

# Two Weeks, Six Dead: Police Violence, Indigenous Dehumanization & Canadian Indifference



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**THE DEHUMANIZATION** of Indigenous peoples is reflected in the indifference of Canadians today – so much so that our deaths become merely passing bylines.

Over a two-week period (August 29 – September 9, 2024), police have killed six Indigenous people.

The details of the cases range.

- In two separate instances, Tammy Bateman and an unnamed 31-year-old man were struck by police vehicle(s) and died.
- Steven “Iggy” Dedem was shot and killed by officers after police responded to a call for a wellness check.
- A 15-year-old boy named Hoss Lightning was shot and killed by police when he called them for help.
- In response to a call involving an assault, the police found the man they believed was responsible, and an altercation ensued. Thus far, there is no indication that he was armed, but he, too, was shot and killed by officers.
- Sixties Scoop survivor Jason West died following an “interaction” with law enforcement.

There are striking and heartbreaking similarities to previous deaths involving law enforcement, including Chantel Moore, who was shot and killed during a wellness check, and the shootings of Josephine Pelletier and 16-year-old Eisha Hudson.

These are not isolated incidents and reflect a long trend of police violence against Indigenous people. There are significant racial disparities in Canada when it comes to police violence, with Indigenous peoples vastly overrepresented in those incidents.

**It is difficult – especially in moments like these – to ignore claims that genocide in Canada is ongoing, despite our supposed era of reconciliation. The state continues to apprehend, incarcerate, confine, abuse, and kill Indigenous peoples.**

Many of those killed by law enforcement have been previously (and continue to be) subject to residential and day schools, foster care, jails, and prisons. The violence is cumulative; genocidal.

## The Long Horizon of Police Violence

The context is important here. Police violence stretched back to early Canada when the Northwest Mounted Police (the precursor to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) were tasked with the removal of Indigenous children for placement in residential schools, enforcing the Indian Act and generally containing our communities. The aim of this dehumanization and control has been to secure Canadian access to land and resources (a central need of colonial settlement) (Manuel, 2017; Razack, 2015). Dispossession

requires the continued use of multiple strategies to displace and subdue Indigenous peoples, often through force. Racist stereotypes of the “savage” help justify this violence. This dehumanization means we are deemed deserving of confinement, violence, and death.

This process is obscured by a colonial quest to investigate the problem and to tinker with existing systems. Indigenous peoples have done the work and provided testimony to support the inquiries, research projects, and special committees. Our voices have been loud in our calls for justice, action, accountability, and change. We have protested, marched, signed petitions, written blog posts, books, and articles, testified to imposed governments, and relived our pain and trauma — to have our stories and proposed solutions documented in the hope that they would be implemented.

Yet, genocide continues through law enforcement’s lethal use of force, which contributes to more harm, more death, and more grief. And this, too, has been documented.

The 2019 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (National Inquiry) recorded racism, use of force, and abuse by law enforcement — including in instances when they had been called to help. Before the National Inquiry, there were decades of reports, recommendations, inquiries, and suggestions that have been put forward: The Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall Jr. Prosecution (1989); Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba (1991); Bridging the cultural divide: A report on Aboriginal Peoples and Criminal Justice in Canada by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), which itself notes multiple failures to implement existing recommendations (see Chapter 5); Report to the Attorney General: Tsuut’ina First Nation Inquiry (2000); The Ipperwash Inquiry (2007); Human Rights Watch — those who take us away (2013); the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015); Broken trust: Indigenous people and the Thunder Bay Police Service (2018); The Council of Canadian Academics (2019); as well as multiple reports from Amnesty International, amongst many, many, more.

## **Truth, Reconciliation & Genocide**

When news stories about our deaths, disappearances, and violence are published, Canadians seem only to glance

over headlines and move on. The indifference of Canadian society is, of course, another symptom of dehumanization that sustains colonial violence and control (Razack, 2015). The reports mentioned above include findings of law enforcement inflicting physical and sexual violence, use of force, racism, and actions or failures to act, culminating in Indigenous peoples’ deaths.

So, why are we here again?

Indigenous peoples are still not considered human. We exist on the margins — our lives deemed unworthy of care, our calls for help met with violence, and our killers often granted impunity. Canada has been complicit in the deaths of Indigenous peoples since first contact. Law enforcement continues the colonial goal of removing the “Indigenous problem” through force. This is a well-documented, ever-apparent reality, and it must end.

**On this National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, as we look to the past and remember those who died because of state violence, let us reflect on the fact that genocide — the killing of Indigenous peoples at the hands of Canadian institutions — continues and demands action and accountability; not stalling, debating, delaying, inquiring, or crocodile tears on a single day of the year.**

If there is any debate about the barometer for reconciliation and justice in this country, let these events remind us all that genocide is still a thing. We must call it out and challenge it; our lives depend on it.

### **CITATION**

McGuire, Michaela. “Two Weeks, Six Dead: Police Violence, Indigenous Dehumanization & Canadian Indifference” Yellowhead Institute. 24 September 2024. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2024/09/24/two-weeks-six-dead-police-violence-indigenous-dehumanization-canadian-indifference/>

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