

The “Miseducation” of American Indians

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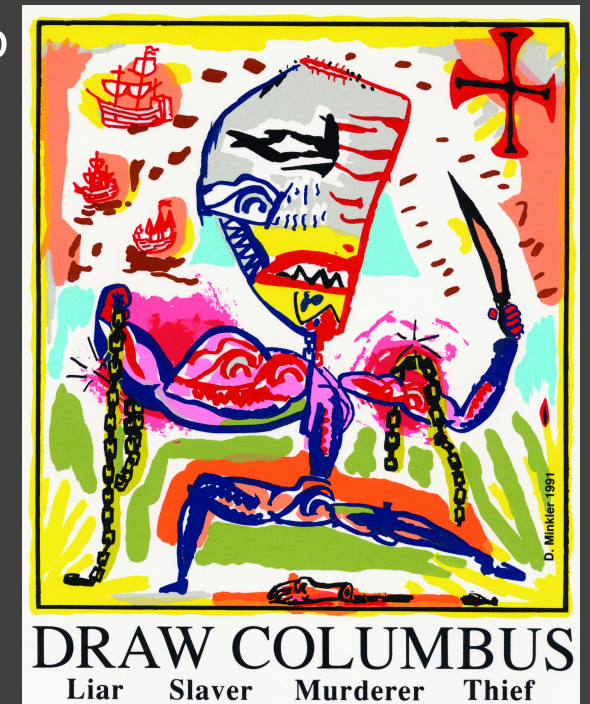
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"As a savage, we cannot tolerate him any more than as a half-civilized parasite, wanderer or vagabond. The only alternative left is to fit him by education for civilized life. The Indian, though a simple child of nature with mental facilities dwarfed and shriveled, while groping his way for generations in the darkness of barbarism, already sees the importance of education; bewildered by the glare of a civilization above and beyond his comprehension, he is nevertheless seeking to adjust himself to the new conditions by which he is encompassed. He sees that the knowledge possessed by the white man is necessary for self-preservation.

Education before 1492

“Contrary to popular belief, education, the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and skills – did not come to the North American continent on the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria. We Native Americans have educated our youth through a rich and oral tradition...” ~Dr. Henrietta Whiteman-Mann

- ❖ Before looking at the history of the American government’s attempts to “educate” American Indians, it is important to recognize that Indian nations had their own educational systems firmly in place by the time Columbus landed in Hispaniola.
- ❖ Such education efforts were both formal and informal. Education was deliberate, planned, and valued, designed by tribal elders to reflect the social, cultural, political, and economic needs of their tribe.
- ❖ The inadequate education provided for Indian youth post-Colonization represents yet another way the American government has taken advantage of and failed Native people.



Colonial Period

- ❖ As the American colonies took hold, Euro-Americans felt it was important to **“Christianize”** and **“civilize”** Native Peoples. (No regard was given to the fact that Native People had their own religions, customs, and forms of education.)
- ❖ Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson began formulating policies that would promote the "civilizing process" through which Indian people would learn, appreciate, and practice Euro-American cultural, social, economic, and political traditions.
- ❖ Colonial missionaries started schools for Native children. Missionaries were trained to convince Indians (who would certainly be untrusting and resist sending their children to colonial schools) that free room and board in a charity school was the key to their child's survival in an increasingly hostile colonial environment.
- ❖ Colonial attempts to use education to “civilize and Christianize” American Indian children failed, however. Few Indians attended and even fewer graduated.



Into the 1800s

- ❖ Within 20 years after the Constitution was signed, two separate systems of Indian education had developed:
 - ✓ tribal education organized and operated by various Indian nations;
 - ✓ federally-subsidized education organized and operated primarily by Euro-American Christian organizations.



Tribal Education

- ❖ In the early 1800s, several nations established sophisticated school systems for their children. The Cherokee and Choctaw created an education network which included over 200 classrooms.
- ❖ Among the Cherokee, tribal literacy and journalism flourished as newspapers were published in both Cherokee and English languages. Their motive was clear, according to a Cherokee elder's advice to younger tribal members,

"Remember that the whites are near us. With them we have constant intercourse, and you must be sensible, that unless you can speak their language, read and write as they do, they will be able to cheat you and trample on your rights." (Nabokov, 1991:215.)
- ❖ In 1851, the Cherokee National Council created the Cherokee National Female Seminary that was operated by the Cherokee Nation, not the federal government. At the Seminary, Cherokee girls took courses in Latin, French, trigonometry, political economy, and literary criticism. They also staged dramatic productions, held music recitals and published their own newsletter.

Federal Education: Mission Schools

Church & State partner to “educate” American Indians

- ❖ Despite Indian interest in education that could help tribal members cope with the endless flow of Euro-Americans into tribal lands, the federal government took an entirely different path.
- ❖ In 1819, the U.S. government created a "**Civilization Fund**" which provided federal funds to churches and missionary organizations to run schools (**Mission Schools**) designed to “educate Native Americans in the ways of the white man.”
- ❖ The goal was to "civilize" Native Americans by getting rid of their customs, traditions, religions, etc. while teaching them to read and write in only English.
- ❖ The **Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)** was created in 1824 by the federal government (and tellingly placed into the U.S. Department of War) to administer the funds given to the schools.

The Indian Removal Act (1830) & Manual Labor Schools

- ❖ The **Indian Removal Act** was signed into law May 28, 1830, authorizing the president to grant unsettled lands in the west in exchange for Indian lands within existing state borders. A few tribes went peacefully, but many rightfully resisted the unjust relocation policy.
- ❖ A **Commissioner of Indian Affairs** was appointed (also positioned in the U.S. Dept. of War) to deal with removed tribes and charged with figuring out a system to “reeducate” Indians to live “domesticated” lives in their new land.
- ❖ The unfair and racist system of Indian education that resulted – **manual labor schools** - emphasized vocational training as the ideal to assimilate Indians into industrial society.



The Indian Removal Act (1830) & Manual Labor Schools

- ❖ Manual labor schools turned the alleged “moral” project of “civilizing Indians” into a for-profit exercise, benefiting the religious groups running the schools and supported by the government.
- ❖ Under this model, churches were provided hundreds of acres of land for Indian children to plow, maintain and harvest. Many churches made high profits from the free labor of American Indians, creating increased competition for federal funding of more manual labor schools.
- ❖ Ironically, it was the competitive friction among rival churches that contributed to the repeal of the Civilization Fund in 1873.





"Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."

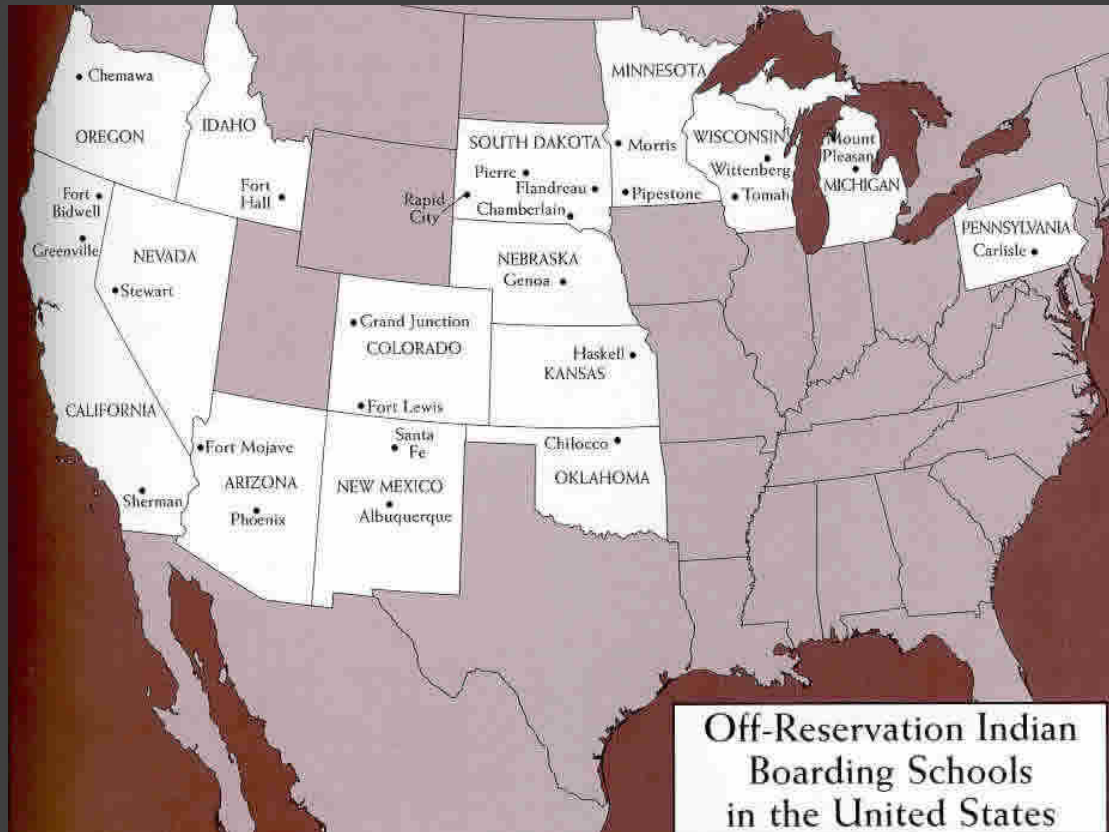
Boarding Schools

- ❖ Building on models established by manual labor schools, the government looked to define a new system of Indian education.
- ❖ Federal planners did not like day school models, which they felt kept Indian students too close and connected to their families and communities. (Such access made the overall goal of **assimilation** and **deculturalization** unsuccessful.) Thus, boarding schools became the model of choice.
- ❖ The infamous Carlisle Indian School (1879-1918) was the first such boarding school. Richard Pratt, its founder, attacked the tribal way of life as socialist and contrary to American values of civilization.

"Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."

~Capt. Robert H. Pratt, 1892 (founder of Carlisle School)

Boarding Schools

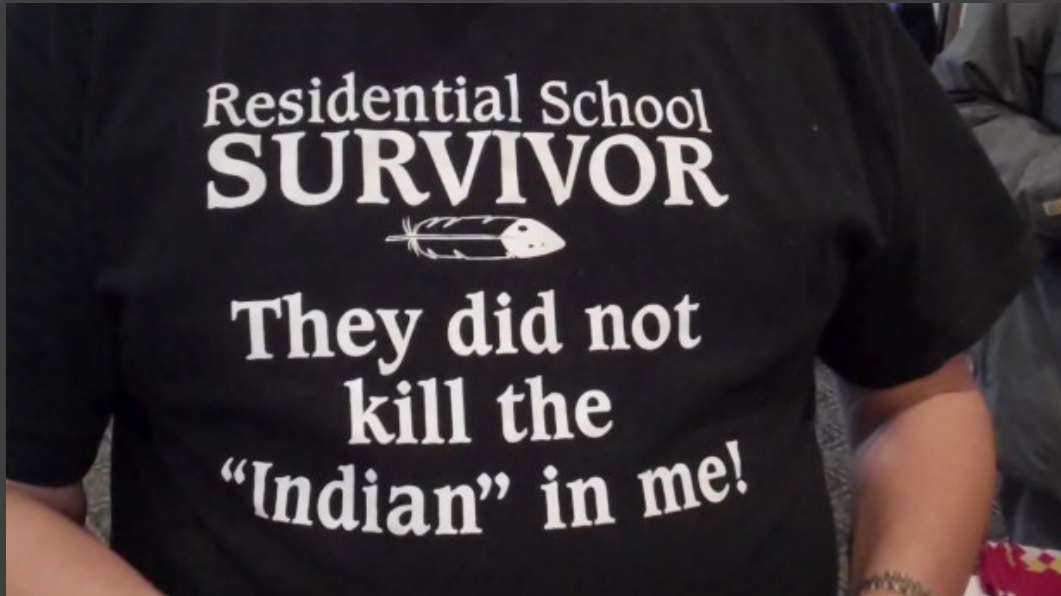


- ❖ By 1900, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was opening 25 such boarding schools in 15 states.
- ❖ Eventually, over 100,000 children were sent to over 500 such schools throughout the United States.

Boarding Schools

- ❖ Like earlier models, boarding schools were designed to serve the purposes of the federal government, not the needs of Indian children.
- ❖ The “education” process began with the (often forcible) removal of young children from their homes and communities and transporting them to places that were foreign to them (both in location and in customs.)
- ❖ Upon arrival, students were subjected to English-only, Anglo-centric curriculum and “patriotic propaganda.” Native languages, customs and religions were purposely excluded.
- ❖ Another central feature was teaching “work ethic” through forced manual labor. (In his annual report in 1881, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price argued that previous attempts to “civilize” Indians failed because they did not teach the “necessity of labor”.)
- ❖ Children were often undernourished and subjected to overcrowded living spaces.
- ❖ Compulsory attendance laws meant that families has no choice in whether to send their children to these unjust boarding schools.

Warm-Up Activity



- ❖ Consider the history you have learned regarding the American government's policies for "educating" American Indians and how important it is that this history be acknowledged.
- ❖ Design a t-shirt that addresses this history in some way. The purpose of the shirt is to call attention to the miseducation of Native People throughout history.
- ❖ Your shirt can include pictures, words, phrases, etc. Be creative!

Boarding Schools to **Segregated** Public Schools

- ❖ Eventually, the boarding school experiment began to fail. Schools were becoming overcrowded due to the government's compulsory attendance laws, federal funding decreased, and resistance to the injustice grew among tribes, all of which made the system too problematic for federal officials to maintain.
- ❖ Not only did the schools become political and economic liabilities, but they also proved to be ineffective in achieving the government's aim of "assimilation."
- ❖ **Native languages, spiritual practices, and other customs were not only continued by tribal elders, but passed down from generation to generation.**
- ❖ In 1906, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Leupp initiated the next plan – the transfer of Indians into **public schools**. The government believed this would not only save money, but would also help with their goal of "Americanizing" Indian children.
- ❖ However, public schools would not be the perfect solution. With segregation in full effect during the 1900s, American Indians would experience racism and unequal schooling in the public system.



The Meriam Report

- ❖ In 1928, an independent investigation of the Indian Office by the Brookings Institution, known as the **Meriam Report**, sharply criticized the quality of education provided by government-run Indian schools.
- ❖ The report was especially critical of vocational education programs, which it noted were used to provide student labor to keep the schools running and save the government money. The report also harshly criticized the policy of removing Indian children from their homes and communities and the severe discipline they experienced at boarding schools.
- ❖ The report called for more child-centered, culturally appropriate education in keeping with the then-current philosophy of progressive education.
- ❖ The report summarized that the most fundamental need in Indian education was a “**change in government attitude.**”

John Collier and the “Indian New Deal”

- ❖ In 1933, leading reformer and advocate of Indian rights **John Collier** became the Commissioner of Indian affairs.
- ❖ He oversaw the implementation of many of the recommendations in the Meriam Report, including increased Indian religious freedom and greater tribal self-government.
- ❖ The **Johnson-O'Malley Act (1934)** was also passed during Collier's term, which authorized payments to states or territories for the education of Indians in public institutions.
- ❖ Such reforms were features of Collier's **Indian New Deal**, the impact of which significantly increased the number of Indian children being served by both federal (BIA) and public educational institutions.
- ❖ The idea of reform, made popular by Collier's New Deal, increased sentiments to **“free” the Indian from government control**, particularly from the reservation system.

“Self-Determination” & the Civil Rights Movement



- ❖ By the 1960s, tribes had developed a core leadership capable of articulating Indian rights and concerns.
- ❖ In addition to their protests of existing federal policies, the new Indian leadership advocated an agenda of **self-determination**, or the idea of “letting Indian people decide their own destiny”
- ❖ The spirit of self-determination gave rise to several Indian organizations, such as National Indian Education Association (1967), the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards (1971), and the American Indian Movement (1972).
- ❖ The political energy created by such groups helped to energize efforts to create **tribally controlled schools**.
- ❖ In 1966, Rough Rock Demonstration School opened in the Navajo Nation in Arizona as the first Indian-controlled school in modern times.
- ❖ Citing the high college-dropout rate for Native students, the Navajo tribal council passes a resolution founding Navajo Community College (renamed Diné College in 1977), the first tribal college. In 1978, Congress passes the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act. Today, there are 35 tribal colleges in 13 states.

Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School



- ❖ In 1957, the Haliwa-Saponi opened one of the first tribal schools in the United States.
- ❖ At the height of the Jim Crow Era, Native students were experiencing racism and inadequate schooling in segregated public schools. Tribal schools were one solution.
- ❖ From 1957-1969, the Haliwa-Saponi built, maintained, and operated the **Haliwa Indian School**, one of the first tribal schools in the U.S. and the only non-reservation, tribally-supported Indian school in the state.
- ❖ Tribal members paid for supplies and materials, the building, and maintenance out of their own pockets. Teachers were initially paid by donations taken up by the Tribe. (After a few years of operation, the state Department of Public Instruction provided funding for teacher salaries.)
- ❖ While the school shut down in 1969, it was reopened in August 2000. The school includes a curriculum based on standard course of study, small classrooms, technology, and American Indian Studies. It promotes the cultural and traditional heritage of the Haliwa-Saponi people of Halifax and Warren Co.

Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975

- ❖ The efforts of Indian educators and leaders also prompted the publication of two major studies in Indian education: *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge* (U.S. Senate, 1969) and *The National Study of American Indian Education* (1970)
- ❖ These reports helped secure passage of the **Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975**, which provided American Indians increased control over their children's education
- ❖ The act authorized special funding for programs in reservation schools and for the first time, off-reservation urban schools.
- ❖ It also advocated for parent involvement in program planning, for the establishment of community-run schools, and for culturally relevant and bilingual curriculum materials.



Reports paint a gloomy picture of Indian Education

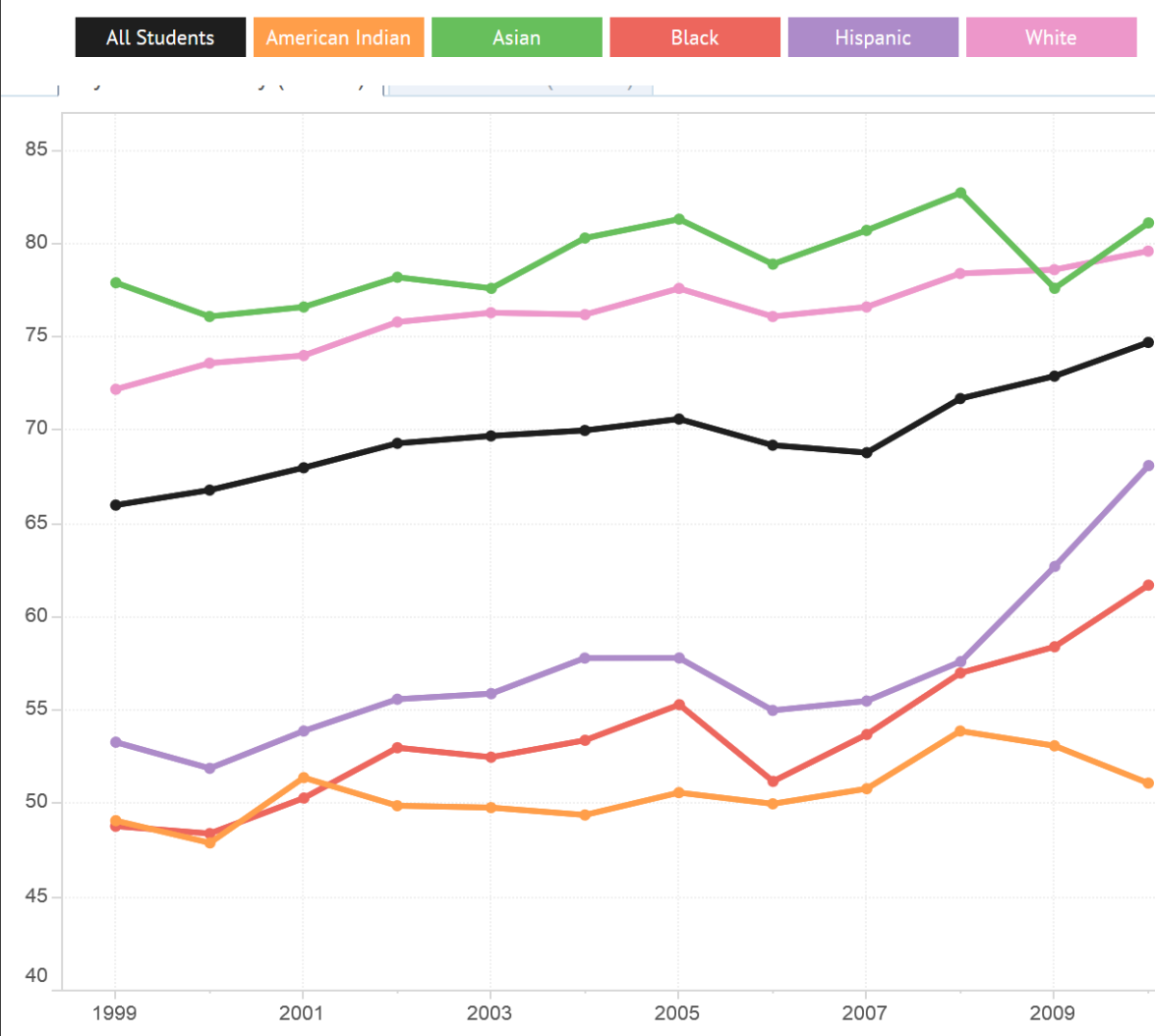
- ❖ Several reports were also published during the era of self-determination, such as the *Indian Nations at Risk* (1991), the *White House Conference on Indian Education* (1992), and the *Executive order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education* (1998). **In general these reports indicate that while progress had been made in Indian education, the road ahead held many challenges.**
- ❖ Overall, it was reported that:
 - Indians have the highest dropout rates and the lowest achievement rates.
 - Most Indians were subject to schools with Euro-centric curriculums, high teacher turnover, underprepared teachers, limited access to cultural learning resources, limited access to technology and computers, and racism. These problems were deepened by a decline in federal spending.
 - Centuries of racism, genocide and assimilationist policies cannot be undone in a matter of years.

Reports paint a gloomy picture of Indian Education

- ❖ In 2001, the “Comprehensive Federal Indian Education Policy Statement” was released. It stated that **school reform must be systematic and inclusive of all aspects of tribal life**. The relationship between educational reform and the struggles to preserve tribal homelands, governments, languages, cultures, economies, and social structures is made explicit.
- ❖ This report served as the model for “**The Executive Order on American Indian and Native Alaskan Education**” issued in 1998 by the Clinton administration. This issue of this executive order was a historic moment, symbolizing the efforts of contemporary American leaders to support self-determination but also the governments acknowledgement of this inherent right.



U.S. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES (1987-2010)



- ❖ While progress has been made, Indian students, in comparison to all others, are still the most disproportionately affected by poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to educational opportunities.
- ❖ Additionally, the number of Indian youth (12-17 yrs.) engaging in high-risk behaviors is vast. For example, drug use is more than twice the national average and alcohol use is higher than the national average.

Toward True Native Education: A Treaty of 1992

“It is time for a new treaty, a Treaty of 1992, to end a shameful, secret war. For five hundred years, our tribal people have been resisting the **siege of the non-Native societies** that have developed in **our native land**...Our children face the consequences of this war today. Every tribal member has felt the bitter pains of this relentless siege. It dominates our lives. It is killing our children. It is destroying our Native communities.” *–“Toward True Native Education: A Treaty of 1992,” Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (1994)*

- ❖ In 1992, the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force published a report placing the liability for the failings of American Indians’ education in the **hands of the U.S. government**. Yet, it also notes that **change will only occur when Native and nonnative societies make the commitment to work together**.
- ❖ The report summarizes that Native nations are struggling because:
 - Schools have failed to nurture the intellectual development and academic performance of Native children.
 - Indian lands and resources are constantly being besieged by outside forces.
 - Relationships between tribes and the federal government fluctuate with the will of the U.S. Congress and decisions by the courts.

Read and discuss the quote provided to you:

- ❖ What does the quote provided tell you regarding the history of the relationship between indigenous peoples and Euro-American colonists?
- ❖ What does the quote tell you about the history of American Indian education?
- ❖ Where do we go from here? Imagine you have been named as a member on a task force for improving the education of Native Americans. What ideas do you have? Whose assistance would you need and why?

- ❖ "The white man's superior technology, hunger for land, and ethnocentrism seemingly knew no bounds. The white threat to Indians came in many forms: smallpox, missionaries, Conestoga wagons, barbed wire, and smoking locomotives. And in the end, it came in the form of schools." *Cornell Pewewardy*
- ❖ "Understanding the "the Indian problem" is not a problem of children and families but rather a problem that has been consciously and historically produced by and through the systems of colonization: a multidimensional force underwritten by Western Christianity, defined by white supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism." *Sandy Grande*
- ❖ "Indian education was never simply about the desire to "civilize" or even deculturalize a people, but rather, from its very inception, it was a project designed to colonize Indian minds as a means of gaining access to Indian labor, land, and resources." *Sandy Grande*



THE CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL:

This school was the model for a nationwide system of boarding schools intended to assimilate American Indians into mainstream culture. Over 10,000 indigenous children attended the school between 1879 and 1918. Despite idealistic beginnings, the school left a mixed and lasting legacy, creating opportunity for some students and conflicted identities for others. In this cemetery are 186 graves of American Indian students who died while at Carlisle.

Sources

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