

Is Harper's Canada a "Genocide"-Free Zone?

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, July 30, 2013

<https://politicsrespun.org/2013/07/is-harpers-canada-a-genocide-free-zone/>



The CMHR: a "genocide"-free zone.

Genocide is a pretty serious word. It invokes the Holocaust, Pol Pot, Rwanda and some other high profile human eradication attempts.

But Canada, being Canada these days, is loathe to admit that it had any part in any kind of genocide. No. Not us. We're so nice.

But the Canadian Museum for Human Rights will not be using the word when it comes to our historical "treatment" of the first peoples. Since the museum is part of the federal government's propaganda wing, I can understand why it is avoiding the word. While a museum spokesperson said the Harper-appointed board did not make that call, staff did, this would not be the first instance of federal civil servants engaging in self-censorship during the Harper regime.

A number of commenters at the article make some interesting points.

1. One notes that if our definition of genocide is too broad (like presumably [the UN's](#)), then we will have to acknowledge too many genocides which will make the word meaningless. The last part is a non sequitur. What if there actually have been dozens or hundreds of genocides attempted? That wouldn't make any one genocide attempt less significant, but more broadly indict our race as genocidal, thereby more likely leading to more awareness of why we are so sick as a species. We don't have to have merely a few genocides for them to be important. We don't need to preclude others from being genocides out of fear that those affected by the Holocaust, for instance, would be offended.
2. Another person suggested that it isn't genocide if there are no death camps. If this were a

reasonable standard, genocidal maniacs would merely need to skip actual death camps in their mass slaughter.

One thing I keep in mind when people argue that Canada's treatment of the first peoples is not genocidal is to consider how much people could be using separate arguments to avoid having to deal with the extent of destruction our nation visited upon people. If it's uncomfortable to our self-concept that we tried to eradicate a people/culture/etc., we can sometimes come up with other arguments, like the semantic ones above.

It's hard to know what's in people's hearts, but it's easy to check to see if they appreciate the gravity of the issues they sometimes dance around.

"What matters in genocide is not that it's a lot of killing," said University of Manitoba sociology Prof. Andrew Woolford. "What matters is that it's an assault against a group, on their ability to persist as a group."

Underlying the genocide question are persistent allegations -- some made by former museum staff -- the CMHR's federally appointed board routinely interferes in content decisions in an effort to tell more "positive," politically palatable stories.

[Spokeswoman Maureen] Fitzhenry said the decision to avoid the word "genocide" was made by senior staff, not the board.

She said the museum will not shy away from exploring Canada's colonial legacy, including the epidemic of missing and slain aboriginal women, the disastrous relocation of Manitoba's Sayisi Dene people, land and treaty rights and residential schools.

- from [CMHR rejects 'genocide' for native policies](#)