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## When Myth Overshadows Historical Artefacts: A Social Semiotic Analysis Using Crown Photography

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### Abstract

The go-to images representing the history of Canada's Indian Residential Schools (IRS) are of identifiable Indigenous children—often digitized Crown photography now used to teach difficult history. The choice of digital image in online education may perpetuate the exploitation of children and distract from historical context that facilitates critical inquiry among learners. This social semiotic research analyzed a Crown photograph for paradigmatic relationships with similar themed images to answer the question of missing context and its effect on truth value around a society's ideologies. Second order semiotics informed by Barthes' Signification process ending in myth reveals false beliefs associated with images of children and the IRS: enforced institutionalization, child advocacy, presentation of a comprehensive history, and cultural genocide. To date, Barthes' Signification process has not been utilized in qualitative research to determine adequate historiography on Canada's Indian residential schools. Notably, image presentation is found to be habitually contrary to social norms related to the protection of children. Conference attendees are guided through a semiotic analysis ending with a demonstration of the reflexive tool for choosing images that transpired from this master of education thesis research. This presentation is rich in historic and contemporary images used with permission.

**Keywords:** curriculum; difficult history; ethics; historiography; social semiotics