



# Healing Voices Volume 1:

## A Primer on American Indian and Alaska Native Boarding Schools in the U.S.



*“Sometimes a little boy would die from loneliness.” How? “They would just stop eating and die in their sleep, we would find them in the mornings.”*

– Lenny (Ojibwe), Chemawa Boarding School, Oregon

Child-size handcuffs from Haskell Institute with a before and after photo of “Three Lakota boys” at Carlisle Indian School, circa 1890.

## “Kill the Indian, Save the Man:” An Introduction to the History of Boarding Schools

The government of the United States had an “Indian problem.” To address it, they enlisted Christian churches and decided to remove children from our communities and our culture. They attempted to replace Tribal values, languages, and ways of knowing with dominant white Christian values, religion, culture, and language.

By 1926, nearly 83% of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools.<sup>1</sup> The multigenerational impact of removing children from families and communities cannot be overstated. The U.S. Indian boarding schools are directly responsible for and inextricably linked to loss of Tribal language, loss of Tribal cultural resources, and ongoing intergenerational trauma in Native communities today. In order for us to have justice, we need to begin with the truth.

### **TRUTH. HEALING. JUSTICE. RECONCILIATION.**

Justice in Indian Country cannot be fully realized without a major shift in our national narrative. The United States government must admit and accept responsibility for its boarding school experiment and other white supremacist policies, including removal. Churches have also yet to acknowledge their role in this chapter of cultural genocide in U.S. history. Various church denominations

*Continued on page 2*



Group of Native American children at Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas, circa 1884-89.

**Children as young as four were forcibly removed from their homes, families, and communities during the Boarding School Era.** Children were taken to schools far away where they were punished for speaking their Native language; banned from engaging in traditional or cultural practices; and stripped of traditional clothing, hair, personal belongings, and behaviors reflective of their Native culture. They suffered physical, sexual, cultural, and spiritual abuse and neglect and experienced treatment that in many cases constituted torture. Many children never returned home, and the U.S. government has yet to account for their fates.

*“I was four years old when stolen and taken to Chemawa, Oregon. The matron grabbed me and my sister, stripped off our clothes, laid us in a trough and scrubbed our genitals with lye soap, yelling at us that we were ‘filthy savages, dirty.’ I had to walk on my tip toes screaming in pain.”*

– Elsie (Yakima), Chemawa Boarding School, Oregon

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<sup>1</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 27.

## Intro to Boarding School History (CONTINUED)

benefited from federal funding (via the Indian Civilization Fund Act), which was used to run the Indian boarding schools across the U.S.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that half of all Indian boarding schools were run by churches. Most U.S. citizens do not even know of the existence of these genocidal boarding schools, let alone that they have had lasting effects on the health and well-being of Native American communities. We cannot have reconciliation before healing. In order to have healing, we must reveal the truth.

### WE MUST TELL THE WHOLE TRUTH

Beginning with the Indian Civilization Fund Act of March 3, 1819, and the Peace Policy of 1869, the United States, in concert with and at the urging of several Christian denominations, adopted a boarding school policy expressly intended to implement cultural genocide through the removal and reprogramming of American Indian and Alaska Native children. The stated purpose of this policy was to “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” The U.S. Boarding School Era emerged from the federal government’s desire to deal with the “Indian problem” by using education as a weapon. At the same time (the end of the 19th century), the U.S. hunted bison to near extinction to eliminate a major source of sustenance for Native people. One U.S. Army leader is said to have ordered his troops to “kill every buffalo you can. Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone.”<sup>3</sup> While this effort sought to eliminate Indian nations by starving Indigenous economies, boarding schools were even more insidious. The intent was to eliminate Indians by removing all traces of Tribal cultures—language, spiritual traditions, family ties, etc. and replacing them with European Christian ideals of civilization, religion, and culture.

<sup>2</sup> Stat. 516b

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 307-320.

<sup>5</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action,” *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2012, [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf).



We still do not know how many total children were removed from their homes and families and placed in boarding schools operated by the federal government and Christian churches. However, preliminary statistics tell us that within the first twenty years of the boarding school policy, 20,000 children had already been taken from their families and placed in schools far from their homes. Only twenty-five years later, that number more than tripled, and 60,889 children were in boarding schools by 1925.<sup>4</sup>

### THE FORMATION OF THE BOARDING SCHOOL HEALING COALITION

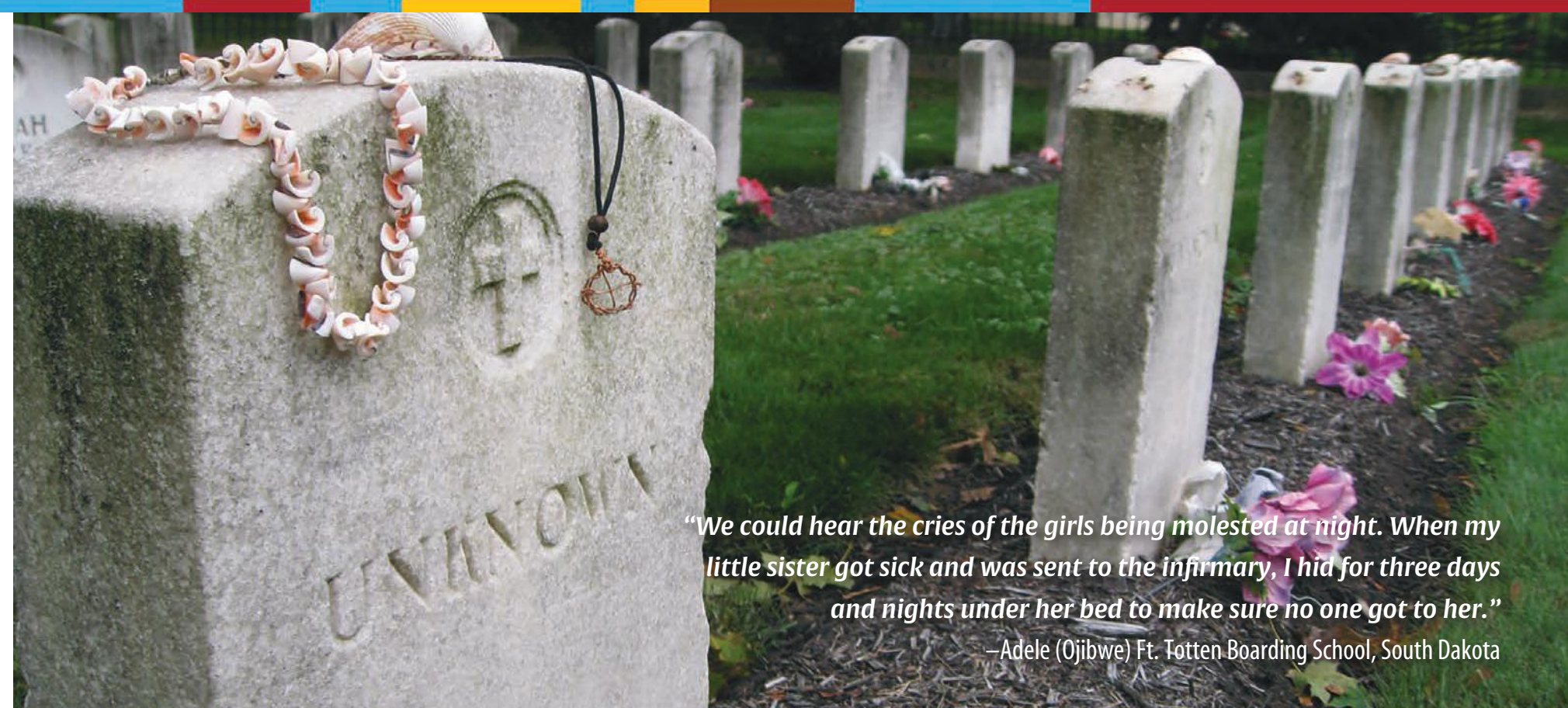
The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) was formed because of public outcry about the lasting effects of the boarding school era. Our mission is to tell the truth about the history of the U.S. boarding school policy and the involvement of many church denominations. We seek truth, action, and justice to support community-led healing for boarding school survivors and their descendants.

Our work and formation was encouraged by the precedent set by Canada, which formed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2010 using settlement funds from a class-action lawsuit against the Canadian government for boarding school abuses. The TRC was a five-year commission resulting in a seven-volume report and 94 Calls to Action.<sup>5</sup> Following the example set by Canadian First Nations, Native leaders participating in a 2011 symposium in the U.S. called for the formation of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition.

Through its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Canada is the most recent country to denounce policies that were designed to “Kill all that is Indian” in its students to “Save the man.” In doing so, they shed light on the harm that this policy and the way it was carried out caused. Until now, the truth has largely been swept under the rug, ignored by the public, and left out of textbooks about U.S. history. But the impacts of intergenerational trauma have continued to fester and compound in Native American and Alaskan Native communities. By bringing the harms of the past and their continued effects out into the light, we can begin to create healing for all who were, and continue to be, impacted.

### DID THE U.S. BOARDING SCHOOL EXPERIMENT ACCOMPLISH ITS GOALS?

Native peoples are, for the most part, assimilated into modern English-speaking contemporary culture. However, it failed to completely erase our heritage, our cultures, and our rights as Indigenous persons. We are still here, but we live with the lasting legacies of cultural genocide.



Graves marked “Unknown” at Carlisle Indian Boarding School cemetery.

“We could hear the cries of the girls being molested at night. When my little sister got sick and was sent to the infirmary, I hid for three days and nights under her bed to make sure no one got to her.”

—Adele (Ojibwe) Ft. Totten Boarding School, South Dakota

### THIS IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

“Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.”

—Article 8, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP)

The **definition of “genocide”** according to Article 2 of the UN Geneva Convention, 1948:

1. A mental element: the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such”; and
2. A physical element, which includes the following five acts, enumerated exhaustively:
  - Killing members of the group
  - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
  - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
  - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
  - **Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group**

Racism in the Native American and Alaska Native experience is deeply connected to genocide, literal and cultural, as well as loss of land through forced removal and coercion. The groundwork for this was laid by three papal documents, known collectively as the “Doctrine of Discovery.”<sup>6</sup> The first of these papal bulls, *Dum Diversas*, was issued in 1452 by Pope Nicholas V to the Portuguese monarch, King Alfonso V, providing sanction and justification for the invasion and colonization of land inhabited by non-Christians. The pope instructed the king to “capture, vanquish, and subdue the saracens, pagans, and other enemies of Christ,” to “put them into perpetual slavery” and “take all their possessions and property.”<sup>7</sup> In 1454, the pope issued a follow-up

with *Romanus Pontifex*, prohibiting other nations from interfering with Portugal’s rights over the lands it was colonizing. After Christopher Columbus returned from his travels to the Americas, Pope Alexander IV issued *Inter Caetera* in 1493, another papal bull that granted Spain the rights of conquest over the lands Columbus had stumbled upon, inclusive of future lands Spain might encounter.

One of the lasting legacies of this ethnocentric doctrine is the legal and cultural belief that Indigenous people do not have the rights to our own lands, religion, cultures, economies, and governance, or even how we raise and educate our own children.

### WE HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW THE TRUTH

In 2000, the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at the time, Kevin Gover (Pawnee), acknowledged boarding schools’ historic emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual abuse of children. Gover recognized this history at the *Ceremony Acknowledging the 175th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs*, which took part in carrying out the boarding school policies:

“This agency [the Bureau of Indian Affairs] forbade the speaking of Indian languages, prohibited the conduct of traditional religious activities, outlawed traditional government, and made Indian people ashamed of who they were. Worst of all, the Bureau of Indian Affairs committed these acts against the children entrusted to its boarding schools, brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually. Even in this era of self-determination, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs is at long last serving as an advocate for Indian people in an atmosphere of mutual respect, the legacy of these misdeeds haunts us. The trauma of shame, fear and anger has passed from one generation to the next, and manifests itself in the rampant alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence that plague Indian country. Many of our people live lives of unrelenting tragedy as Indian families suffer the ruin of lives by alcoholism, suicides made of shame and despair, and violent death at the hands of one another. So many of the maladies suffered today in Indian country result from the failures of this agency. Poverty, ignorance, and disease have been the product of this agency’s work.”<sup>8</sup>

In 2008, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) passed a resolution calling for Presidential acknowledgement and an apology for the abuses that took place at Indian boarding schools. In 2009, as part of a defense spending appropriations bill, a measure was included urging the President “to officially apologize for the past ill-conceived policies by the U.S. government toward the Native peoples of this land and re-affirm our commitment toward healing our nation’s wounds and working toward establishing better relationships rooted in reconciliation.”<sup>9</sup>

The bill passed and President Obama signed it; however, it was modified to read as a more general apology “on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native peoples by citizens of the United States.” Many people, including small independent media sources, questioned whether this was a true apology considering that the White House did not publicize it and no one in particular received it.

Many believe the boarding schools are largely responsible for several legacies:

- Loss of language
- Loss of culture and traditions
- High rates of physical and sexual abuse
- High rates of drug and alcohol abuse

While the rates of physical and sexual abuse at American Indian boarding schools were reportedly high, it should be noted that not all experiences were negative. Many met their spouses at boarding school or learned a trade that provided for their families. Yet, at what cost?

What did they give up in order go to boarding school and gain a new lease on life through a Western education? ■

(see page 10 for more on Historical Trauma)



“They gave me the number 76. I was number 76. All my clothes, underwear, socks, dresses had the number 76. When my laundry came back folded, it had a slip of paper on top with the number 76 on it.”

—Ann, (Ojibwe) Marty Boarding School, SD.

<sup>6</sup> This doctrine also refers to a part of U.S. law, using the papal bulls and also several additional rulings particular to the U.S.

<sup>7</sup> Frances Gardiner Davenport, *European Treaties bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies to 1648*, Vol. 1, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), 20-26.

<sup>8</sup> “An Apology for the Treatment of Indians,” NBC Learn K-12, NBC Universal, September 9, 2000, accessed May 7, 2018, <https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/K-12/flatview/cuecard=1530>.

<sup>9</sup> Rob Capriccioso, “A Sorry Saga: Obama Signs Native American Apology Resolution; Fails to Draw Attention to It” *Indian Country Today*, January 13, 2010, <http://indianlaw.org/node/529>.

# Timeline of U.S. Indian Policy—Layers of Historical Trauma

## Six Phases of Historical Unresolved Grief: Traumatic Events “inflict a wounding on the soul” that lasts through generations (Soul Wound)<sup>10</sup>

- 1 Contact**  
Invasion, colonization, disease
- 2 Invasion/War Period**  
Genocide
- 3 Economic Competition**  
Sustenance loss (physical/spiritual)
- 4 Subjugation/Reservation Period**  
Forced dependency on United States
- 5 Boarding School Period**  
Cultural genocide
- 6 Forced Relocation/Termination Period**  
Systematic Marginalization and Legal Erasure

## Boarding School Generations

As Brenda Child writes about in “Boarding School Seasons,” assimilation was not the true purpose of the boarding schools. If so, why segregate American Indians and Alaskan Natives?

“The reality is that properties and assets were still at stake, and a campaign for land and resources was waged every single day of the boarding school era.”<sup>11</sup>



### First Generation

- Post Civil War through World War I
- End of the Indian Wars
- Military-style schools, uniforms, haircuts
- Forced assimilation
- Prohibition of Native languages and cultures

### Second Generation

- Great Depression Era through World War II
- Students bilingual
- Boarding school becomes an escape route from poverty
- Natives get the right to vote (1924)
- Natives enlist voluntarily in World War II due to military influence of 1st generation boarding schools

### Third Generation

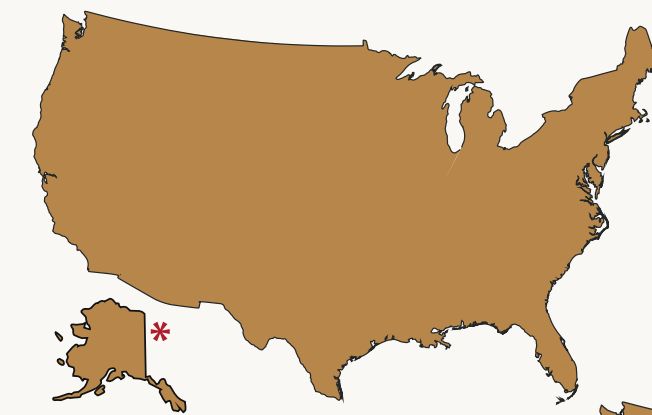
- Post War Era through the Civil Rights Era
- Boarding schools scaled back in favor of public schools
- Students confront racism and discrimination for their mixed heritage
- Boarding schools begin to include vocational training
- Boarding schools begin being turned over to Tribal Nations through the Bureau of Indian Education

### Fourth Generation

- Post Civil Rights Era to present day
- Some 73 schools that began under the historical boarding school era, such as Sherman, Haskell, Santa Fe, Chemawa, are still in operation today
- Native language and culture is often promoted instead of prohibited
- Despite Tribal involvement in schools, legacies of the historical boarding school era still impact communities today

## Indian Land Cessions

How the U.S. dealt with the “Indian problem” to make way for westward expansion, boarding schools, relocation, and adoption—all of which were used to break apart Tribal communities



**Pre-Colonization**  
All current U.S. land was originally Native American land, known as Turtle Island.

**1784**

By the time the U.S. became an independent nation, Tribal Nations had ceded much of their territory in exchange for education, medical care, and rations when being displaced from their traditional homelands.



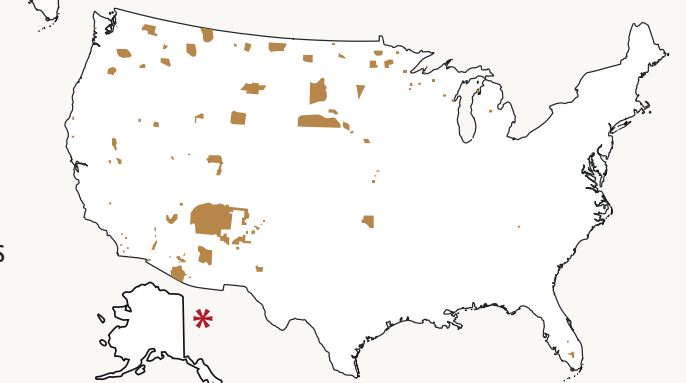
**1860**

By the time the gold rush hit, the U.S. had broken the treaty agreements and made new laws to gain more land—Tribal Nations had already been pushed west of the Mississippi River, after being promised that the West was reserved as their territory according to the treaties.



### Present-Day Indian Reservations

Through various campaigns of all-out war, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide, this is all that is left of Indian land set aside for our Tribal Nations today.



\* NOTE: The U.S. government never signed treaties with Alaska Native nations. However, when the U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, it assumed control over the entire territory. Alaska Natives still consider this land unceded.

## From Contact to Present Day

PRE-1492 Turtle Island inhabited since time immemorial

**1492** Columbus gets lost and is discovered by Indigenous people in the Caribbean.

**1493** Pope Alexander VI issues the “Inter Caetera” papal bull also known as the Doctrine of Discovery.

**1646** John Eliot preaches his first sermon to an Indian audience, laying the foundation for a missionary program in New England that sought to “civilize” Indians by isolating them in “praying towns.”<sup>12</sup>

**1600s-1800s Treaties and Indian Wars** Tribes sign over 370 treaties, yet Europe and U.S. wage thousands of wars on Tribes.

**1775** U.S.A. declares itself an independent nation.

**1816** U.S. creates BIA. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is created under the Department of War primarily to administer the funds to the churches from the Civilization Fund.

**1817** Indian Appropriations Act. The creation of Indian reservations.

**1819** Indian Civilization Fund Act. Authorizes up to \$10,000 a year to support the efforts of religious groups and interested individuals willing to live among and teach Indians. “Civilizing” meant stripping traditions and customs from Native peoples and transforming them into Christian farmers or laborers.

**1824** U.S. Creates BIA. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is created under the Department of War primarily to administer the funds to the churches from the Civilization Fund.

**1830** Indian Removal Act. Andrew Jackson signs a law that allows him to remove Tribes from their lands.

**1837** General Allotment Act. U.S. divides and allots Tribal lands to individuals resulting in a loss of 60 million acres—2/3 of the Indian land base at the time.

**1848** Indian Citizenship Act. Native Americans get the right to vote.

**1851** Indian Appropriations Act. The creation of Indian reservations.

**1853** Termination Policy. The federal government attempts to terminate the legal sovereignty of Tribal Nations in its ongoing assimilation efforts.

**1856** Indian Relocation Act. Indians are encouraged to leave reservations and move to designated urban locations for educational and economic opportunities.

**1858** Grant’s Peace Policy. BIA gives Christian denominations power over Indian programs on reservations, leading the way to Indian boarding schools.

**1868** Grant’s Peace Policy. BIA gives Christian denominations power over Indian programs on reservations, leading the way to Indian boarding schools.

**1871** Indian Appropriations Act. End of treaty-making, Tribal Nations legally designated as “wards of the federal government.”

**1879** First Indian boarding school opened. Over 10,000 children from tribes all over the U.S. and Alaskan territory are sent to the first federal off-reservation Indian boarding school in Carlisle, PA. Hundreds of schools would be modeled after Carlisle.

**1875** Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act. Gives Tribal governments ability to enter into contracts with and receive grants from certain government agencies, giving our Tribal Nations greater control over their own affairs.

**1892** Dead Indian Act. Non-Indians can now own Indian trust lands.

**1902** Dead Indian Act. Non-Indians can now own Indian trust lands.

**1906** Esther Martinez Native American Language Preservation Act. Named for a teacher known for her efforts to preserve the Tewa language, this act provides funding for Native American language instruction through language nests, language survival schools, and language restoration programs.

**1912** Indian Reorganization Act. Tribes given ultimatum to adopt a constitution government like the U.S. or be terminated.

**1924** Indian Citizenship Act. Native Americans get the right to vote.

**1928** Meriam Report. A government report cites malnourishment, poor living conditions, manual labor, and corporal punishment as having disastrous effects on mental health in Indian boarding schools.

**1929** Indian Child Welfare Act. Protects Native children from adoption/placement in foster care with non-Natives in response to the long history of forced assimilation through Native children being removed from their Tribal communities.

**1934** Indian Reorganization Act. Tribes given ultimatum to adopt a constitution government like the U.S. or be terminated.

**1936** Indian Child Welfare Act. Protects Native children from adoption/placement in foster care with non-Natives in response to the long history of forced assimilation through Native children being removed from their Tribal communities.

**1948** Indian Child Welfare Act. Protects Native children from adoption/placement in foster care with non-Natives in response to the long history of forced assimilation through Native children being removed from their Tribal communities.

**1953** Termination Policy. The federal government attempts to terminate the legal sovereignty of Tribal Nations in its ongoing assimilation efforts.

**1956** Indian Relocation Act. Indians are encouraged to leave reservations and move to designated urban locations for educational and economic opportunities.

**1960s-1980s** Boarding School Changes. BIA starts to close boarding schools or turn them over to BIE and Tribes for operation.

**1969** U.S. Senate Report. “Indian Education: A National Tragedy, A National Challenge,” also known as the Kennedy Report, calls boarding schools a failure and tragedy.

**1972** Survival Schools and the American Indian Movement (AIM) Indian Education Act. Native parents start education movement based on cultural revitalization and survival. Makes way for the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).

**1975** Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act. Gives Tribal governments ability to enter into contracts with and receive grants from certain government agencies, giving our Tribal Nations greater control over their own affairs.

**1978** American Indian Religious Freedom Act. Spiritual practices once forbidden and punished in boarding schools and Indian Country are now protected.

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**1990** Language Revitalization Act. Protects Native languages that were once prohibited in schools.

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**1990** Native American Graves Protection & Repatriation Act. Protects Native peoples’ remains, funerary objects, and sacred objects from being stolen or placed in museums.

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**2001** No Child Left Behind Act. This landmark act was the first to require the U.S. to track and hold schools accountable for the achievement gap among Native American and Alaska Native students. The law increased funding levels for these students and reauthorized parts of the Indian Education Act, but the results have been mixed.

**2006** Esther Martinez Native American Language Preservation Act. Named for a teacher known for her efforts to preserve the Tewa language, this act provides funding for Native American language instruction through language nests, language survival schools, and language restoration programs.

**Present Day** Tribal Nations still fight for self-determination, human rights, land retention, and the survival of their cultures and languages. 64 of the original Indian boarding schools still remain open. However, today, these schools are not aimed at forced assimilation. They focus on serving Native communities and they remind us of the ongoing impacts and legacy of the boarding school policy intended to “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.”

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<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Brown-Rice, “Examining the Theory of Historical Trauma Among Native Americans,” *The Professional Counselor*, 3, no. 3 (2013): 117-130; Judy Daniels and Michael D’Andrea, “Trauma and the Soul Wound: A Multicultural-Social Justice Perspective,” *Counseling Today*, accessed May 22, 2018, <https://ct.counseling.org/2007/06/dignity-development-diversity-6/>.

<sup>11</sup> Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Neal Salisbury, “Red Puritans: The ‘Praying Indians’ of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 31(1), (January 1974), 27-54.

# Indian Boarding Schools: The First Indian

## A SYSTEM OF DOMINATION

In 1958, as Indian boarding schools were starting to wane, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) created the Indian Adoption Project.

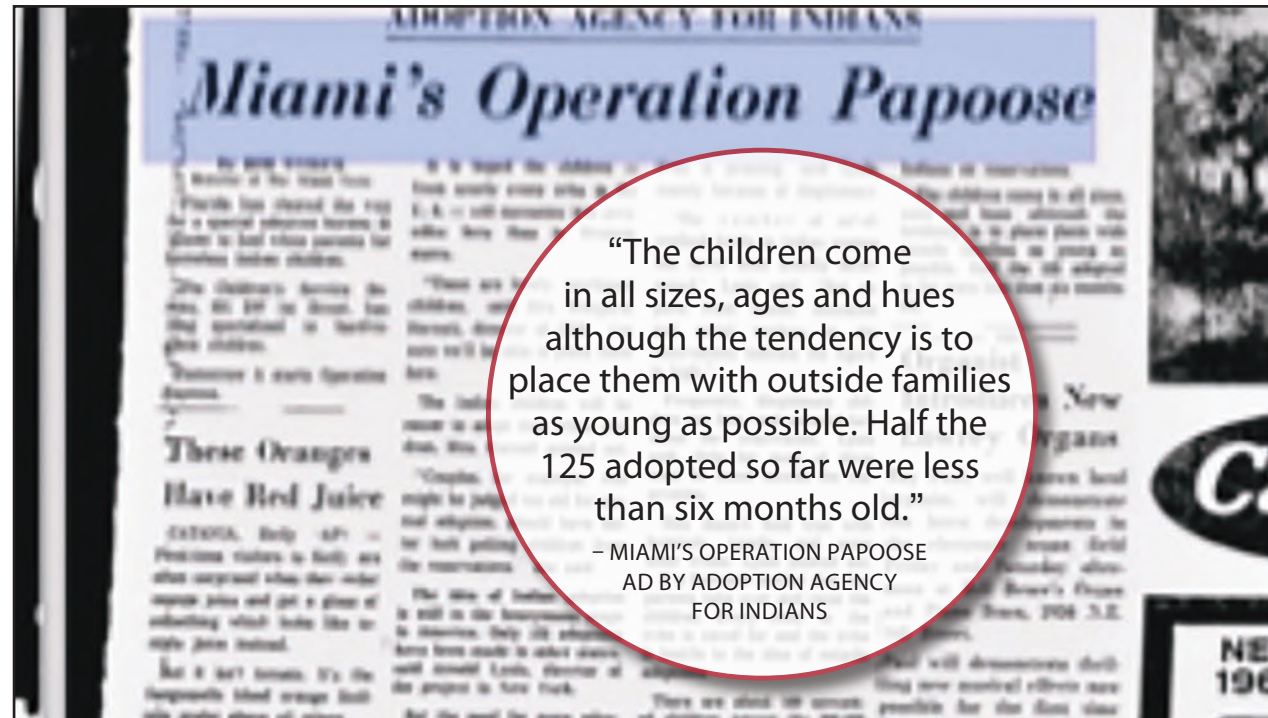
Both the U.S. Indian Boarding School and the Indian Adoption policies were intentionally designed to force assimilation and eradicate Native cultures and family systems.

“This was not an accident of history, it was a government program designed to save the government money and dismantle Tribal Nations. All under the guise of integrating Native children more fully into American society,” said Melissa Olson (Ojibwe) in a documentary she produced exploring the cultural and historical impacts of forced adoption.<sup>13</sup>

When the BIA started the project it enlisted social workers to visit reservations and convince parents to sign away their parental rights. It was a way to assimilate these children into “civilization,” Olson said. The government believed adoption was the best option for dealing with the perennial “Indian problem.”<sup>14</sup>

“When you removed a child and put them in a non-Indian family, they wouldn’t be getting to know other Indian people as they would in a boarding school, they would hopefully be raised in a middle-class family. And so the idea was that they would be fully assimilated, and at no cost to the government,” said Margaret Jacobs, non-Native author of “A Generation Removed,” a book on forced Indian adoption.<sup>15</sup>

Sandy White Hawk (Lakota), NABS Board President and Executive Director for the First Nations Repatriation Institute, writes about her experiences as an adoptee. As a part of her



Newspaper ad in the Miami News, 1964.

writing, White Hawk frequently looks to the connections between boarding school policy and adoption of Indigenous children to non-Indigenous families.

“This idea did not come from grace (a basic Christian concept), but rather a cruel assumption that Indian families did not have a religion and a spiritual belief system or a family system. All they saw was poverty and alcoholism—circumstances we came upon due to colonization—and they compared it to their life and concluded that they and their way of life were superior,” writes White Hawk.<sup>16</sup>

This notion of white supremacy created an abusive environment where White Hawk was forcibly separated from her traditional natural spirit. She writes, “My adoptive mother constantly reminded me that no matter what I

did, I came from a pagan race whose only hope for redemption was to assimilate to white culture. From the time I was small I heard things like, ‘you better not grow up to be a good for nothing Indian,’ and so it was a continuation of identity shaming and cultural genocide,” said White Hawk.<sup>17</sup>

By the 1960s about one in four Native children were living apart from their families. Many of these adopted children, now adults, struggle with memories from traumatic childhoods in abusive homes, while trying to figure out where they fit in as Natives in white communities.

In 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was created to stop these adoptions that deliberately removed children from Tribal communities, but the struggle continues.

# Child Welfare Policy in the U.S.

Native children are still placed in foster care at higher rates per capita than any other ethnic group, effectively removing them from their communities. These placements often still lead to adoption with non-Native families, despite ICWA.

“These problems aren’t going to be resolved until people are educated enough to change the model. We are still dealing with ongoing removal of our children—from boarding schools, to adoption, to foster care and other institutions. This all started from the Boarding School Era when it was okay to ‘Kill the Indian to Save the Man.’” said, Christine Diindiisi McCleave (Ojibwe), NABS Executive Director. “Today, the government is still taking our children. It’s race-based systematic removal of children, which is ongoing cultural genocide.”

## 2014 NATIVE YOUTH REPORT

The 2014 White House Report on Native Youth lists major disparities in health and education, and declares a state of emergency regarding Native youth suicide and PTSD rates, which are three times the general public—the same rate as veterans of the Iraqi war.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, in addition to the other negative effects of decades of debilitating poverty, educational progress was and continues to be

hindered by poor physical infrastructure in the schools serving Native youth. Today, federal and state partners are making improvements in a number of areas, including education, but absent a significant increase in financial and political investment, the path forward is uncertain. Despite advances in Tribal self-determination, the opportunity gaps remain startling:

- More than one in three American Indian and Alaska Native children live in poverty.<sup>23</sup>
- The American Indian/Alaska Native high school graduation rate is 67 percent, the lowest of any racial/ethnic demographic group across all schools.<sup>24</sup> The most recent Department of Education data indicate that the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools fare even worse, with a graduation rate of 53 percent, compared to a national average of 80 percent.<sup>25</sup>
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death—2.5 times the national rate—for Native youth in the 15 to 24 year old age group.<sup>26</sup>

In 1969, the Senate convened a Special Subcommittee on Indian Education to investigate the challenges facing Native students. The resulting report, titled “Indian Education: A National Tragedy, a National Challenge,” informally known as the “Kennedy Report,” delivered a scathing indictment of the federal government’s Indian education policies.<sup>27</sup> It concluded that the “dominant policy...of coercive assimilation” has had “disastrous effects on the education of Indian children.” The Subcommittee detailed 60 recommendations for overhauling the system, all of which centered on “increased Indian participation and control of their own education programs.” Congress also moved to enhance the role of Native nations in education, with the Indian Education Act of 1972, the landmark Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978, and the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988. These laws provided tribal governments, communities, and families with unprecedented opportunities to influence the direction of their children’s future. Indian education has made much progress in the self-determination era, but acknowledgement and awareness of the boarding school legacy is needed to create a paradigm change. ■

<sup>22</sup> Executive Office of the President, “2014 Native Youth Report,” Obama White House Archives, December 2014, [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/20141129nativeyouthreport\\_final.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/20141129nativeyouthreport_final.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> American Community Survey 5-year estimates, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, December 17, 2013), cited in Executive Office of the President, “2014 Native Youth Report.”

<sup>24</sup> Indian Students in Public Schools—Cultivating the Next Generation: Hearing on Indian Education Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, 113th Congress, testimony of William Mendoza, Executive Director, White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, 2014 cited in Executive Office of the President, “2014 Native Youth Report.”

<sup>25</sup> Marie C. Stetsler and Robert Stillwell, “Public High School Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates and Event Dropout Rates: School Years 2010-11 and 2011-12” (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, April 2014), <https://nces.ed.gov/pub2014/2014391.pdf>, cited in Executive Office of the President, “2014 Native Youth Report.”

<sup>26</sup> Pamela Hyde, “Behavior Health and Tribal Communities,” (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, February 8, 2011), <https://www.store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA11-PHYDE020811/SMA11-PHYDE020811.pdf> cited in Executive Office of the President, “2014 Native Youth Report.”

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Senate, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy, a National Disgrace* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969).

<sup>13</sup> *Stolen Childhoods*, produced by Melissa Olson and Ryan Katz, narrated by Melissa Olson (Minneapolis, MN: KFAI, 2017), DVD.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Margaret D. Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Sandy White Hawk, “Who Is Sandy White Hawk,” First Nations Repatriation Institute, accessed May 7, 2018, [http://www.werecominghome.com/Sandy\\_White\\_Hawk.html](http://www.werecominghome.com/Sandy_White_Hawk.html).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

## How Many Boarding Schools, How Many Children?

The records of Indian boarding schools are scattered in public archives and private collections across the country. As a result, we still do not know how many total children were actually removed from their families and placed in boarding schools. This is what we do know:

By 1926, the Indian Office estimated that nearly 83% of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools<sup>18</sup>



- 1900: 20,000 children in Indian boarding schools<sup>19</sup>
- 1925: 60,889 children in Indian boarding schools<sup>20</sup>
- 150 Residential Schools in Canada ▶ 150,000 children ▶ 6000 children who died or went missing<sup>21</sup>
- 360+ Indian Boarding Schools in the U.S. ▶ How many children? ▶ How many died or went missing?

- Child Removal Systems**
- Mission Schools
  - Boarding Schools
  - Indian Schools
  - Day Schools
  - Military Schools
  - Fort Schools
  - Labor Schools and Camps
  - Sanatoriums
  - Adoption
  - Foster Placements
  - Orphanages
  - Detention or Reform Schools

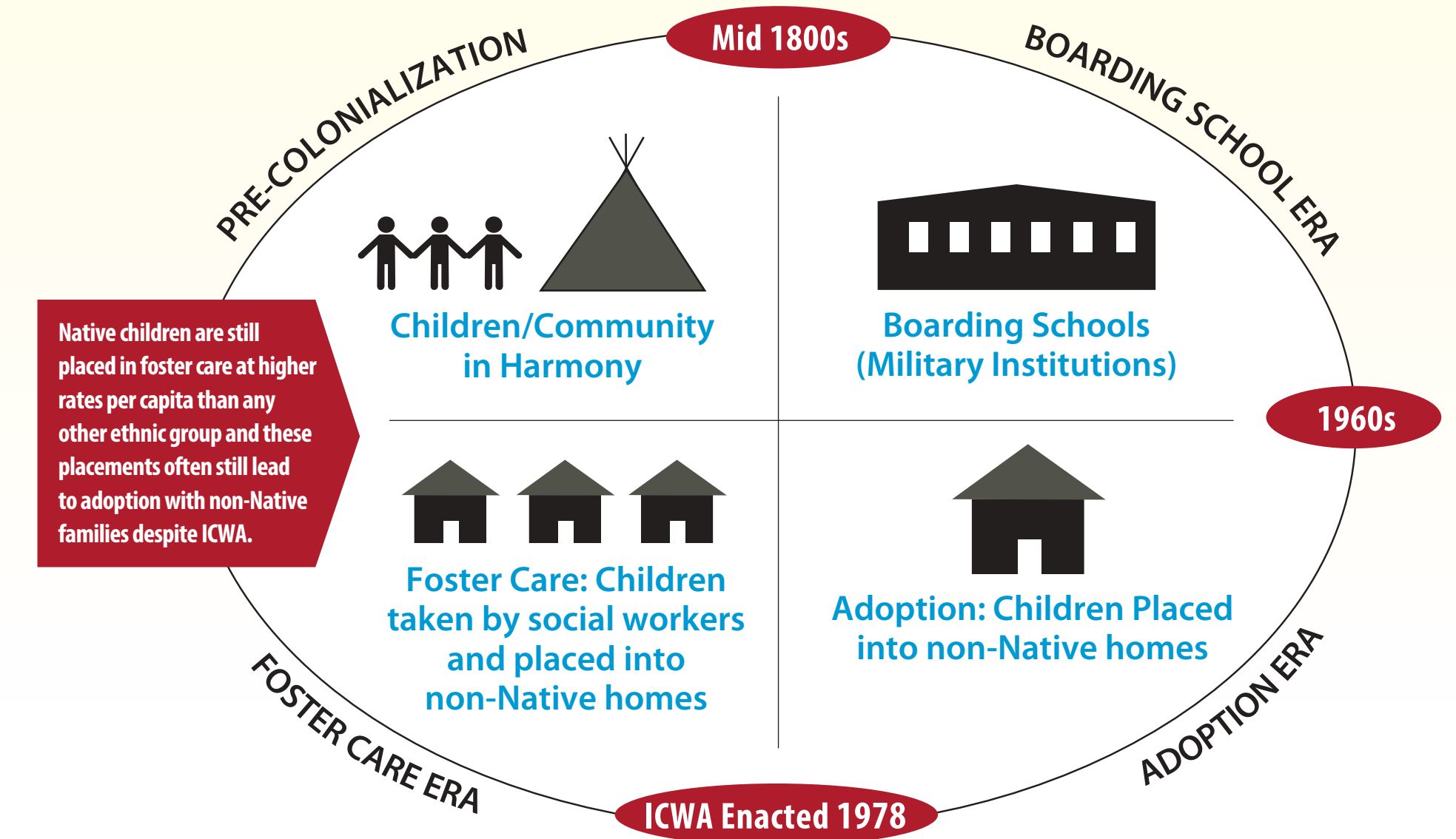
<sup>18</sup> Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>21</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) [http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Principles\\_English\\_Web.pdf](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Principles_English_Web.pdf)

## Evolution of Race-Based Child Removal in the United States



# American Indian Boarding Schools by State



**367 Schools**  
73 remain open today  
15 still boarding

**29 States**

The top five states with the most boarding schools were:

- Oklahoma (83)
- Arizona (51)
- Alaska (33)
- New Mexico (26)
- South Dakota (25)

**14 Denominations**

- Catholic (80)
- Presbyterian (21)
- Quaker (15)
- Episcopal (9)
- Methodist (12)
- Baptist (4)
- Jesuit (4)
- Dutch Reformed (2)
- Evangelical (2)
- Mennonite (2)
- Protestant (2)
- Anglican (1)
- 7th Day Adventist (1)
- Unitarian (1)

Originally compiled by Dr. Denise Lajimodiere for the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS), this list also includes considerable contributions from Dr. Rose Miron, Dr. Samuel B. Torres, and Ellie Heaton. This list may not be complete.

**Alabama 1**  
Asbury Manual Labor School and Mission

**Alaska 33**  
Anchorage\*  
Anvik Mission (Christ Church)  
Bethel Regional High School  
Chououtla  
Copper Valley  
Covenant High School  
Douglas Island Friends Mission School  
Eklutna (Tyonek)  
Fairbanks\*  
Friends High School  
Galena\*  
Holy Cross  
Jessee Lee  
Kanakanak (Dillingham-Kanakanak)  
Kodiak Aleutian Regional High School  
Kosorefsky  
Mount Edgecumbe\*\*  
Nenana  
Nenana High School\*\*  
Nunapitsinghak Moravian Children's Home  
Palmer\*  
Palmer House  
Pius Tenth Mission  
Seward Sanitarium  
Sitka Industrial Training School (Sheldon Jackson)\*  
St. Mark's Mission  
St. Mary's  
Victory Bible School  
Wasilla\*  
White Mountain  
William E. Beltz School (Nome-Beltz)  
Woody Island Mission and Orphanage  
Wrangell Institute

**Arizona 51**  
Chinle\*  
Colorado River  
Dilcon Community School\*  
Fort Apache (Theodore Roosevelt)  
Fort Defiance  
Fort Mojave Industrial School  
Gila River St. Peter School  
Globe New Jerusalem  
Greasewood Springs Community School\*  
Greyhills Academy High School\*\*  
Holbrook\*  
Hunter's Point Indian School\*\*  
Jeehdeez'a Academy  
Kaibeto Indian School\*  
Kayenta Indian School\*  
Keams Canyon\*  
Kinlichee Indian School\*  
Kingman Indian School  
Leupp\*  
Low Mountain\*  
Lukachukai Community School\*  
Many Farms High School\*  
March Pass  
Naa Tsis' Ana Community School\*  
Navajo Training School  
Navajo Mountain  
Nazlini Community School\*

Nenahnezad Indian School\*  
Phoenix Indian School  
Pima  
Pine Springs  
Pinon  
Rice Station  
Rocky Ridge\*  
Rough Rock Community School\*  
Sacaton  
San Carlos  
Santa Rosa Ranch\*  
SebaDalkai  
Shonto Indian School\* (Shonto Preparatory Technology HS)\*  
Theodore Roosevelt  
St. Michaels Industrial\*  
St. Johns Mission at Gila Crossing  
Tee Nos Pos  
Toyei  
Truxton Canyon  
Tuba City\*\*  
Tucson Indian Training School  
Western Navajo  
Wide Ruins  
Wide Ruins Community School\*

**California 10**  
Fort Bidwell Indian School  
Fort Yuma Indian School  
Greenville Indian Industrial  
Hoopa Valley  
Perris Indian School  
Round Valley Indian School  
Sherman Institute\*\*  
St. Anthony's Industrial School  
St. Boniface Indian Industrial School  
St. Turibius Industrial

**Colorado 6**  
Fort Lewis Indian School (now Fort Lewis College)\*  
Good Shepherd Industrial School  
Grand Junction  
Holy Cross Abbey  
Ignacio  
Southern Ute\*

**Iowa 3**  
Sac & Fox  
Toledo Industrial  
White's Iowa Manual Labor Institute

**Idaho 5**  
Fort Hall  
Fort Lapwai  
Lemhi  
Sacred Heart Convent of Mary Immaculate  
St. Josephs

**Indiana 2**  
St. Joseph's Indian Normal School  
White Manual Labor Institute

**Kansas 7**  
Haskell Industrial Training School (now Haskell Indian Nations University)\*

Great Nemaha Indian School  
Kaw Manual Labor School  
Kickapoo  
Osage Manual Labor School/St. Francis  
Potawatamie Manual Labor School  
Shawnee Mission Manual Labor School

**Michigan 5**  
Holy Childhood of Jesus School  
Holy Name (Chippewa) Baraga  
Mount Pleasant Industrial  
Pottawatomie  
St. Joseph's Orphanage

**Minnesota 15**  
Cass/Leech Lake  
Clontarf (St. Paul's Industrial School)  
Convent of our Lady of the Lake  
Cross Lake  
Morris Industrial (Sisters of Mercy)  
Pine Point  
Pipestone Indian School  
Red Lake  
St. Benedict's Orphan School (St. Joseph's Academy)  
St. Francis Xavier's Industrial School  
St. Mary's Mission\*  
St. Theodore's  
Vermillion Lake Indian School  
White Earth Boarding School (St. Benedict's Mission)  
Wild Rice River

**Mississippi 1**  
Choctaw Central Indian School\*

**Montana 17**  
Blackfeet\*  
Bond's Mission School (Montana Industrial)  
Crow Agency  
Flathead  
Fort Belknap  
Fort Peck  
Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School  
Holy Family Mission  
Holy James Mission  
St. Xavier Mission (Pretty Eagle Catholic Academy)\*  
Pryor Creek  
St. Ignatius Mission  
St. Labre Mission\*\*  
St. Paul's Mission School (Mission Grade School)\*  
St. Peter's  
Tongue River  
Willow Creek

**Nebraska 7**  
Genoa Indian Industrial School  
Iowa Industrial School  
Omaha Indian School  
Oto and Missouri Agency Industrial  
Santee Industrial School  
Santee Normal Training School  
St. Augustine's\*

**Nevada 3**  
Stewart Indian School  
Fort McDermitt  
Western Shoshone Indian School

**New Mexico 26**  
Albuquerque Indian School (Indian Pueblo Training School)  
Bernalillo  
Chichiltah/Jones Ranch  
Ch'ooahgai Community (Chuska)\*  
Crownpoint Indian School\*  
Dzilth-Na-0-Dith-Hle Community School\*  
Fort Wingate Indian School\*  
Jicarilla Apache  
Lake Valley Indian School  
Mescalero Apache  
Navajo Prep\*  
Nenannezed\*  
Ojo Encino Indian School\*  
Pine Hill\*  
Pueblo Bonito  
Pueblo Pintado Indian School  
Rehoboth Christian School\*  
San Juan  
Santa Fe Indian School\*  
Shiprock  
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute  
St. Catherine Indian School  
Toadlena  
Tohatchi  
Windgate Indian School  
Zuni

**New York 3**  
Convent of Our Lady of Mercy  
Thomas/Gowanda  
Tunasassa Friends Boarding School for Indian Children

**North Carolina 1**  
Eastern Cherokee

**North Dakota 12**  
Bismark Indian School  
Fort Berthold  
Fort Totten Indian School  
Maddock Agricultural and Training School  
Sacred Heart Mission  
Seven Dolors Mission  
St. Mary  
St. Mary (Turtle Mountain)  
St. Michael's Mission  
Standing Rock Agency Agricultural/Martin Kennel  
Standing Rock Indian Industrial School  
Wahpeton Indian School (Now Circle of Nations)\*\*

**Ohio 1**  
Shawnee Friends Mission and School

**Oklahoma 83**  
Absentee Shawnee  
Anadarko (St. Patricks)

Arapaho Manual Labor and Boarding School (Concho)  
Armstrong Academy  
Asbury Manual Labor School  
Bacone College (Indian University)\*  
Bloomfield Academy (Bloomfield Seminary; Carter Seminary; now Chickasaw Children's Village)\*  
Bloomfield Academy for Girls  
Burney Institute (Burney Institute for Girls; Lebanon Orphan School; Chickasaw Orphan Home and Manual Labor School)  
Cantonment Indian School  
Cherokee Female Seminary  
Cherokee Indian Orphan School  
Cherokee Male Seminary  
Cheyenne Manual Labor and Boarding School  
Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy for Boys  
Chickasaw Orphan Home and Manual Labor School  
Chillico Indian Agricultural School  
Chuala Female Seminary  
Collins (Colbert) Institute  
Coweta Mission (Koweta Boarding School)  
Darlington Mennonite Mission  
Dwight Mission  
Edwards University  
El Meta Bond College  
Emahaka Mission School for Girls  
Eucluee (Yuchi)  
Eufaula Boarding School for Girls (National High School at Eufaula; now Eufaula Dormitory)\*  
Folsom Training School  
Fort Coffee Academy for Boys  
Fort Sill Indian School  
Goodland Academy (Old Goodland Indian Orphanage)\*  
Harrell International Institute (Spaulding Female College)  
Henry Kendall College (Presbyterian School for Indian Girls; Minerva Home; now the University of Tulsa)  
Hillside Mission  
Hominy Creek (St. John's)  
Iowa Mission  
Jones Academy/Jones Male Academy\*  
Mekasuke Academy  
Murray School of Agriculture (Murray State College)\*  
Murray Indian Orphanage\*  
Nazareth (College) Institute  
Norwalk Academy for Boys  
Nuyaka Mission  
Nuyaka School and Orphanage  
Oak Hill Industrial Academy (Alice Lee Elliott Memorial Academy)  
Oak Ridge Manual Labor School  
Oklahoma Presbyterian College for Women (Calvin Institute/Durant Presbyterian College)  
Osage Boarding School  
Otoe  
Pawnee Boarding and Training School  
Pawnee Industrial Boarding School  
Pecan Creek Mission  
Ponca Indian School  
Quapaw

Rainy Mountain  
Red Moon  
Riverside Indian School\*\*  
Sac & Fox Indian School  
Sasakwa Female Academy  
Seeger Industrial School  
Seneca Boarding School  
Sequoyah High School (now Sequoyah Schools)\*\*  
Shawnee  
Spencer Academy  
St. Agnes  
St. Agnes Academy  
St. Benedict's Industrial School (Sacred Heart Institute)  
St. Elizabeth School  
St. John's School  
St. Joseph's School  
St. Louis School  
St. Mary's  
St. Mary's Academy for Girls  
St. Mary's School  
Sulphur Springs School  
Tullahassee Manual Labor Boarding School  
Tuskahoma (Tushkahomma) Institute/Choctaw Female Academy  
Wapanucka Academy for Girls (Allen's Academy/ Chickasaw Rock Academy/Wapanucka Institute)  
Wealaka Mission (replaced Tullahassee)  
Wetumka Mission (Levering)  
Wewoka Mission Boarding School for Girls  
Wheelock Academy (Wheelock Mission and Wheelock Female Seminaries)  
Yellow Springs School

**Oregon 9**  
Chemawa Indian School (Salem Indian Industrial School; Harrison Institute)\*\*  
Forest Grove Indian Training School  
Grand Ronde  
Kate Drexel/St. Andrews Industrial School  
Klamath Indian School for Boys  
Siletz  
Umatilla  
Warm Springs  
Yaimax Indian Boarding School for Girls

**Pennsylvania 6**  
Carlisle Indian Industrial School  
Girls' Home of the Lincoln Institution/Boys' Home (Lincoln Institute)  
Holy Providence School for Indians and Colored People  
Martinsburg  
St. Francis  
West Philadelphia Industrial

**South Dakota 25**  
All Saint's  
Brainard  
Chamberlain Indian School  
Cheyenne River  
Flandreau School/Riggs Institute\*\*  
Holy Rosary Mission/Red Cloud Indian School\*  
Hope

Immaculate Conception Indian School/Stephan Mission/Crow Creek\*  
Lower Brule  
Marty Indian School (St. Paul's Indian Mission)\*\*  
Oahe  
Oglala Indian School  
Our Lady of Lourdes\*  
Pierre Indian School\*\*  
Pine Ridge  
Rapid City Indian School  
Sisseton Sioux Indian School  
Springfield Indian School  
St. Elizabeth's  
St. Francis Indian School (Rosebud)\*  
St. John's School for Girls  
St. Joseph's Indian School\*\*  
St. Mary's School for Girls  
Tekakwitha Indian Mission (orphanage)  
Yankton Reservation Industrial

**Utah 4**  
Aneth  
Intermountain Indian School  
Ouray  
Uintah

**Virginia 1**  
Hampton University

**Washington 13**  
Colville Mission School  
Cushman Indian School  
Fort Spokane Indian School  
Male and Female Industrial School  
Oneida Indian School  
Puyallup  
Sacred Heart Convent  
St. George's Mission  
St. Francis Regis Mission  
St. Mary's (now Pascal Sherman Indian School)\*  
Tonasket  
Tulalip Indian School  
Yakima/Fort Simcoa

**Wisconsin 12**  
Good Shepard Industrial School  
Hayward Indian School - Milwaukee  
Holy Family (Bayfield)  
Keshena/Menominee  
Lac de Flambeau  
Menominee  
Oneida Indian School  
St. Joseph's Industrial School  
St. Mary's  
Tomah Indian Industrial School  
Winnebago  
Wittenberg Indian School - Bethany Mission

**Wyoming 5**  
Fort Washakie/Wind River  
Hayward Indian School  
Robert's Episcopal Mission for Shoshone Girls  
St. Michael's Mission  
St. Stephen's Mission Industrial School\*

\*Indicates the school is still open as of 2020. \*\*Indicates the school is open and continues to board as of 2020.

# Historical and Intergenerational Trauma

**DR. MARIA YELLOW HORSE BRAVE HEART, DEFINES HISTORICAL TRAUMA AS...**

“...the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over one’s lifetime and from generation to generation following loss of lives, land and vital aspects of culture.”<sup>28</sup>



## EPIGENETICS

A study that focused on children of Holocaust survivors found that trauma effects may linger in the body chemistry of the next generation. These children:

“could be more likely to develop stress or anxiety disorders.”<sup>29</sup>

The legacy of the boarding schools is loss of familial ties and structures, loss of language, cultural decimation, and other violations of human rights. The lasting effects are still present in Native American communities in the many forms of lateral violence, substance abuse, high rates of imprisonment, disproportionate removal of Indigenous children from their homes, and mental and physical illnesses.

The boarding school students, their children, and now their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, have suffered the legacy of the federal policy that established and sustained those schools. The trauma the children suffered has gone unrecognized and unresolved, and it is passed on to each subsequent generation where it continues to work in, undermine, and devastate Native American individuals, families, and communities.

The science of epigenetics (the study of changes in gene activity) is beginning to uncover evidence that intergenerational trauma is real, and historical trauma contributes to the

development of illnesses such as PTSD, depression, and Type 2 Diabetes. High rates of addiction, suicide, mental illness, and sexual violence may in part also be influenced by historical trauma.

“Trauma leaves a mark on DNA of some victims: Gene-environment interaction causes lifelong dysregulation of stress hormones.”<sup>30</sup> – Max-Planck-Gesellschaft Institute of Psychiatry

“Abused children are at high risk of anxiety and mood disorders, as traumatic experience induces lasting changes to their gene regulation. Scientists from the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich have now documented for the first time that genetic variants of the FKBP5 gene can influence epigenetic alterations in this gene induced by early trauma.

In individuals with a genetic predisposition, trauma causes long-term changes in DNA methylation leading to a lasting dysregulation of the stress hormone system. As a result, those affected find themselves less able to cope with

stressful situations throughout their lives, frequently leading to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety disorders in adulthood. Doctors and scientists hope these discoveries will yield new treatment strategies tailored to individual patients, as well as increased public awareness of the importance of protecting children from trauma and its consequences.”<sup>31</sup>

Dr. Rachel Yehuda, Director of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine’s Traumatic Stress Studies Division, noticed an epigenetic change, a chemical change in a marker attached to the gene itself. Yehuda and her team studied survivors of the Holocaust and found that direct survivors experience an adaptation or response to a horrendous environmental event. However, they also found that the descendants of Holocaust survivors respond to this parental trauma indicating that the children of Holocaust survivors could be more likely to develop stress or anxiety disorders.<sup>32</sup>

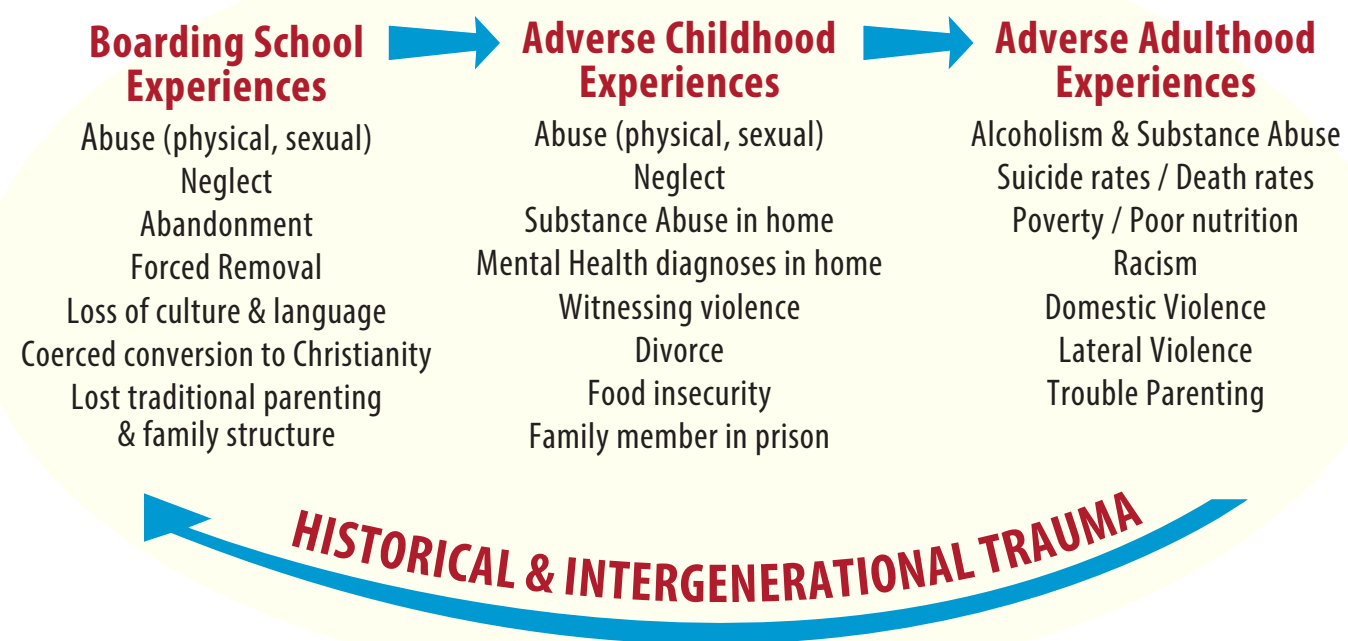
“American Indian and Alaskan Native children experience posttraumatic stress disorder at the same rate as veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and triple the rate of the general population.”<sup>33</sup>

– Attorney General’s Advisory Committee on American Indian/Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence: Ending Violence so Children Can Thrive.

DNA is passed from parent to child. Yehuda’s research suggests parental life experiences can modify their body chemistry and those modifications can be transmitted to children as well. ■

In addition to trauma being passed on in our DNA, the CDC has also found that Adverse Childhood Experiences can directly affect rates of “future violence victimization and perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity.”<sup>34</sup> The experiences of boarding school survivors directly influence their experiences as adults and the experiences of their descendants and family members.

According to a 1997 study by the CDC and Kaiser Permanente, exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is linked to chronic diseases and higher rates of mortality.<sup>35</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra M. DeBruyn, “The American Indian holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief,” *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8 no.2 (1998), 60-82

<sup>29</sup> Yehuda, Daskalakis, Bierer, Bader, Klengel, Holsboer, Binder, “Holocaust Intergenerational Effect on FKBP5.”

<sup>30</sup> Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, “Childhood Trauma Leaves Mark on DNA of Some Victims,” (Munich: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft Institute of Psychiatry, 2012), <https://www.mpg.de/6643282/childhood-trauma-dna>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Rachel Yehuda, Nikolaos P. Daskalakis, Linda M. Bierer, Heather N. Bader, Torsten Klengel, Florian Holsboer, Elisabeth B. Binder, “Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation,” *Biological Psychiatry* 80 no. 5 (September 1, 2016), 372-380, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2015.08.005>.

<sup>33</sup> Byron L. Dorgan and Joanne Shenandoah, “Attorney General’s Advisory Committee on American Indian/Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence: Ending Violence so Children Can Thrive,” *U.S. Department of Justice*, November 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente, “The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” Center for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed May 11, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/behavioralrisk/acesstudy/about.html>. For more information on the study see: Vincent J. Felitti MD, FACP, Robert F. Anda MD, MS, Dale Nordenberg MD, David F. Williamson MS, PhD, Alison M Spitz MS, MPH, Valerie Edwards BA Mary P. Koss PhD, James S. Marks MD, MPH, “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 14 no. 4 (May 1998), 245-258, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)0017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)0017-8).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

# Stories of Boarding School Trauma

**MANY OF US HAVE BOARDING SCHOOL STORIES IN OUR LIVES OR IN OUR FAMILIES.**

Many of us don’t tell these stories or hear these stories from our relatives because the things that happened at Indian boarding school were either too traumatic to talk about or were normalized.



Looking unto Jesus: “A class in penmanship at the Red Deer Indian Industrial School”<sup>36</sup>

## BREAK THE SILENCE, BEGIN THE HEALING

In some Indigenous cultures, storytelling is an art with cultural protocols surrounding how and when to tell stories because the stories have lives of their own and must be cared for, respected, and honored. NABS seeks to be respectful of these traditions, engaging in cross-sector collaboration with academics, educators, advocates, legal experts, counselors, and healers in its work toward surfacing stories and healing trauma. Some may call the boarding school stories “research” or “interviews” while others may call them “testimony” or “cases.” Regardless, these stories must be treated with the utmost care, both in the collection so as to not trigger trauma responses and in the sharing so as to respect the giver and spirit of the story.

Here are some stories that were collected by Dr. Denise Lajimodiere<sup>37</sup> and Christine Diindiisi McCleave, M.A.,<sup>38</sup> during interviews with boarding school survivors for separate research. These stories highlight the injustice that was experienced by these students, to validate the trauma they’ve carried

all these years. It’s time to Break the Silence, Begin the Healing™. The names have been changed to protect the identities of the students.

Claire\* is now an elder and tells about boarding school experiences at two different Catholic Indian boarding schools in the 1960s. When she was just a little girl in first grade she experienced corporal punishment and shaming tactics from a nun.

*“I was locked in a closet by a nun for discipline. It was pitch black, they used a skeleton key to lock the door. I had to pee and banged on the door for hours, crying. When they opened the door and saw I had peed my pants, I was whipped with a short belt, doubled.”*

When Claire was not much older and at a different Catholic Indian boarding school, she continued to be subjected to abuse from the nuns. “Someone had stuffed their pee-stained sheet in a closet and the nun found it. No one would own up to it. So the nun made us pee in a bucket, then she pushed all of our faces into it, one at a time” she said. Claire wasn’t the only child to be abused at a federally-funded, church run Indian boarding school. A little boy named Harry\* was beat by nuns with a cut out strip of rubber from a tire. Harry was 86 when he told his story.

*Continued on page 12*



<sup>36</sup> Red Deer, Alberta, ca. 1914-1999. United Church of Canada, Victoria University Archives, 93.049P-850N

<sup>37</sup> Denise Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries: Stories from Northern Plains Indian Boarding School Survivors*, Contemporary Voices of Indigenous Peoples Series (Fargo: North Dakota State University Press, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Christine Diindiisi Wallethe McCleave, “Spiritual Leadership in Modern-Day Native American Culture and Approaches to Native American Religion and Christianity” (MA thesis, Augsburg College, 2016), Augsburg Theology Archives, Lindell Library, Minneapolis, MN, <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Wallethe-Thesis-2016-Final.pdf>.

\* Names have been changed to protect the privacy of boarding school survivors.

## Stories of Boarding School Trauma (CONTINUED)

### SPIRITUAL TRAUMA

A Pipe Carrier told us that he was threatened by a Christian who told him, “You better open your life to Jesus or God will get you. You Natives are always practicing hocus pocus, it’s all devil-worshipping stuff.”

The pipe carrier replied, “Well I’m sorry you feel that way, but you call our spirituality hocus pocus?” He said, “look at your Jesus, he walked on water. That’s kind of hocus pocus. He fed millions of people with the fish and bread. Then he died and came back to life; that’s kind of hocus pocus too. So how come you believe that way and not our ways? And he didn’t hear it, he just said ‘my God is my God’ and that was it.”

Approximately half of all boarding schools in the U.S. were run by various Christian denominations. This was a direct result of the 1819 Civilization Fund Act, which authorized federal funding for religious groups to live among and teach Indians, and the 1868 Grant Peace Policy, which divided Indian reservations among Christian denominations, leading to the establishment of boarding schools. These federally-funded Christian boarding schools were used to assimilate American Indians by disrupting family systems and preventing children from engaging in our cultural practices, including language and ceremonies. As a result, although Indigenous languages are being used more in the churches today, many elders who attended boarding schools are still too traumatized and afraid to speak their Tribal language in public.<sup>39</sup>

Another boarding school survivor told us how the religious leaders of the school treated him, saying “I was working in the mail room with a priest. A kid came in and wanted his mail. I handed a letter to him. The priest took a board and whacked me in the head. I got knocked out and woke up on the floor by myself because all mail had to be opened by the priest first, and he blackened out certain things before giving to students.” The elder added, “I don’t understand why they didn’t feel that we knew about God, you know? Why did they think that we didn’t have a God? That we understood.” And he said, “Didn’t the Bible say that there’s only one God? And I believe that there’s only one God, it’s just that we have different ways to express worship towards that one God.”

Despite abuses by religious leaders, many Native Americans are still practicing Christians today. A Native American woman who still identifies as Christian admitted that “We’ve probably had the worst holocaust in the history of the human community happen here in America because of the death of so many Indian people. We had the government and the church that came in to destroy the culture of Indian people and to take over the lands of

Indian people. Some of those practices have continued on, that have touched our generations, when you look at what boarding schools have done to Indian people where they literally kidnapped children out of their Indian homes—to take a child off to someplace else and punish them for speaking their language or trying to practice their religion or punishing them because they were going to run away and go back home. So we were the victims of horrible atrocities and some of that has been done by the church, but that was the cultural church, not the theology of the church—in other words, it was man, not God.”

However, for some, there is still no explaining the treatment of our children in Indian boarding schools under the guise of Christ’s love. Claire told us,

*“If you went to communion you got to eat, if not, you did not eat. And they fed us pure slop, but if you didn’t eat it, you got whipped with a wide leather belt with handles on it. I was only eight years old and sometimes I would eat a younger girl’s food so she didn’t get beaten.”*

### THE PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE THAT NO ONE TALKS ABOUT

So many of our Tribal communities are dealing with the ongoing impacts of violence and sexual abuse that started in the boarding schools.



Boys praying on bunk beds: “Montreal Gazette Files. Residential school children students in a typical dormitory.”

Elly, a boarding school survivor, shared “I was four years old when I was stolen and taken to Chemawa, Oregon.” As if being ripped from her family wasn’t enough, the abuse continued when she got to school. “The matron grabbed me and my sister, stripped off our clothes laid us in a trough and scrubbed our genitals with lye soap, yelling at us that we were ‘filthy savages, dirty.’ I had to walk on my tip toes screaming in pain.” Others were made to kneel on a broomstick for 15-minute increments as punishment for bad behavior. “We had to stick our noses against the wall at the same time. If we moved our nose it was another 15 minutes extra” she added.

Untold stories of sexual abuse are carried throughout Native communities as well. Adele, another survivor, said, “We could hear the cries of the girls being molested at night. When my little sister got sick and was sent to the infirmary, I hid for three days and nights under her bed to make sure no one got to her.” Many are haunted by nightmares of the abuse. They suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress and sometimes don’t know why. Mike shared some difficult memories from his time at boarding school. He was raped by older boys—other students. “How do you tell your wife or children that?” he asked. Mike recalled the events and said “I would be screaming into my pillow. It happened hundreds of times. I still have physical problems.”

Not only were children subjected to sexual violence, but they were forced by staff to witness or participate in physical and mental abuse towards each other. If they refused, they were punished. Lenny, now 77 years old, shared that when he was 10,

*“They laid me over my bed and two boys held my hands and two others my feet. Each boy had to hit me with a studded belt. If anyone let up he had to take my place. I passed out and woke up in the infirmary. I was there for two weeks—I had to sleep on my stomach. I still have the scars. They called it the ‘gauntlet’.”*

Lenny shared many stories of abuse from his time at Chemawa Boarding School, including being the witness of a murder, “They killed a Blackfeet boy using a gauntlet beating—ruptured his kidneys. They shipped his body home with a note saying he died bravely.” Lenny explained how the boys at the school had to

build the coffins for students who died there. Sometimes the children from their tribe would say a secret burial prayer for them.

These stories remind us just how traumatizing boarding schools were for many children. While no child should ever have to experience abuse, it is especially troubling that these experiences happened after children were taken into state custody. Many of our relatives are still dealing with the impacts of abuses they endured in boarding school. Some are not ready to tell their stories, and even those who are ready may not be able to bring their cases to court. Statutes of limitations in many states prevent survivors from bringing forth older cases. While some find healing in other ways, those who want to tell their stories and hold their abusers responsible should have the ability to do so in a court of law. We must continue to push for survivors’ voices to be heard. ■



**Many believe that healing historical trauma from boarding schools occurs when we empower our communities by engaging in our cultural traditions and speaking our language.**



# Boarding School Healing Today

## HEALING BEGINS WITH THE TRUTH

Previous attempts by individual government officials to make apology or acknowledge the ongoing impacts of the Boarding School Era have fallen short of Native American and Alaskan Native community standards. Our Coalition members and relatives want the truth about what happened in U.S. boarding schools.

Alissa Ackerman describes restorative justice as, “concerned with violations of people and relationships, not statute definitions and sentencing guidelines. It acknowledges the harm caused to victims, their families and friends, and their communities. A key component of restorative justice frameworks is that offenders must accept responsibility for their actions. Equally important is the survivor’s narrative, as much of the healing process stems from telling one’s story and being heard. The process allows victims to be heard, to seek the acknowledgement of culpability they need, and for perpetrators to hear, firsthand, the personal narrative of suffering they have caused that permeates, like a ripple effect, across time and relationships.”<sup>40</sup>

In Canada, the federal government and church denominations brought forth all their boarding school records for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In the U.S. we are still seeking records that identify all the details about the schools and the fate of Native American students taken into federal custody for boarding school attendance. It’s time the U.S. Government fully acknowledges the impact of this country’s boarding school policy.

We are calling for the creation of a “Truth Report: The U.S. Boarding School Policy, History, and Legacy.” Any form of U.S. Government

<sup>40</sup>Dr. Alissa R. Ackerman and Dr. Jill Levenson, “Sexual Assault: A Restorative Justice Model,” Alissa R. Ackerman, There Is A Better Way, published January 28, 2018, <http://www.alissaackerman.com/blog/>.

In a 2016 survey by NABS, respondents said Native peoples need acknowledgement from the federal government and churches for perpetrating the boarding school harms on our Tribal nations.



acknowledgement falls short if it does not include the commission of a study on boarding schools.

Nearly 300 people participated in an online survey by NABS in 2016. Demographics from the survey show that nearly half of the respondents were self-designated “non-Native allies,” indicating that this issue is important to more than just Native Americans. The majority

of the survey respondents were either boarding school survivors or descendants of boarding school survivors.

- 98.8% said that the U.S. needs to acknowledge the TRUTH: that Indian children were forcibly abducted, sent hundreds of miles away, beaten, starved, or abused.
- 96.9% said that the U.S. needs to share the FACTS about how many children were sent to boarding schools, how many died at schools, and why there are graves marked “unknown” at many school cemeteries.
- 91.7% of respondents believe that due to the high incidence of substance abuse and mental health issues resulting from the historical trauma of having attended boarding schools, increased funding of community-oriented healing programs in Indian Country and urban Native populations should be a priority.

Coalition members feel it is important to target historical trauma for healing. There is a dire need for American Indian and Alaska Native peoples in the U.S. to heal from the collective historical trauma of the schools and to interrupt the cycle of passing that trauma on to yet another generation.

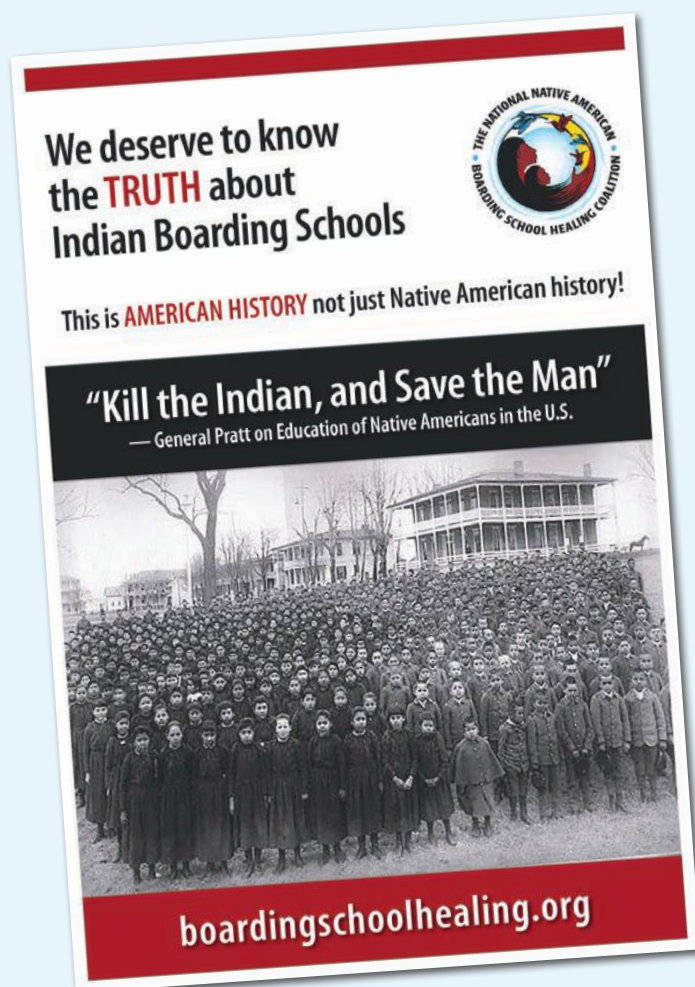
The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition also wants the U.S. to acknowledge that the prime ministers of both Australia and Canada apologized to aboriginal people for the devastating impact the schools have had on the social fabric of aboriginal communities and it’s time for the U.S. to do the same.

## Petition for “The Truth Report: The U.S. Indian Boarding School Policy, History, and Legacy”

NABS is petitioning the U.S. Federal Government to tell the American people the truth about the U.S. Indian Boarding School policy. NABS and our Tribal allies call for the commission of a comprehensive national study of the history of the U.S. Boarding School policy to include:

- Complete documentation of all schools, how many students attended, and the events that took place at each of the schools
- Testimony from those who suffered from abuse, neglect, or other trauma
- Documentation of the effects of the policy on individuals, families, and communities

This study is necessary to support recommendations by and to Tribal Nations concerning inter-generational trauma and potential paradigms for healing and reconciliation.



Native students at Carlisle Indian School circa 1881 and Native children in regalia today.

“Honoring Our Pain: Dedicating time and attention to honoring our pain ensures space for grief, outrage, and sorrow. This caring derives from our interconnectedness with all of life.”

— Stone Child College, Montana, Historical Trauma Curriculum

## OUR RESILIENCY IS OUR HOPE



Photo Credit: Kerri Cottle, Indian Country Today Media Network

The Santa Fe Indian Industrial School opened in 1890 to educate Native American children throughout the Southwest; it was one of two federal boarding schools in the state of New Mexico (the other was in Albuquerque). This school was established by the government during the Boarding School Era with a charge to assimilate Native children by prohibiting them from speaking their languages and practicing their traditional and spiritual beliefs. In the 1980s, the federally-run Santa Fe Indian Industrial School became the tribally-run Santa Fe Indian School, where language and culture are being revitalized.

On May 26, 2016, First Lady Michelle Obama, gave the commencement speech at the Santa Fe Indian School graduation ceremony.<sup>41</sup>

Here is what she said about the school’s legacy:

“As we all know, this school was founded as part of a deliberate, systematic effort to extinguish your culture; to literally annihilate who you were and what you believed in. But look at you today. The Native languages that were once strictly forbidden here now echo through hallways and in your dorm room conversations at night. The traditions that this school was designed to destroy are now expressed in every square foot of this building—in the art on your walls, in the statue in your MSC building, in the Po Pay Day song and dance performances in your plaza, in the prayers and blessings that you offer in your heart room.

And the endless military drills and manual labor that those early students endured have been replaced by one of the best academic curriculums in the country. And over the years, you all have proudly represented this school in chess tournaments, and science and robotics competitions, and every kind of internship and leadership conference imaginable. And nearly all of you are going on to college. And as the superintendent said, you’ve earned more than \$5 million in scholarships this year. That is breathtaking—breathtaking.

And whether you’re saying an ancient blessing over your hydroponically-grown crops, or using cutting-edge computer technology to understand the biology and hydrology of your ancestral lands,

“They tried to bury us. They didn’t know we were seeds.”

every day at this school, you’ve been weaving together thousands of years of your heritage with the realities of your modern lives. And all of that preparation and hard work, graduates, is so critically important, because make no mistake about it, you all are the next generation of leaders in your communities, and not years from now or decades from now, but right now.”

<sup>41</sup>For full speech see: Michelle Obama, “Remarks by the First Lady at the Santa Fe Indian School Commencement,” Office of the First Lady, The White House, May 26, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/26/remarks-first-lady-santa-fe-indian-school-commencement>





# LOOK INSIDE!

## Exploring the History and Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools in the U.S.



Child-size handcuffs from Haskell Indian School with before and after photo of "Three Lakota boys" at Carlisle Indian School, circa 1890.



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Find out the truth about Indian Boarding Schools in the U.S. and what communities are doing to heal.

Visit us online at [www.boardingschoolhealing.org](http://www.boardingschoolhealing.org)

- Get access to educational resources
- Hear personal stories from boarding school survivors
- And get involved!

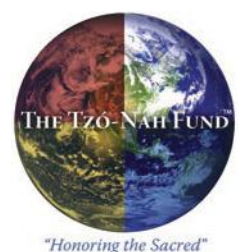


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