

# The Intergenerational Trauma of Separating Indigenous Children from their Families: A History and Analysis of the Postwar Period

The postwar era marked a period of significant social and political change in many countries, including a renewed focus on child welfare and the expansion of foster care and adoption systems. However, for Indigenous children, this period was also marked by a continuation of policies and practices that led to the separation of children from their families and communities. This separation had a devastating impact on Indigenous families and communities, and the intergenerational trauma caused by this practice continues to reverberate today.

In the postwar era, many countries experienced a baby boom and an increase in the number of children in need of foster care and adoption. This led to a greater emphasis on adoption as a means of providing permanent homes for these children. However, Indigenous children were often disproportionately represented in foster care and adoption systems, due to a number of factors, including:

- **Poverty and discrimination:** Indigenous families were often living in poverty and facing discrimination, which made it difficult for them to provide for their children.
- **Government policies:** Government policies, such as the Indian Adoption Project in the United States, actively encouraged the adoption of Indigenous children by non-Indigenous families.

- **Cultural misunderstandings:** Child welfare professionals often had little understanding of Indigenous cultures and values, which led to misunderstandings and conflicts with Indigenous families.

As a result of these factors, many Indigenous children were separated from their families and placed in foster care or adopted by non-Indigenous families. This separation had a profound impact on these children, as they were often subjected to cultural genocide and assimilationist practices that aimed to erase their Indigenous identity.



## A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World

by Margaret D. Jacobs

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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The separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities has had a devastating intergenerational impact. Children who were separated from their families often experienced:

- **Loss and grief:** The loss of family and community can be a traumatic experience for children, leading to feelings of abandonment, isolation,

and depression.

- **Cultural disruption:** Separation from their families and communities can disrupt children's cultural identity and sense of belonging. This can lead to feelings of shame and alienation.
- **Attachment disorders:** Children who are separated from their primary caregivers at an early age may develop attachment disorders, which can make it difficult for them to form healthy relationships later in life.
- **Increased risk of mental health problems:** Indigenous children who are separated from their families are at an increased risk of developing mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The intergenerational trauma caused by the separation of Indigenous children from their families has had a ripple effect on Indigenous communities. The loss of children has weakened families and communities, and the trauma experienced by these children has been passed down through generations. This has contributed to the ongoing cycle of poverty, addiction, and violence that plagues many Indigenous communities today.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the harm caused by the separation of Indigenous children from their families. This has led to a number of efforts to address this intergenerational trauma and promote reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous society.

These efforts include:

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commissions:** Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been established in a number of countries to investigate the history of child separation and its impact on Indigenous

communities. These commissions have provided a platform for Indigenous survivors to share their stories and for non-Indigenous society to learn about the devastating consequences of these policies.

- **Apology and reparations:** In a number of countries, governments have issued formal apologies for the separation of Indigenous children from their families. Some governments have also provided reparations to survivors of these policies.
- **Cultural revitalization:** Indigenous communities are working to revitalize their cultures and languages, which were often suppressed during the era of child separation. This is an important step in healing the intergenerational trauma caused by these policies.
- **Family reunification:** There are ongoing efforts to reunite Indigenous children who were separated from their families. This can be a complex and challenging process, but it can be a powerful way to heal the trauma caused by this separation.

The separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities during the postwar era was a traumatic event that has had a devastating impact on Indigenous families and communities. The intergenerational trauma caused by this separation continues to reverberate today, contributing to the ongoing cycle of poverty, addiction, and violence that plagues many Indigenous communities. However, there is hope for reconciliation and healing. Through truth and reconciliation commissions, apologies and reparations, cultural revitalization, and family reunification, we can work to address the intergenerational trauma caused by this history and build a more just and equitable future for Indigenous peoples.

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
- United Nations. (2009). Convention on the Rights of the Child.



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