by venerating historical figures is one way of promoting the myth of “Canada the good.” Former Prime Minister Steven Harper’s campaign to honour John A. Macdonald, one of the main architects

6 Freedom of Mind Resource Centre, “Steven Hassan’s BITE Model of Authoritarian Control”: <https://freedomofmind.com/cult-mind-control/bite-model/>
 7 John-Henry Harter, “Heritage Minutes: History, Culture, and Propaganda,” Feb. 4, 2020: <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/history-culture-and-propaganda>
 8 “Dr. P.H. Bryce,” <https://ncaringsociety.com/people-history>
 9 Nicole Bogart and Richard Madan, “Did Trudeau’s Government Take Indigenous Kids to Court?,” *CTV News*, Sept. 10, 2021: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/federal-election-2021/did-trudeau-s-government-take-indigenous-kids-to-court-1.5581348>

that “in every way, Canada has used mind control techniques,” isolating First Nations people physically and psychologically through the reserve system, residential schools, incarceration, and segregated (“Indian”) hospitals.¹⁰ Indeed, early in Canada’s formation, Indigenous peoples became “the objects of a strategy of spiritual and cultural conquest.”¹¹ By 1830, Canada instituted a formal “civilization policy” designed to control Indigenous peoples as a means of gaining access to the largest amount of land possible at the least expense.¹²

Indigenous peoples have strongly resisted the colonizer’s attempts to convert and assimilate them from the start. The resistance was so strong that

the colonizers determined they could only achieve their goals of assimilation by separating children from their families and communities and forcing the children to attend residential schools.¹³ As Murray Sinclair, commissioner of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of Canada notes, these institutions were not schools at all, but rather “centres of cultural indoctrination.”¹⁴ Psychologist Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson says that the means through which these institutions attempted to impose their Christian and European belief system, values, and behaviours on the children are not dissimilar to strategies of mind control imposed on people involved in cults: separation from families; controlled and

limited communication; punishment for minor infractions; food deprivation; physical and sexual abuse and control; long hours of forced labour; and insufficient opportunities to sleep.¹⁵

Another major way Canada asserts authoritarian control over First Nations peoples is through the *Indian Act*. Passed in 1876, and still active, this legislation was designed to control every aspect of the lives of First Nations people, including the banning of traditional dress and ceremonies, the restriction of hunting and fishing rights, the restriction of movement, and the removal of children from their families to attend residential schools. The legislation also defines who the government considers to be a registered or

“status Indian” based on blood quantum (rather than on First Nations laws and norms), a racist strategy designed to ultimately eliminate the category of “Indian” altogether. Under the *Indian Act*, First Nations people are required to choose between belonging to their band and

having “Indian status” or giving up their band membership (including any rights associated with being a band member) and having access to opportunities and benefits available to “regular Canadians.”¹⁶

The *Indian Act* has continuously changed, but at various times, First Nations peoples would lose their “Indian status” and no longer be a band member if they attended secondary or

How did undue influence enable colonialism and residential schools?

10 Pam Palmater, “Mind Control and Colonization” (1:11:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYHuBgR-Otk&t=3350s>

11 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939*, Volume 1, p. 25: https://ehprnh2m-wo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume_1_History_Part_1_English_Web.pdf

12 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

13 Harvard Divinity School, Religion and Public Life, “Residential Schools of Canada”: <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/case-studies/violence-peace/residential-schools-canada>

14 As cited in TRC, Vol. 1, p. VII.

15 Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson (2006), “The Residential School Experience: Syndrome or Historic Trauma,” *Pimatisiwin*, 4(1): 1–28.

16 Assembly of First Nations (2020), “Enfranchisement.” <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/12-19-02-06-AFN-Fact-Sheet-Enfranchisement-final-reviewed.pdf>

post-secondary school, worked in the medical or legal profession, worked off reserve, became a Christian minister, or join the armed forces. This process of becoming a “regular Canadian” was called enfranchisement, and it meant that a First Nations person was a “person under law,” and could vote in elections, own property off-reserve, and have access to other benefits that were not available to “status Indians.”¹⁷ First Nations women who married a “non-status” man between 1869 and 1985 were automatically enfranchised, which means both they and their children were stripped of their “Indian status” and were no longer band members. This had the effect of shrinking the number of people who were considered “Indians” under Canadian law.¹⁸

By imposing the category of “Indian status” on First Nations, the *Indian Act* asserts undue influence over First Nations people.

Undue influence, a legal term used to refer to methods and techniques used to gain exploitative or coercive control over others, is “any act of persuasion that overcomes the free will and judgement of another person.”¹⁹ Steven Hassan argues that when people are under undue influence, they think they are making free choices and thinking clearly, but they are actually “living in a bubble of indoctrination” and are taught to ignore or consider illegitimate any information or person that contradicts their beliefs. When used as

“Undue influence ... refer[s] to methods and techniques used to gain exploitative or coercive control over others.”

a method of authoritarian control, undue influence can undermine the ability of “even the brightest, educated and most functional people” to “think rationally and act independently.”

²⁰ Unlike the concept of brainwashing, which suggests that a person’s beliefs and authentic identity can be erased and replaced, Steven Hassan argues that being under undue influence is more like experiencing a dissociative disorder. A new identity is created under undue influence, suppressing a person’s “authentic identity”

in ways that make them question past beliefs and their own identity.²¹

Pam Palmater writes about the ways she has experienced the impacts of undue influence through the imposition of “the externally-imposed, legislative identity of ‘Indian’” onto her “internal identity” as a Mi’kmaw woman.²² She writes that individual Mi’kmaw identity is inseparable from the existence of the Mi’kmaw Nation,

and that neither citizen nor Nation can exist without recognition and support of each other. The individual Mi’kmaw identity is tied to “the collective identity of the Nation” and carries with it special benefits as well as important responsibilities and obligations. By tying identity to “individual rights and benefits” via “Indian” status, Canada has done a lot of damage to the “integral relation between citizen and Nation,” in many cases replacing traditional community membership based on culture, tradition, and

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012). *They Came for the Children*, pp. 11–12. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2012/cvrc-trcc/IR4-4-2012-eng.pdf

¹⁹ Freedom of Mind Resource Center, “Undoing Undue Influence and the BITE Model of Authoritarian Control.” <https://freedomofmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/BITE-Model-Handout-9-23-16.pdf>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Steven Hassan, *Mind Control and Colonization* (31:13): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYHuBgR-Otk&t=3350s>

²² Pam Palmater (2013), “Matm Tel-Mi’kmawi: I’m Fighting for my Mi’kmaw Identity,” p. 148: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1498366017?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>

relationality with *Indian Act* band membership, which divides communities through band enrolment regulations and internalization of colonially-imposed identity.²³ Palmater writes that, by interfering in Mi'kmaw identity, Canada works to displace the individual's responsibilities and obligations to the Nation, making people vulnerable to "the enticements of power and money offered by governments and others to look the other way, or make deals that negatively impact our people but benefit us as individuals."²⁴

Coercive control and undue influence are often evident in decisions made by First Nations leaders who make deals with governments that go against their community's best interests, maintain uneven colonial relationships, suppress First Nations ways of knowing, and prevent the possibility of true self-determination. For example, Dean Neu argues that Canada controls First Nations through funding arrangements with Band Councils that reinforce subservient relationships, entrench stereotypes (e.g., First

Nations cannot be trusted with money), and discourage biting the hand that feeds.²⁵ To quell resistance, Canada retaliates against high profile Indigenous advocates and limits the methods through which First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples can resist by implementing official procedures that promise to achieve change – such as negotiations, inquiries, and inquests – but get shelved once public pressure dies down.

Disrupting colonial thought patterns – whether imposed through the residential school system, modern-day propaganda, or undue influence – is crucial for affirming First Nations ways of knowing and enabling true self-determination.

Part 2 in this series applies Steven Hassan's BITE Model of Authoritarian Control to enable a deeper understanding of the specific methods of influence and control used by colonizers and discusses how to evaluate levels of influence based on Hassan's Influence Continuum. Part 3 in this series discusses strategies for identifying and disrupting colonial thought control patterns.

23 Ibid, pp. 149–150.

24 Ibid.

25 Dean Neu (2003), *Accounting for Genocide*.

This is Part 1 of 3 in the series, **Mind Control and Colonization**

Watch for: **Part 2 | Understanding Colonial Mind Control Patterns using the BITE Model and Influence Continuum**

Part 3 | Strategies for Overcoming Colonial Mind Control



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