

Residential Schools and Reconciliation: Canada Confronts Its History by J.R. Miller

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[See table of contents](#)

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included this figure, Macdonell suggests, as a veiled metaphor for Edward Walker's syphilis-stricken state, and his corresponding yearning for deliverance.

Pop-culture-savvy readers will be familiar with the concept of figurative "Easter eggs"—hidden messages and "bonus" features included in modern forms of entertainment such as movies and video games that people "hunt" for in much

the same way that children hunt for actual Easter eggs. Macdonell reveals that St. Mary's Anglican Church is replete with such treats, with the aforementioned window being only one example. For this reason, and many others, *Ghost Storeys* is unusually enjoyable.

Denis McKim
Douglas College

Residential Schools and Reconciliation *Canada Confronts Its History*

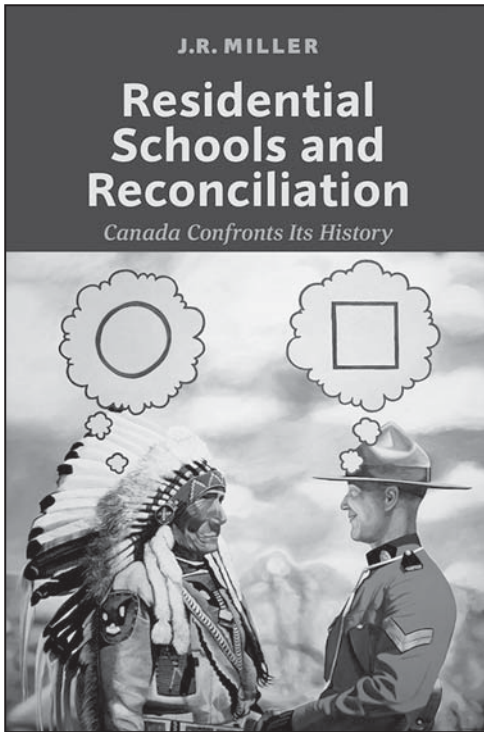
By J.R. Miller

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. 348 pages. \$39.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-1-4875-0218-8 (utorontopress.com)

The cover of *Residential Schools and Reconciliation: Canada Confronts Its History* by well-known historian J.R. Miller depicts a painting by artist David Garneau entitled *Not to Confuse Politeness with Agreement* in which an Indigenous man faces a Mountie. Both figures have thought bubbles over their heads, though one contains a square and the other a circle. This is an apt choice for the cover of a book that focuses on the complicated and divisive topic of Canada's recent attempts by the government, churches, and Canadian public to grapple with the harmful legacy of residential schooling and how best to "reconcile" that past. Miller argues that though many strides have been made in advancing reconciliation, that ultimately "it is still incomplete" (7), in no small part due to the inability of many non-Indigenous Canadians to move past their view of Canada as a benevolent nation that has supposedly looked out for the best interests of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, we are living in a time in which Prime Minister

Stephen Harper apologized for Canada's role in the residential school system, calling it "a sad chapter in our history" and then, only months later at the G20 Summit, Harper claimed that Canada had "no history of colonialism." Regardless, Miller still holds out hope for the potential of reconciliation, however halting the process has been over the past thirty years, focusing on "how historical understanding has evolved and how Canadians have struggled to come to grips with the negative aspects of their country's past" (6).

Miller, professor emeritus of history at the University of Saskatchewan, is the author of many works about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada including *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*. In *Residential Schools and Reconciliation* Miller begins where *Shingwauk's Vision* finished, during the period after the dismantling of the residential school system. Miller asks his readers to evaluate the historical context of reconciliation, keeping in mind both obstacles



and possibilities, and that reconciliation is a process in which the Canadian government has not been keen to become involved (at least until very recently and even then, in limited ways).

The book is divided into three sections. The first, entitled “Exposing the Problem,” provides a brief overview of the history and creation of the school system that began in seventeenth-century New France and ended with the closure of the last residential school in 1996. During that period the school system exposed over 150,000 children to physical, sexual, emotional, and cultural abuse and, for thousands, even death. It would not be until the 1980s that some of the churches began to apologize for their role in the school system. Miller explains though that it would be events like Oka which led to the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peo-

ples (RCAP) that would bring residential schools into the public eye. Interestingly, Miller details how the terms of reference for RCAP made no mention of residential schools, despite RCAP’s finding that residential schools “have had devastating consequences in every aspect of Aboriginal life and society” (50). However, it would be court cases, including class action suits, that ultimately made the government take steps toward reconciliation, beginning with what Miller describes as a deeply flawed dispute resolution process.

Section Two, entitled “Finding a Solution,” details how dispute resolution eventually transitioned into the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. In this section Miller outlines how the process worked, how settlements were calculated (both the Common Experience Payment which all approved applicants received, as well as the Independent Assessment Process which used a point system to assess harm). Much time is spent in this section on how these processes retraumatized and dehumanized former students.

Section Three, entitled “Redress and Reconciliation,” begins with the aforementioned 2008 apology by Stephen Harper. Miller stresses that Harper (and many government and church officials) “saw the apology as closing a sad chapter of Canada’s history rather than beginning a new one on reconciliation” (202). It would not be until the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that a more concerted effort at reconciliation would begin, and Miller analyzes the TRC’s processes and findings in detail.

Based on extensive archival sources and numerous interviews with politicians, former students, church officials and others, *Residential Schools and Reconciliation* provides a timely, comprehensive overview that will be of interest not only to academic

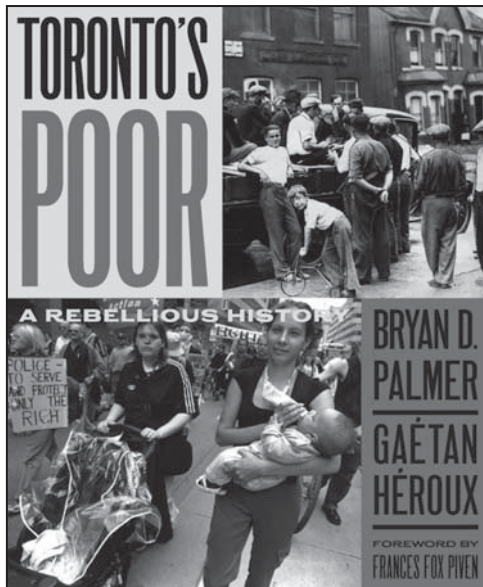
historians, but to many other disciplines and the general reader as well who will find the book to be well-written and easy to follow. The book is detailed, objective, and provides the much-needed historical context for reconciliation. *Residential Schools and Reconciliation* shows us that time and time again Indigenous peoples have been excluded from decisions that have in turn had a profound and often damaging impact and that there is potential for reconciliation efforts to be equally flawed. Miller stresses that “Canadians cannot approach reconciliation thinking that fine words, amicable gestures, and a few measures in line with TRC calls to action are enough” (268).

The book would benefit though from an exploration of this argument in more detail. We hear very little in *Residential Schools and Reconciliation* from the critics and skeptics of reconciliation. Many would argue that reconciliation is going to be a much rougher ride than is depicted here

and that reconciliation is not just an Indigenous issue, but a Canadian issue (something not always obvious in the book), that extends far beyond addressing the legacy of residential schooling. The difference between reconciliation and decolonization is also not fully explored, a missed opportunity in a conclusion that largely repeats previous material. These shortcomings, however, do not take away from the important contribution that *Residential Schools and Reconciliation* makes toward an understanding of how Canadians have evolved from clinging to the myth of a benevolent past, to a more nuanced view of how Canada may be able to move toward “true reconciliation” in which “economic and social equality is accorded to Aboriginal people” (269).

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Toronto's Poor *A Rebellious History*

By Bryan D. Palmer and Gaétan Héroux

Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, 2016. 544 pages. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN 9781771132817
(www.btlbooks.com)

In this ambitious and comprehensive book, Bryan Palmer and Gaétan Héroux have undertaken a mammoth effort to tell the story of Toronto’s poor, a population understudied in both a historical and contemporary sense. The title of the book—*A Rebellious History*—is thus doubly apt, both because it outlines in painstaking detail the long tradition of resistance by the economically marginalized in Toronto,