

## SIXTIES SCOOP – CHILD LABOUR

Born in the 1960s, I was one of the thousands of Aboriginal children that were apprehended by Social Services across Canada and put into foster care. The Sixties Scoop overlapped the residential school era and was a time of a tremendous loss of generations of children, which proved to have a devastating impact on Aboriginal communities. As residential school survivors returned home, soon after many of them would have their children taken away from them through the Sixties Scoop. The term the ‘Sixties Scoop’ refers to the apprehension of Native children by government social workers. In 1951, Amendment 88 of the Indian Act stated that all provincial laws would be enforced on reserves, thus allowing Social Services to apprehend children in reserve communities. Social Services were guaranteed payment for each child apprehended (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Other financial gains were made by selling children across the border to American adoption agencies, sometimes for as much as \$4000.00 per child. The number of apprehensions of Native children is staggering, especially when one considers that Aboriginals in Canada make up three to five percent of the population. From the 1960s through the 1980s, approximately 40 percent of all children in foster care in Canada were Aboriginal: in 1980, 15,000 children were in foster care. As a result of the outcry from Aboriginal communities, provincial governments across Canada agreed to place a priority to place Aboriginal children in homes that were the next of kin or at least within the community first, and external adoption would be the last option. However, this policy has not always been acted upon, and in some provinces apprehensions have risen dramatically such as in Saskatchewan where Aboriginal children in care has risen to 70% from 40% of all children in care.



Figure 6. *Sixties Scoop – Child Labour*. 2004. Digital Photo, 76 x 102

Today, there is much more public awareness about residential schools than the Sixties Scoop, which remains unknown to most Canadians. It remains largely unacknowledged that the two eras of residential school and the sixties scoop mirrored each other in terms of dislocating Aboriginal children from their family and communities, as well as the children’s similarity of experience of physical and sexual abuse and exploitation for child labour. I expect that the Sixties Scoop will not remain submerged for much longer and these survivors will testify to their experience in courts sooner rather than later.

In 2004, I readdressed the issue of the Sixties Scoop with a digital photo collage work entitled, *Sixties Scoop child labour*, (Figure 6). Ironically, the digital medium and style were also new to my repertoire and I have not done any other digital work since, except for childrens book

illustrations. Even today, the topic of the Sixties Scoop is not often discussed or presented in the media, thus the incentive to revisit the topic. This work speaks to captivity, child labour and abuse by presenting a child locked in a birdcage. The child again, is essentially a prisoner, a victim of circumstance over which she has no control. The border of this image, at first glance reads as a Aboriginal design, though is in fact a constructed image made of clothespins and pitch forks, subtly referencing labour. The cage hovers above the prairie farms, where most of the boys were sent to live to assist with farm work. The distant horizon is lined with small ghost-like cages, symbolizing headstones, and memorializing those who became lost and did not survive the experience, either by way of suicide, or as a result of homelessness, prostitution or prison life.