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'I don't need any more education': Senator Lynn Beyak, residential school denialism, and attacks on truth and reconciliation in Canada

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ABSTRACT

In 2017, Lynn Beyak, a Canadian Senator, delivered a controversial speech defending Canada's Indian Residential School system (1883–1996) as being 'well-intentioned.' Made shortly after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report to show Canadians the evidence of how residential schooling for Indigenous children and youth constituted genocide, the Senator's speech sparked national debate. This article historicizes and theorizes the role of denialism in colonial settings to argue that speech acts such as Beyak's can be understood as a discursive strategy used by colonizers to legitimize and defend their material power, privilege, and profit. The article examines Beyak's public comments as well as 100 support letters she received and published on her Senate website to show how they embrace anti-Indigenous racism generally and employ residential school denialism specifically to attack and undermine truth and reconciliation efforts in Canada.

KEYWORDS

Residential schools; denialism; settler colonialism; truth and reconciliation

On 7 March 2017, Lynn Beyak delivered a controversial speech in the Canadian Senate defending the Indian Residential School system as being 'well-intentioned.' In her speech, the Conservative Senator argued that instead of dwelling on the mistreatment and abuse experienced by many of the 150,000 Indigenous children and youth who attended residential schools in Canada between 1883 and 1996, people should focus on all the 'good' the schools accomplished in terms of assimilating Indigenous peoples into Canadian society. The Senator explained that it was her intent to speak 'in memory' of the 'kindly' residential school staff whose 'remarkable works' and 'good deeds' have gone unrecognized because they are too often 'overshadowed by negative reports.' Though Beyak admitted that 'mistakes were made' at residential schools, she used the majority of her speech to insist that an emphasis on the system's positives will help 'Canada's native people' to thrive 'as victors, not victims.'¹

Beyak's speech, made only a year after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its final report to show Canadians the evidence of how residential schooling constituted 'cultural genocide,' sparked an intense public controversy.² The

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Senator's attempt to put a positive spin on the system – that even Stephen Harper, the Conservative prime minister who appointed Beyak, called a 'sad chapter in Canada's history' – was not appreciated by many, including her fellow Senator and the former chair of the TRC Murray Sinclair.³ In response, Sinclair suggested that those engaging in residential school denialism are 'dim-witted' and pose a serious barrier to meaningful reconciliation.⁴ Like other kinds of denialism, residential school denialism is not the outright denial of the system's existence, but rather the rejection or misrepresentation of basic facts about residential schooling to undermine truth and reconciliation efforts in Canada.⁵ Even the Anglican Church, which ran a third of the schools across the country, including the Pelican Lake Residential School near Dryden, Ontario (Treaty 3 territory) where Beyak lives, made a public statement clarifying that 'nothing good' came from the schools. The church noted that while a 'small minority of survivors' speak of some positive school memories on an individual level, those personal experiences must be understood as occurring in the context of a genocidal school system designed to 'kill the Indian in the child.'⁶

Despite facing wide-spread criticism for her comments, Beyak refused to apologize. The Senator stood behind her 'positive' perspective, even attacking criticism of her speech as 'fake news and exaggeration.'⁷ When confronted by reporters, Beyak doubled down on her defence of residential schooling, arguing 'there are shining examples from sea to sea of people who owe their lives to the schools.' When pressed on how Indigenous peoples, especially the many former students who were mentally, physically, and sexually abused in the schools, might feel about such statements, Beyak elaborated: 'I've suffered with them ... I appreciate their suffering more than they'll ever know [but] the best way to heal is to move forward together. Not to blame, not to point fingers, not to live in the past.' Asked directly if she had read the TRC report to fully understand the history of the schools and the intergenerational trauma still experienced by many Indigenous peoples today, Beyak quipped: 'I don't need any more education.'⁸

The Senator's comments also catalyzed further incidents of anti-Indigenous racism and residential school denialism in Canada that historian Matthew Sears calls 'The Beyak Effect.'⁹ After Beyak's speech, conservative pundits defended Beyak in the press, and some people posted 'IT'S OK TO BE WHITE' signs as well as posters defending residential schools on university campuses across the country that regurgitated Beyak's denialist talking points, including overemphasizing the system's positive attributes and questioning the validity of the TRC's findings.¹⁰ In short, Beyak's speech emboldened some settler Canadians to declare and defend their denialism publicly. As a result, Beyak was removed from a Senate committee on Indigenous issues in April 2017, but she retained her seat in the Red Chamber. While not wanting former students of residential schools to dwell on their victimization at the hands of church and state officials, Beyak quickly constructed herself as a victim of attacks on 'free speech.' Beyak dug in and used her Senate website to post the full text of her speech as well as additional personal statements and a selection of support letters (mostly emails) that she received.

Beyak's speech, statements of defence, and the support letters she posted online in 2017 deserve critical analysis in today's era of truth and reconciliation, a time of reckoning with Canada's colonial past to build stronger relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians.¹¹ It is tempting to stereotype those who engage in residential school denialism as ignorant bigots or to simply ignore them. Silence, some say, starves denialists of

their sustenance: dialogue. Sinclair, however, suggests a different approach that I, as a settler scholar committed to truth and reconciliation, build on in this article. Sinclair argues that 'it is not enough for us to simply yell at [those engaging in denialism] and knock them down.' Instead, we must try to understand their reasoning and 'show that they are wrong.' He elaborates, 'I've always been convinced that while we may not deal with all of the [denialists], we can at least take away their tools.' By challenging the comments of high-profile people such as Beyak, Sinclair is hopeful that denialists 'will have a diminishing population of people who will believe them.'¹² Sinclair, in short, calls for a strategy of engagement to disprove and discredit denialism.

Taking away the 'tools' of residential school denialism requires a better understanding of those tools and how and why some people employ and defend them. To advance such an understanding, this article interrogates the 2017 Beyak controversy as a way of comprehending and confronting not just Beyak's comments but the phenomenon of residential school denialism generally. To begin, I historicize residential school denialism and contextualize it in terms of recent literature. I also theorize denialism in relation to the work of anti-colonial thinkers. Specifically, I engage with Albert Memmi's psychological portrait of the 'colonizer who accepts' to highlight the role that denialism plays in justifying ongoing colonialism.¹³ In this context, I then analyse Beyak's comments and the 100 support letters she posted on her website, and I suggest that the denialism they deploy is neither new nor surprising. Instead, I argue that residential school denialism and attacks on truth and reconciliation, by Beyak and others, can be understood as a common strategy in which colonizers use denialist discourse to legitimize and defend their material power, privilege, and profit. Building on Sinclair's suggested approach, this article shows how critical engagement with the discursive strategies – the tools – that Beyak and her followers used can help check the growing trend of residential school denialism and support truth and reconciliation efforts.

Historicizing residential school denialism

Residential school denialism is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, settlers downplaying the destructive effects of residential schooling for Indigenous peoples has a long history in what is today known as Canada. Eric Taylor Woods has noted that for much of the system's 100 year history, church and state officials 'likened the residential schools to a humanitarian – even sacred – enterprise designed to save Indigenous communities from extinction in the face of an ostensibly higher form of civilization.'¹⁴ Even when confronted with evidence of horrific conditions in many of the schools documented in the annual reports of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), officials clung to a 'humanitarian' discourse and discredited the system's detractors, especially Indigenous parents who raised concerns about the first schools in the 1880s. In 1907, as the system was expanding across the country, Dr. Peter Bryce, a DIA medical official, even released a report drawing attention to the abnormally high rate of student death and disease in many residential schools that he suggested was exacerbated by overcrowding, poor nutrition, and a lack of proper sanitation.¹⁵ The DIA buried the doctor's report.¹⁶ As a medical expert, Bryce tried to blow the whistle on residential schooling in its initial phase, but DIA officials chose to selectively focus on the 'positive' results the system was having – or, more correctly, that they hoped it would have – in disrupting Indigenous lifeways and supporting

continued settler colonialism and Canadian nation-building.¹⁷ It was not until the 1940s, argues Woods, that 'the gap between the benign representation of the residential schools and their malign reality had become so wide that it was no longer possible to ignore.'¹⁸ Even still, many officials continued to promote a positive representation of residential schooling as being well-intentioned. Despite the system's obvious failings, even according to the DIA's own experts, residential schools continued to operate in many parts of Canada for another 50 years. The last school closed in 1996.¹⁹

It was not until former students published accounts of their abuse at the schools and started organizing for redress that the dominant narrative about residential schooling started to shift. Some students admittedly recounted positive experiences, but by the 1970s and 1980s more former students were speaking out about the cruelty, abuse, and poor conditions they endured in schools across the country.²⁰ As more students spoke publicly about their negative experiences they inspired others to break their silence too, eventually sparking a movement led by thousands of former students seeking an apology and compensation for their time spent in the schools. With many officials still denying any wrongdoing in the 1980s and 1990s, 86,000 students forced the issue by launching one of the largest class-action lawsuits in Canadian history, which the Government of Canada chose to settle out of court by agreeing to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA, 2006).²¹ As part of the settlement, the federal government officially apologized to former students in 2008 and established an independent commission, which became the TRC, to research and raise national awareness about the Indian Residential School system. As part of its research, the TRC consulted thousands of government and church records and gathered testimony from more than 6,000 witnesses, including school employees and many former students. The goal of the commission was to present evidence that would 'reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy' of residential schooling.²²

The TRC published its final report in 2015. The conclusions shocked many Canadians but confirmed what generations of Indigenous peoples already understood:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as 'cultural genocide.'²³

The commission made clear, however, that 'shaming and pointing out wrongdoing' was not the TRC's mandate. Instead, the 'focus on truth determination was intended to lay the foundation for the important question of reconciliation.'²⁴ According to the report, reconciliation 'requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours.' The commissioners thus emphasized, 'Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one.'²⁵ Many Canadians have embraced the challenge put forward by the TRC and are, in differing ways, engaged in reckoning with Canada's colonial past to build new relationships of mutual respect with Indigenous peoples to aid reconciliation.²⁶ Others, however, are choosing to downplay, dispute, and/or discredit the commission's findings to reject reconciliation and defend the colonial status quo. To be sure,

confronting the legacies of genocide and committing to what Stó:lō writer Lee Maracle calls 'continued growth and transformation' is not easy, but it is the task that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living in what is currently Canada are being challenged to undertake in the era of truth and reconciliation.²⁷

Theorizing residential school denialism

Scholarship in the fields of genocide studies, Indigenous studies, and settler colonial studies can help shed light on how different countries around the world, including Canada, are dealing with the legacies of genocide and addressing the phenomenon of denialism specifically. In terms of better understanding the relationship between genocide and denialism, Adam Jones argues that the manipulation of memory and history often occurs in the aftermath of genocides. In looking at Germany's grappling with the Jewish Holocaust, he shows how a 'wilful amnesia' and 'politicized forgetting' emerged in the immediate post-war period that served to distance the country and its citizens from its recent Nazi past. In reflecting on the psychology of denialism, Jones argues that 'individual and collective narcissism play a pivotal role in buttressing denial; in many contexts a denialist stance heads off cognitive dissonance between one's preferred view of self and country, and the grimmer reality.' He also points out that 'there is also usually an element of material self-interest' in denialism.²⁸ Canadian genocide scholars such as Andrew Woolford and David B. MacDonald agree. They argue that Canada's treatment of Indigenous peoples, particularly in regards to the Indian Residential School system, constitutes genocide, a fact some Canadians refuse to acknowledge to avoid feeling guilty and responsible for redress.²⁹ Denialism can thus be understood as part of a conscious or unconscious strategy of selectively remembering the past to protect one's power and privilege in the present and, most importantly, to perpetuate it into the future.

Insights from genocide studies overlap with lessons from Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies on the role of denialism in colonial settings. Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt contend that Canadians are in denial about the past and present of settler colonialism. They argue that Canadians seek refuge in myths of benevolence that justify colonial policy towards Indigenous peoples as being well-intentioned, even necessary.³⁰ Indeed, Maracle argues that 'Canadians have a myth [of innocence] about themselves, and it seems this myth is inviolable.'³¹ To be Canadian, according to Maracle, 'is to be sunk in deep denial.'³² Leanne Betasamosake Simpson contends that a 'large number of Canadians will do everything they can [... including perpetuating colonial mythology] to preserve the social, cultural, and economic systems of the country, even though this system is predicated on violence and dispossession of Indigenous lands and bodies.'³³ Similarly, settler scholars such as Eva Mackey, Emma Battell Lowman, and Adam J. Barker argue that Canadians must embrace the transformative possibilities of reconciliation by 'unsettling' the myths of Canada as the 'Peaceable Kingdom' and challenging 'fantasies of entitlement' that some settlers use to legitimize their 'right' to lands and resources.³⁴ In particular, Paulette Regan contends that understanding the history and ongoing legacies of residential schooling offers Canadians an 'opening' into the work of reconciliation that can facilitate dialogue and help to build reciprocal relationships with Indigenous peoples.³⁵ Framed in this way, reconciliation and reckoning with

residential school history is a challenge *and* an opportunity. Nevertheless, Maracle notes that many Canadians 'tend towards defensiveness' and choose to engage in denialism as a defensive strategy to protect their privileges.³⁶

To further theorize the role of denialism in colonial societies, it is also helpful to turn to the works of anti-colonial thinkers. Writing in response to global decolonization movements after the Second World War, authors such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi offered numerous meditations on the psychology of colonialism and decolonization.³⁷ Anti-colonial theory offers a window into the ways in which those living in colonial settlements rationalize injustice to themselves and how these psychological strategies help to legitimize and perpetuate colonialism. In particular, Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, which consists of psychological portraits of 'the colonizer' and 'the colonized', is insightful because it looks at the role of denialism in legitimizing colonialism as commonsensical.

While scholars such as Emma LaRocque have related Memmi's 'Portrait of the Colonized' to Indigenous struggles in Canada, for the purposes of this article I will focus on Memmi's 'Portrait of the Colonizer' and its applicability to settler Canadians.³⁸ Memmi argues that colonizers are daily confronted with the illegitimacy of their status. Whether colonizers are immigrants or are born in the colonies, they are always, even if only subconsciously, plagued by the question: what entitles me to live here? In the back of their minds they understand that their home is not really *their* home. It is their home *on* native land; it is not *their* native land. Indeed, colonizers are implicitly cognisant that coercion, theft, and bloody violence only recently cleared – and in some cases still clears – the way for them to travel to and take root in a new land. Moreover, fears about retribution and revenge by the colonized, often fuelled by news of anti-colonial 'protests,' 'riots,' and 'rebellions' from around the colony and across the globe, stoke a kind of ever-present anxiety.³⁹ In an attempt to resolve these unsettled feelings, colonizers devise and deploy different discursive strategies to protect their position of material privilege and to prove to themselves and to others the righteousness of their existence.

In addition to enacting specific laws and creating institutions such as ghettos, prisons, and schools to contain and control the colonized physically, Memmi contends that colonizers invent and invest themselves in mythology and racist stereotypes that they then propagate through various channels, including art and entertainment, and the writing of history. As Memmi's contemporary Fanon once remarked, 'the colonist makes history, and he knows it.'⁴⁰ Accordingly, colonizers make films and paintings and they write books, plays, and poems that bolster the supposed superiority of the colonizer while simultaneously degrading and dehumanizing the colonized.⁴¹ Colonizers produce new knowledge and disseminate it in various ways to rationalize the oppressive colonial relationship that underpins their material prosperity as natural, inevitable, and, most importantly, unchangeable, something scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call 'settler futurity.'⁴²

Although Memmi argues that all colonizers benefit from the colonial situation, he notes the different behaviour of two main groups: 'the colonizer who refuses' and 'the colonizer who accepts.' The colonizer who refuses comes to the realization that colonialism is deeply unjust and vows to challenge the oppression of the colonized and to fight for their freedom. This is no easy task because the liberation of the colonized requires colonizers to challenge and question the legitimacy of the colonial project and thus

their own existence. The colonizer's freedom is facilitated by the unfreedom of the colonized. Ending this unequal relationship works against the colonizer's own self-interest, and advocating for such a radical rupture can result in being ostracized by both the colonized – who see all colonizers as oppressors – and by other colonizers, who see those 'who refuse' as traitors and turncoats.⁴³ As a result, Memmi contends that most colonizers simply resign themselves to embrace colonialism and its benefits, becoming colonizers 'who accept.' 'Justice' and 'equality' in the colonies are threatening concepts to colonizers 'who accept' because their prosperity is predicated on prejudice and rooted in ongoing oppression of the colonized. As a result, denialism is an especially powerful tool employed by colonizers 'who accept.' Memmi argues that

to possess victory completely [colonizers] absolve [themselves] of it and the conditions under which it is attained. This explains [their] strenuous insistence, strange for [victors], on apparently futile matters. [They endeavour] to falsify history, [they rewrite] laws, [they] would extinguish memories – anything to succeed in transforming [their] usurpation into legitimacy.⁴⁴

Moreover, Memmi suggests that colonizers' 'disquiet and resulting thirst for justification' requires them to extol the virtues of their righteousness 'to the skies and to drive the usurped below the ground at the same time.'⁴⁵

Properly historicized and theorized, denialism can be understood as an effective tool for protecting the status quo in colonial settings, including in Canada. Rather than 'unsettle' the history of Canada and confront the ongoing legacies of colonization, including things like residential schools, some Canadians are employing the tools of Memmi's 'the colonizer who accepts': they deploy a denialist discourse that justifies their existence through a combination of degrading Indigenous peoples and clinging to selective and self-congratulatory accounts of the past that they think absolves them of wrongdoing and justifies their lack of support for reconciliation. In this way, Senator Beyak's comments defending residential schooling can be seen as a strategy – a tool – for downplaying the injustices of the past and present to safeguard colonial power and privilege in the unsettling time of truth and reconciliation.

Analysing Beyak's Senate speech

Drawing on the insights outlined above, I now return to analyse the 2017 Beyak controversy. I start by examining Beyak's speech in the Senate addressing 'several timely indigenous issues.' The Senator's speech promoted a whole host of ignorant and incorrect views about Indigenous peoples, including her belief that, on balance, residential schooling should be considered beneficial for Indigenous peoples. In the speech, Beyak used 'false balance' – a form of bias, often used by denialists, that suggests an issue is more balanced between opposing views than the evidence shows – to contend that the 'good' and 'bad' are equal parts of the whole residential school story.⁴⁶ She explained that people only focus on the 'bad' for political reasons and noted that it was her duty to stick up for 'the other side.' The problem with Beyak's premise is that it is not supported by evidence. Her equal weighting of 'good' and 'bad' reveals her misunderstanding of the historical consensus: that the problems of the Indian Residential School system were systemic.⁴⁷ The issue was not only the individual cases of neglect and abuse, but that for over one hundred years the government colluded with churches to operate a genocidal system that

removed children from their families, often by force, to undercut and attack Indigenous life-ways to support colonization and Canadian nation-building. Whether some former students recall positive experiences, or whether employees had benevolent intentions, does not change the genocidal effects of the system, as scholars such as MacDonald have outlined.⁴⁸

Like Memmi's 'colonizer who accepts,' however, Beyak was not concerned with the weight of historical evidence. Instead, her comments misrepresented residential school history in ways that absolved those involved, downplayed the system's disastrous effects, and championed the system overall. Beyak began her speech by launching a defence of Canadian politicians such as John A. Macdonald and Hector-Louis Langevin, who she felt were unfairly identified in the TRC report as the 'architects' of the residential school system. She supported her position by pointing to boarding schools for Indigenous children being in existence for 'decades' before Macdonald and Langevin became government officials. As a result, Beyak argued that these 'founding fathers' should not be held responsible for starting residential schooling. What Beyak saw as a smoking gun was actually proof that she had not read, or at least did not understand, the TRC's report. In fact, the first volume of the TRC's report clearly acknowledges the existence of early ad hoc boarding schools for Indigenous children, but shows how politicians such as Macdonald, supported by figures like Langevin, drew on those examples in the late 1870s and early 1880s to call for, establish, and defend a national network of federally-funded and church-run schools that became the official Indian Residential School system.⁴⁹

Beyak also argued that in signing the Numbered Treaties on the Prairies in the 1870s and 1880s, Indigenous peoples expressed a 'universal demand' for education. She points to this desire, and quotes Indigenous parents asking for education, as if to apologize for the government and churches delivering and defending a genocidal school system for over 100 years. As well, Beyak misrepresented residential school statistics to downplay the system's effects. She argued that only '31.1 per cent of the school-aged Aboriginal children were in residential schools. That also means that 68.9 per cent were not.'⁵⁰ Beyak used this statistic out of context; these figures, taken from the TRC report, were from just one year (1944–1945) and do not reflect accurate attendance percentages at the system's peak in 1956–1957 or for the system as a whole.⁵¹ Lastly, as if to undermine her earlier points, she argued that even if the schools were harmful, the system's intentions were good and that all should be forgiven in an effort to move forward: 'As with everything in life, forgiveness will go a long way in the process of reconciliation.' Beyak concluded the speech by encouraging her fellow Senators not to fall sway to attempts to 'rewrite history,' and she argued that 'a hopeful future is better than a troubled past.'⁵² In the mould of Memmi's portrait of colonizers 'who accept,' Beyak's speech used denialism to misrepresent the history of residential schooling and undermine confidence in the TRC's report and calls to action.

Analysing Beyak's statements of defence and support letters

The discursive strategies of colonizers 'who accept' are also on display in Beyak's brief statements of defence and the many support letters she received and posted online. On the 6 April 2017, a month after her speech, Beyak used her Senate website to

release a statement to thank ‘all the people who have written and phoned me in the past few weeks to express their support.’ ‘Too often,’ Beyak wrote,

a vocal minority cries foul and offence whenever a point of view is raised that does not align with their own. Meanwhile the silent majority, who are contributing to this country by working, building, and selling things, taking care of their parents and children, are left thinking they are alone.

Beyak concluded the statement with a message to her supporters: ‘You are not alone. You are the majority as has been shown to me with all the support I have received. I will continue to represent you and your views on Parliament Hill.’⁵³ The controversy only strengthened Beyak’s commitment to denialism.

Though proudly proclaiming that the majority of Canadians supported her position based on the ‘avalanche of support’ she received, the Senator was cagy when pressed for evidence of that support.⁵⁴ Beyak claimed to have received seven hundred letters that overwhelmingly supported her views. A subsequent investigation by the Senate Ethics Officer revealed that the Senator actually received 6,766 letters. Of that total number, only 2,389 supported Beyak, while 4,282, the majority, were critical of the Senator.⁵⁵ After promising to make all of the letters publicly available, Beyak only published a handful of these statements online in 2017, a total of 129. For all of Beyak’s instance on maintaining ‘balance’ in the residential school dialogue, she only published letters that unequivocally supported her comments. The support letters need more critical analysis, especially because the 100 anonymous letters dated between 8 March and 11 April 2017, in the month after Beyak’s speech, openly engaged in residential school denialism.⁵⁶ To better understand and examine the content of Beyak’s support letters and to show how the writers used the tools of denialism, I cluster and analyse the comments, drawing on Cheryl Gaver’s work on residential school denialism, into three broad categories: (1) personal knowledge, (2) ignorance and anti-Indigenous racism, and (3) world-views-in-collision.⁵⁷ The following examination reveals that those writing to support Beyak drew from all three categories to advance denialism in ways consistent with Memmi’s profile of colonizers ‘who accept.’

(1) Personal knowledge

Many of Beyak’s support letters defended residential schooling based on various kinds of personal knowledge in keeping with what Tuck and Yang refer to as ‘moves to innocence.’⁵⁸ Some authors admitted to having direct experience working in the schools, and it is clear they were taking refuge in Beyak’s comments and seeking absolution for themselves and family members. The very first letter ‘commends’ the Senator for adding ‘balance’ to the ‘historical perspective of Residential Schools’ by emphasizing “‘the good’ that many dedicated educators accomplished over the years.’ The author, Richard, had ‘a combined experience of 26 years in Aboriginal and Metis schools’ and ‘witnessed first-hand the positive anecdotes and experiences of those who gained from their attendance at Residential Schools.’⁵⁹ Others wrote to defend family members. Remi noted,

As the brother of a nun who worked in the system, and the nephew of a jesuit [sic] who worked there too, I categorically refuse to believe that all the people who worked in these

schools were as evil as they are being portrayed to be. Indeed, They [*sic*] were seeking, under the social rules that were generally accepted at the time to do good, and to help these children.⁶⁰

Similarly, D wrote to thank Beyak for making 'a public announcement about the positive contributions which some people made while working in residential schools.' The author explained: 'My grandfather was the headmaster of a Residential School (Anglican) for over 40 years.' The author admitted, 'I realize that some of the governmental policies he had to follow brought discomfort to the children who attended the school,' before clarifying, 'but there is no evidence of abuse or any wrongdoing by my grandfather.'⁶¹

While some authors defended their work or the work of family members in residential schools, others spoke of their positive observations and personal experiences with Indigenous peoples and residential schooling. Janice wrote to Beyak and explained,

My husband has worked and lived in several aboriginal communities in the north which greatly benefitted from these schools and where the people speak very highly of the care and instruction they received. We are only given one side of the story.⁶²

Theresa wrote, 'I personally saw a lot of good emanate from these schools.'⁶³ Bob worked in 'Ontario's Far North' for 27 years in healthcare and argued, based on his experience, that 'the effort was well intentioned at the time.'⁶⁴ Another writer, A, 'lived and worked' in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan for many years and 'had the opportunity to meet retired teachers of residential schools.' Based on the stories of these former residential school employees, the author concluded that they were 'all good, hardworking and well intentioned people.'⁶⁵ Similarly, R wrote: 'I know from first hand experience that the Residential schools provided a lot of good.'⁶⁶ Finally, Marcia once attended an Indigenous art exhibition in Fort McMurry, Alberta where she met 'a native artist who told me how grateful she was to the nuns and priests in her community who ran the school.'⁶⁷ All of these writers gained personal knowledge from former employees or students who spoke favourably about their time in residential schools, and thus they have a hard time accepting the truth about the system's genocidal effects.⁶⁸

Other authors experienced poor treatment at public schools for settler children and felt that the attention being paid to the abuse experienced by Indigenous students in residential schools is overblown.⁶⁹ Charles noted in his letter, 'They talk about abuse, but I can tell you that the country school I attended in the 40s was not a model of civility. Abuse was directed at me because of my families [*sic*] religion.'⁷⁰ Similarly, Ben explained: 'Everyone is talking about these physically and sexually abused aboriginal children, when the same was going on, granted perhaps to a lesser degree, in many schools throughout Canada.' Ben attended a religious college in Ontario where one of his friends was 'sexually assaulted by a professor' and that 'same professor actually attempted to abuse me on a visit to our home once.'⁷¹ Ardell argued that 'Many [teachers] were doing their best to do good.' He then recounted a personal story of corporal punishment at school in the 1940s and 1950s where 'the strap was routinely employed as a disciplinary measure,' and he argued, 'while we now look on these measures as brutal, they were quite normal for the times.'⁷² Richard also had personal experience of abuse at school. 'In 1953/54 being in grades 3 and 4,' he explained, 'I often got the strap and had my hair pulled for unknown "infractions" as did many others in my class That's just the way it was then.'⁷³ Instead of using personal experience and knowledge of abuse and

punishment in schools to develop empathy for Indigenous peoples, these authors felt that because their experiences were not being recognized, Indigenous experiences of abuse should be diminished.

Lastly, some writers commended Beyak for talking about the 'good' of residential schooling simply because it reduced their feelings of discomfort and culpability. Robert resented

the implication that I am somehow responsible for any of the collective abuses suffered by some of the children that were associated with these schools. With a very few exceptions, Residential Schools had been closed long before I was born.⁷⁴

Vic encouraged Beyak not to be intimidated by 'the righteous stampede' and argues: 'It was a different time. Thinking was different but that doesn't mean that all intentions where [*sic*] bad and evil We are not necessarily responsible for the actions of our forefathers.'⁷⁵ Bill also distanced himself from residential schooling. 'Please do not apologize for me,' he wrote, 'I was not there.'⁷⁶ Terry explained, 'History is full of past injustices and I feel no personal responsibility for the plight of first nations.'⁷⁷ Overall, in the mould of Memmi's colonizers 'who accept,' many letter writers drew on differing kinds of personal knowledge and experience to downplay the negative consequences of residential schooling and diminish feelings of personal responsibility for the ongoing legacies of colonial injustice as a way of protecting the status quo and rebuffing calls for reconciliation.

(2) Ignorance and anti-Indigenous racism

Other letter writers supported Beyak's stance on residential schooling because the Senator's denialism created space for them to voice their own ignorant views about Indigenous peoples and openly perpetuate anti-Indigenous racism. As Memmi, Lowman and Barker, and Arthur Manuel contend, ignorance and racism work to create indifference towards or to actively demean the colonized to justify the unequal relations of colonial societies.⁷⁸ In terms of displaying ignorant views, Beyak's support letters are full of incorrect assumptions. Kevin wrote, 'Your remarks to the effect that teachers and leaders involved in the programme were by and large well intentioned are obviously true. It's too bad you are under attack for speaking truthfully.'⁷⁹ Similarly, C wrote to support Beyak and explained,

I feel that the current dialogue re: this part of our history is grotesquely unbalanced. You are right to mention that it was neither the residential school employees or government [*sic*] intention to be cruel or to wipe out an entire race.⁸⁰

Again, the TRC report, drawing on historical research, presents the evidence to show that while not all employees were cruel, many were and the government's clear intention was to use the system to 'kill the Indian in the children' and bring about the end of Indigenous lifeways through coerced assimilation.⁸¹ Like Beyak, writers such as Kevin and C rely on personal belief, eschew historical evidence, and fundamentally fail to grasp a systemic critique of residential schooling in an effort to defend the system and the colonial status quo.

More concerning is the large number of letter writers who felt emboldened by Beyak's comments to espouse anti-Indigenous racism. These authors were openly hostile to Indigenous peoples. In accordance with Memmi's colonizers 'who accept,' these writers

engaged in racism to degrade and dehumanize Indigenous peoples, 'using the darkest colours to depict them.'⁸² In classic victim blaming, some writers positioned Indigenous peoples as the problem, not the ongoing effects of residential schools and intergenerational trauma. Bob argued that residential schooling 'was well intentioned at the time' and that 'Aboriginal peoples must not look to residential schools as the only reason for social dysfunction.'⁸³ Paul argued that immigrants to Canada should be 'envious' of the 'pampered aboriginals' who get 'free school, free food, free housing.' He defended his view:

I'm no anthropologist but it seems every opportunistic culture, subsistence hunter/gathers seeks to get what they can for no effort. There is always a clash between an industrial/organized farming culture that values effort as opposed to a culture that will sit and wait until the government gives them stuff. Until that happens it appears they will let everyone around them die. It's [*sic*] brutal way to live but that's how it looks to me ... I am not saying all of them are like that but right now the Canadian society guilt trip route to more money and power is golden and being opportunistic they're grabbing all the hotel room towels and silver ware [*sic*] they can.⁸⁴

Maracle attributes these kinds of ignorant and racist comments to the influence of Canada's myth of benevolence, that Canadians somehow kindly 'gave us [Indigenous peoples] things; they were kind to us.' Maracle points out, however, that 'the reality is that Canada has seized vast land tracts ... Canada took all the land but the [small] reserves it set aside for us.'⁸⁵

Paul was not the only writer to use openly hostile, anti-Indigenous racism in his letter. Heinz argued, 'If not for these devoted nuns, countless Indians would have continued to live in squalor and poverty. The intent was clearly to enable these children and adolescents to live productive lives in Canadian society.'⁸⁶ Allan noted, 'Without a doubt in some cases these schools led to a better life for some, quite possibly from alcohol related abuse at home.'⁸⁷ R also used racism to apologize for residential schooling: 'I often wonder what problems they would have today if no one learned to read or write ... no sports ... who would be naïve to think that, alcohol, drugs, incest would not have found it's [*sic*] way into the lives of the North's children.' The author, seemingly unaware of the role of colonialism and intergenerational trauma in many of these issues, then claimed: 'It's far to [*sic*] easy to blame everything on the white man and their residential schools for the way some of the native people are still acting today.'⁸⁸ These comments typify how some writers, catalyzed by Beyak, combined ignorance and racism to excuse the negative effects of residential schooling and, like Memmi's colonizer 'who accepts,' justify ongoing colonialism.

(3) *Worldviews-in-collision*

Though many of the support letters Beyak received used personal knowledge or ignorant and racist views to downplay the negative effects of residential schooling, others simply asserted the need for continued assimilation to force Indigenous peoples to participate in Canadian society. As Memmi argues, the inner torment of illegitimacy 'pushes the usurper to go one step further; to wish the disappearance of the usurped.'⁸⁹ Many of Beyak's letter writers cannot – or are unwilling to – comprehend that Indigenous peoples have their own cultures, languages, spiritualities, and economic practices that residential schooling

deliberately and systematically sought to eliminate, eradicate, and replace, borrowing the language of Patrick Wolfe.⁹⁰ Simply put, many letter writers lamented the closure of residential schools because they saw assimilation as a beneficent project of civilizing Indigenous peoples. Starblanket and Hunt argue that colonizers use their ethnocentric worldview to advance narrow solutions to social problems that ultimately benefit them without considering or caring how it might affect Indigenous peoples.⁹¹ Building on Tuck and Yang, Lowman and Barker describe this kind of behaviour as ‘moves to comfort,’ or ‘irrational or illogical statements’ that do not invoke innocence but rather ‘dispel fear’ and ‘restore the comfort’ of being ‘conveniently ignorant of the harms of colonization.’⁹² In this regard, Linda wrote to Beyak:

Like you, I believe the institution of Residential Schools was well intentioned and was an attempt to solve the “Indian Problem” by integrating the children into the new way of life in order that they could function better with language, health, and skills.⁹³

Similarly, Terry asserted: ‘Certainly, the decision to assimilate first nations into Canada was and remains the correct one.’⁹⁴ B took it further suggesting: ‘I think residential schools were an [*sic*] noble and honest attempt to treat natives as equals and integrate the community into the new productive, rewarding Canadian life.’⁹⁵ Grace combined racism and assimilationist rhetoric to suggest,

When the youth can no longer find a reason for effort in the cultural vacuum of the reservations and then lead a life of dissipation, racial snobbishness and prejudice should not prevent them from participating in *our* culture. And education is the key, as it always has been e.g. the residential schools.⁹⁶

In *My Conversations with Canadians*, Maracle argues that Canada is ‘steeped’ in a kind of ‘mythological madness’ that often manifests in denialism. She explains, ‘Canada views itself as the nicest colonizer in the world. It does not ask the colonized if they agree with this, Canadians just keep repeating it to each other like bobbleheads that can’t stop bobbling.’⁹⁷

Moreover, many letter writers saw assimilation, not reconciliation, as offering the blueprint for Canada’s future. Epitomizing Memmi’s colonizers ‘who accept’ and embracing Lowman and Barker’s ‘moves to comfort,’ these authors suggested that Indigenous people simply need to accept, and even be thankful for, colonization. Don wrote,

Everyone of these Indian leaders bleating and shouting for your resignation are a product of the residential school system, and in fashion verifies what the agencies of the day, had in mind, and were trying to accomplish, and did very successfully.⁹⁸

Gordon combined racism and paternalism in his support for assimilation, ‘How do we help end the disease and poverty of first nation’s [*sic*] people? The notion that they lived in idyllic circumstances in nature is ludicrous. They needed help to be brought into the twentieth century.’⁹⁹ Lorraine argued, ‘We must not judge past intentions and behaviours using today’s standards. We must forgive and get on with improving conditions for all Indigenous peoples.’¹⁰⁰ Bryan agreed: ‘Lets [*sic*] leave the past in the past, learn from it and lets [*sic*] move forward *as Canadians*.’¹⁰¹ Barry looked positively on residential schools and the 1969 White Paper, which advocated assimilation, and lamented: ‘Had it succeeded we presumably would have less exclusionary rhetoric (“nation to nation”) and more of an inclusionary perspective (*one nation*) in our contemporary discussion of

aboriginal issues.¹⁰² Roy personified the unquestioned acceptance of assimilation by defending residential schools in the most self-centred, ethnocentric way possible: ‘The fact is that, there are two good things that came out of the res. Schools. When I see an aboriginal person I can talk to him or her. They can operate in *our* modern world.’¹⁰³ The author then concluded, ‘Please hang in there and do not let the fools who think they can implement all of the recommendations of the [TRC] committee. It would destroy *our* nation.’¹⁰⁴ These writers promoted the merits of forced assimilation, and defended residential schooling and attacks on Indigenous lifeways generally, as immensely beneficial to Canada and Canadians because, as Maracle points out, it protects the colonial status quo.¹⁰⁵

Whether through personal knowledge, ignorance and anti-Indigenous racism, or a belief in assimilation as beneficent – or a combination of these – Beyak’s supporters employed denialism to distance themselves from the effects of residential schooling and to defend colonization as commonsensical. Engaging in denialism allows colonizers to cling to myths about Canada and its history of colonization to protect their power and privilege in the present and future. As Tuck and Yang suggest, settlers defend such delusions, consciously or unconsciously, to safeguard the colonial status quo and guarantee settler futurity. Indeed, Memmi explains that this kind of behaviour reassures colonizers ‘who accept’ that ‘colonization is eternal,’ and it encourages them to look towards their ‘future without worries of any kind.’¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

In January 2018, almost a year after Beyak made her controversial speech in the Senate and posted her statements of defense and support letters online, journalist Robert Jago brought greater public attention to Beyak’s use of her website to hold space for residential school denialism. In particular, Jago challenged the content of the support letters and questioned why Beyak was allowed to use a Senate website to give a platform to ignorant and racist comments about Indigenous peoples in the era of truth and reconciliation.¹⁰⁷ As a result of Jago’s efforts and the public outrage by some Canadians unaware of the letters and their sentiments, the Leader of the Conservative Party at the time, Andrew Scheer, kicked Beyak out the Conservative caucus noting, ‘Racism will not be tolerated in the Conservative Caucus or Conservative Party of Canada.’¹⁰⁸ In addition, 4 Senators made complaints to Pierre Legault, the Senate Ethics Officer, about Beyak’s website and the support letters that specifically contained overt anti-Indigenous racism. The complaints triggered a formal investigation.

In March 2019, Legault’s report concluded that Beyak’s conduct breached sections of the Ethics and Conflict of Interest Code for Senators, and the Senator was suspended indefinitely. Beyak was given a number of opportunities to be reinstated, contingent on her making a public apology among other remedies. She eventually removed all of the support letters from her website, but Beyak failed to meet the conditions for her formal reinstatement. In December 2020, Senator Mary Jane McCallum announced her intention to introduce a motion in the Senate to permanently expel Beyak from the Red Chamber. Faced with the prospect of losing her pension if expelled, Beyak announced her early retirement from the Senate in January 2021. On her way out, the Senator showed no remorse. Instead, she doubled down on denialism in a final press release:

Some have criticized me for stating the good, as well as the bad, of residential schools should be recognized. I stand by that statement. Others have criticized me for stating that the Truth and Reconciliation report was not as balanced as it should be. I stand by that statement as well.¹⁰⁹

In explaining why she felt that Beyak did not deserve to be a Senator, McCallum, herself a residential school survivor, argued that the Senate was ‘no place for racism.’¹¹⁰

This article has shown that those engaged in residential school denialism are not simply ‘dim-whited’ racists. Building on Sinclair’s suggestion to try to understand denialists and take away their tools, I argue that residential school denialism can be best understood as a discursive strategy used by colonizers ‘who accept’ to justify colonization and protect the power, privilege, and profit they are afforded in Canada’s capitalist settler society. As Indigenous scholars such as LaRocque and Starblanket and Hunt point out, colonizers ‘who accept’ degrade Indigenous peoples and cling to myths and self-congratulatory accounts of Canada’s colonial past that suggest colonization is not only beneficent but also an admirable, humanitarian project that is well-intentioned and should not be abandoned.¹¹¹

Seeking shelter in delusions and untruths allows denialists to insulate themselves from the critical self-reflection that could bring about an awareness of their own complicity in Canada’s colonial injustice and cultivate a willingness to change. This strategy, however, is a false refuge. As writers like Manuel argue, downplaying the injustices of the colonial past and present prevents settlers from participating in reconciliation and efforts to build reciprocal relations with Indigenous peoples that could resolve settlers’ crisis of legitimacy and help them to live in the lands currently called Canada in better ways.¹¹² Denialism deepens the divide between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians and contributes to the growing gulf between truth and reconciliation. Nēhiyaw political scientist Kiera Ladner argues that ‘reconciliation is not a great big hug ... [It] requires settler society to acknowledge and accept some really uncomfortable truths about how they acquired their privileges.’¹¹³ Similarly, Simpson contends that what Indigenous peoples really need is for Canadians

to help themselves, to learn to struggle and to understand that their great country of Canada has been and is a death dance for Indigenous peoples. They must learn to stop themselves from plundering the land and the climate and using Indigenous peoples’ bodies to fuel their economy, and to find a way of living in the world that is not based on violence and exploitation.¹¹⁴

Thus, contrary to the claims of denialists such as Beyak that they do not need ‘any more education,’ to facilitate meaning reconciliation we need more knowledge about settler colonialism and a greater understanding of residential schooling and its ongoing effects.¹¹⁵

Notes

1. Lynn Beyak, ‘The Senator’s Speech in the Senate—March 7, 2017—Residential School’, <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p108370> (accessed February 1, 2019).
2. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2015), 1.

3. Government of Canada, 'House of Commons Debates, 39th Parliament, 2nd Session', *Edited Hansard* 142, no. 110, June 11, 2008, www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3568890&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2 (accessed May 1, 2020).
4. 'Senator Murray Sinclair Responds to Lynn Beyak's Defence of Residential Schools', *CBC News*, March 29, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/murray-sinclair-lynn-beyak-residential-schools-1.4045465>; Brett Forester, 'Residential school deniers, white supremacists biggest barrier to reconciliation says Murray Sinclair', *APTN News*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/residential-school-deniers-white-supremacists-biggest-barrier-to-reconciliation-says-murray-sinclair/>.
5. Drawing on science research, denialism can be understood as 'the employment of rhetorical arguments to give the appearance of legitimate debate where there is none, an approach that has the ultimate goal of rejecting a proposition on which a scientific consensus exists.' Pascal Diethelm and Martin McKee argue that in responding to denialists, 'it is necessary to shift the debate from the subject under consideration, instead exposing to public scrutiny the tactics they employ and identifying them publicly for what they are.' Pascal Diethelm and Martin McKee, 'Denialism: What is it and How Should Scientists Respond', *European Journal of Public Health*, 29 (January 2009): 2–4. For more on scholarly responses to denialism, see Philip Schmid and Cornelia Betsch, 'Effective Strategies for Rebutting Science Denialism in Public Discussions', *Nature Human Behaviour* 3 (2019): 931–9.
6. The Anglican Church of Canada, 'There Was Nothing Good: An Open Letter to Canadian Senator Lynn Beyak', March 10, 2017, <https://www.anglican.ca/news/nothing-good-open-letter-canadian-senator-lynn-beyak/30018179/>.
7. John Paul Tasker, 'Senator Beyak Stands By Residential School Remarks, Cites "Fake News,"' *CBC News*, March 16, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/lynn-beyak-stands-by-fake-news-1.4028126?cmp=rss>.
8. John Paul Tasker, 'Senator Lynn Beyak Says She Has "Suffered" With Residential School Survivors', *CBC News*, March 27, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/senator-lynn-beyak-suffered-residential-schools-1.4042627>.
9. See Justin Blake, "'The 'Beyak Effect': Fighting Anti-Indigenous Racism and Settler Denialism in Canada', *APTN*, February, 21 2018, <https://aptnnews.ca/2018/02/21/beyak-effect-fighting-anti-indigenous-racism-settler-denialism-canada/>.
10. See Conrad Black, 'Pull Yourself Together, Senators—Don Meredith and Lynn Beyak Don't Deserve to be Kicked Out', *National Post*, March 17, 2017, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/conrad-black-pull-yourself-together-senators-don-meredith-and-lynn-beyak-dont-deserve-kicking-out/>; "'Racist' Posters Removed from University of New Brunswick Campus', *Global News*, January 17, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3970310/racist-posters-campus/>.
11. 'Reconciliation' is an admittedly contested concept. See, for example, Michael Asch, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds. *Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous-Settler Relations and Earth Teachings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).
12. 'Senator Murray Sinclair Responds to Lynn Beyak's Defence of Residential Schools', *CBC News*, March 29, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/murray-sinclair-lynn-beyak-residential-schools-1.4045465>.
13. See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1991), 45–76.
14. Eric Taylor Woods, 'On the Making of a National Tragedy: The Transformation of the Meaning of the Indian Residential Schools', in *Power Through Testimony: Reframing Residential Schools in the Age of Reconciliation*, eds. Brieg Capitaine and Karine Vanthuyne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 29.
15. See P.H. Bryce, *Report on the Indian Schools of Manitoba and the North West Territories* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1907).
16. Bryce later published his report independently. See P.H. Bryce, *The Story of a National Crime: Being an Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada* (Ottawa: James Hope and Sons Ltd., 1922).
17. For more on Bryce's efforts, see John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017), 90–91.
18. Woods, 'On the Making of a National Tragedy', 35.

19. For more on the history of residential schooling see, for example, J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Milloy, *A National Crime*; Barnard Schissel and Terry Wotherspoon, *The Legacy of School for Aboriginal People: Education, Oppression, and Emancipation* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2003); Ian Mosby, 'Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1954', *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 91 (May 2013): 145–172; and Mary Jane Logan McCallum, "'I Would Like the Girls at Home': Domestic Labour and the Age of Discharge at Canadian Indian Residential Schools', in *Colonization and Domestic Service: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Victoria Haskins and Claire Lowry (New York: Routledge, 2014), 191–209.
20. Woods, 'On the Making of a National Tragedy', 40–1. For early accounts that were positive see, for example, Edward Ahenakew, 'Little Pine: An Indian Day School', *Saskatchewan History* 18, no. 2 (1965): 55–62; and Louise Moine, *My Life in a Residential School* (Regina: Provincial Chapter I.O.D.E., Saskatchewan, in cooperation with the Provincial Library of Saskatchewan), 1975. For more critical accounts see, for example, Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1988); Theodore Fontaine, *Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools* (Victoria: Heritage, 2010); and Bev Sellars, *They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Residential School* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2013).
21. On the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, see J.R. Miller, *Residential Schools and Reconciliation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 125–150.
22. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 23. On how Canada has addressed ongoing issues related to residential schooling, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see Ronald Niezen, *Truth and Indignation: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Brieg Capitaine and Karine Vanthuyne, eds, *Power Through Testimony*; David B. MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide, Indian Residential Schools, and the Challenge of Conciliation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).
23. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, v.
24. *Ibid.*, vi.
25. *Ibid.*
26. See, for example, Mary McNally and Debbie Martin, 'First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Health: Considerations for Canadian Health Leaders in the Wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report', *Healthcare Management Forum*, 30 (2, 2017): 117–22; and Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz, 'Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Decolonization: Navigating the Different Visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14 (30, 2018): 218–27.
27. Lee Maracle, *My Conversations with Canadians* (Toronto: Book Thug, 2017), 78.
28. Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 352.
29. Scholars such as Andrew Woolford have published numerous studies situating Canada's treatment of Indigenous peoples in the field of genocide studies. See, for example, Andrew Woolford, 'Ontological Destruction: Genocide and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples', *Genocide and Prevention* 4, 1 (April 2009): 81–97; and Andrew Woolford, *'This Benevolent Experiment': Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide and Redress in North America* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015). See also MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 146–7.
30. Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt, *Storying Violence: Unravelling Colonial Narratives in the Stanley Trial* (Winnipeg: ARP, 2020), 67–9.
31. Maracle, *My Conversations with Canadians*, 10.
32. *Ibid.*, 27.
33. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Been: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 101.
34. Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land, and Settler Decolonization* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Press, 2016), 9. See also, Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: University of British

- Columbia Press, 1999); Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); and Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in the 21st Century* (Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2015), 44–7.
35. Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 6–11.
 36. Maracle, *My Conversations with Canadians*, 58.
 37. See, for example, Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.
 38. See Emma LaRocque, *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse, 1850–1990* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 3–4. Glen Sean Coulthard's work mostly engages with the work of Fanon but he also acknowledges the influence of Memmi's ideas. See Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014), 191, footnote 34.
 39. On settler fear and anxiety, see Maracle, *My Conversations with Canadians*, 14; Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 35–6; Mark Rifkin, 'Settler States of Feeling: National Belonging and the Erasure of Native American Presence', in *A Companion to American Literary Studies*, eds. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 342–55; and Sean Carleton, 'Settler Anxiety and State Support for Missionary Schooling in Colonial British Columbia, 1849–1871', *Historical Studies in Education*, 29 (Spring 2017): 57–76.
 40. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 15.
 41. For more on the cultural production of colonialism, see LaRocque, *When the Other is Me*; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993); Robert Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1978); and Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).
 42. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no.1 (2012): 1.
 43. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 37.
 44. *Ibid.*, 52.
 45. *Ibid.*, 53.
 46. On false balance and residential school denialism, see MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 151–152.
 47. Admittedly, some historians have tried to advocate for a 'positive' interpretation of residential schooling, but they have mostly done so in non-peer reviewed publications. See, for example, Ken Coates, 'Second Thoughts about Residential Schools', *The Dorchester Review* 4, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2014): 25–9. On the questionable validity of these 'counternarratives,' see MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 152–8.
 48. MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 156–7.
 49. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 62–3.
 50. Senator Lynn Beyak, 'The Senator's Speech in the Senate—March 7, 2017—Residential Schools', <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p108370> (accessed 1 February 2019).
 51. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 50–1.
 52. Senator Lynn Beyak, 'The Senator's Speech in the Senate—March 7, 2017—Residential Schools', <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p108370> (accessed 1 February 2019).
 53. Senator Lynn Beyak, 'Statement, April 16, 2017', <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p107719/> (accessed 1 February 2019). I note that the statement was listed as being released on April 6 but the title of the statement on Beyak's website said April 16.
 54. *Ibid.*

55. 97 were neutral. Office of the Senate Ethics Officer, *Inquiry Report Under the Ethics and Conflict of Interest Code for Senators Concerning Senator Lynn Beyak*, March 19, 2019, 12. <http://sen.parl.gc.ca/seo-cse/PDF/Inquiry-Beyak2019-e.pdf>.
56. The letter writers were given anonymity through various forms of abbreviation, by Beyak, her staff, or by the authors themselves.
57. See Cheryl Gaver, 'Residential Schools in Canada: Why the Message is Not Getting Across', in *Power Through Testimony*, 198. Some of the support letters could also be read as examples of 'white fragility', but, like Gaver, I see residential school denialism as a different, though related, phenomenon. For more on white fragility, see Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).
58. Tuck and Yang, 'Decolonization is Not A Metaphor', 3.
59. Letter 1, Richard, 'Your attempts to offer "balance" in the historical perspective of residential schools', 8 March 2017. The support letters, which I downloaded for analysis before they were deleted from Beyak's website in 2019, were not attributed to peoples' full names.
60. Letter 4, Remi, 'Residential schools', March 9, 2017.
61. Letter 22, D, 'Residential schools', March 16, 2017.
62. Letter 15, Janice, 'Residential schools', March 10, 2017.
63. Letter 17, Theresa, 'Residential schools', March 11, 2017.
64. Letter 9, Bob, 'Residential schools', March 9, 2017.
65. Letter 21, A, 'Residential schools', March 16, 2017.
66. Letter 93, R, 'Residential schools', April 3, 2017.
67. Letter 44, Marcia, 'Thank you for being courageous', March 20, 2017.
68. For more on employee narratives regarding residential schools in the context of the TRC, see Niezen, *Truth and Indignation*, 124–144. MacDonald, however, argues that Niezen's anthropological approach, including his uncritical privileging of interviews with former Catholic teachers and school administrators, borders on apology. See MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 151–8.
69. For more on this kind of response, see MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 158–61.
70. Letter 8, Charles, 'Residential schools', March 9, 2017.
71. Letter 51, Ben, 'The abundance of good', March 22, 2017.
72. Letter 53, Ardell, 'DO NOT RESIGN', March 24, 2017.
73. Letter 43, Richard, 'Residential schools', March 20, 2017.
74. Letter 3, Robert, 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report comments', March 9, 2017.
75. Letter 46, Vic, 'Brave and intelligent lady', March 21, 2017.
76. Letter 65, 'Residential schools', March 29, 2017.
77. Letter 37, 'I support you', March 19, 2017.
78. See Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 42–4; Arthur Manuel, *The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., 2017), 76–81.
79. Letter 6, Kevin, 'Your remarks about residential schools', March 9, 2017.
80. Letter 11, C, 'I support you', March 10, 2017.
81. The TRC report talks about music and sports programs in the schools being a 'relief' for some children. Some former students speak fondly about these experiences; however, they must be understood in the larger context of the genocidal system. Beyak, like her supporters, would prefer to focus on the former as a way of mitigating the over-whelming negative effects of the later. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 110–114.
82. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 54 and 71–6.
83. Letter 9, Bob, 'Residential schools', March 9, 2017.
84. Letter 13, Paul, 'Respect for you', March 10, 2017.
85. Maracle, *My Conversations with Canadians*, 10–11.
86. Letter 26, Heinz, 'Commendation', March 18, 2017.
87. Letter 62, Allen, 'Positive comment for your information on residential schools', March 28, 2017.

88. Letter 64, R, 'Thanks for speaking your mind on Indian Residential Schools', March 28, 2017.
89. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 53.
90. Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, no. 4 (December 2004): 387–409.
91. Starblanket and Hunt, *Storying Violence*, 67–9.
92. Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 99.
93. Letter 19, Linda, 'Residential schools', March 14, 2017.
94. Letter 37, Terry, 'I support you', March 19, 2017.
95. Letter 91, B, 'Native/Indian affairs committee', March 30, 2017.
96. Letter 66, Grace, 'Three cheers for you', March 30, 2017. Emphasis added.
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99. Letter 87, Gordon, 'Controversy', March 30, 2017.
100. Letter 71, Lorraine, 'Residential schools and the plight of Aboriginal People in Canada', March 30, 2017.
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103. Letter 98, Roy, 'Truth and reconciliation', April 5, 2017. Emphasis added.
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107. Robert Jago, 'Why is Senator Lynn Beyak Publishing Racist Letters on Her Website?' *The Walrus*, January 3, 2018, <https://thewalrus.ca/why-is-senator-lynn-beyak-publishing-racist-letters-on-her-website/>.
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109. John Paul Tasker, 'Lynn Beyak, the Senator Who Defended Residential Schools, is Resigning', *CBC*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/beyak-retirement-1.5886435>.
110. Mary Jane McCallum quoted in Rachel Aiello, 'Facing Push to Expel, Lynn Beyak Retires from the Senate', *CTVNews.ca*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/facing-push-to-expel-lynn-beyak-retires-from-the-senate-1.5281046>.
111. LaRocque, *When the Other is Me*; Starblanket and Hunt, *Storying Violence*.
112. Manuel, *The Reconciliation Manifesto*, 56.
113. Kiera L. Ladner, '150 Years and Waiting: Will Canada Become an Honourable Nation?' in *Surviving Canada: Indigenous Peoples Celebrate 150 Years of Betrayal*, eds. Kiara L. Ladner and Myra J. Tait (Winnipeg: ARP Books 2017), 407.
114. Simpson, *As We Have Always Been*, 101.
115. Beyak is by no means an anomaly. For other examples of residential school denialism, see Sean Carleton, 'Lynn Beyak has retired, but residential school denial remains a barrier to reconciliation', *National Observer*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/01/28/opinion/lynn-beyak-retired-residential-school-denial-barrier-reconciliation>.

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