

EDUC 203: Native American Boarding Schools

The purpose of Native American boarding schools was to remove Native Americans from their home and cultures in order to change their identities and lifestyles to be like the "white man". Native American children were forced to think and act like the dominant white culture and were not allowed to practice their traditional ways. Not only were languages and beliefs changes, but appearances as well. Hairstyles, clothing and even names and body languages were changed. The intention was to completely erase the Indian way of life. The first Indian boarding school was founded by Captain R. H. Pratt in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879. Within a few years, dozens were opened across the United States. (For more information on boarding schools, go to related links.)

In the latter 1800's, the United States government instituted an educational policy designed to culturally transform Native Americans into the mainstream of white society, due to continual conflicts between the two cultures. It was believed by the government that by forcing Native Americans to learn English, and by preventing them from practicing their own languages and customs, they would believe in and practice white values. Furthermore, it was felt that the best way to implement this policy would be through boarding schools - which were designed to forcibly remove Indian children from their families and homes at a very early age, thereby isolating them from the language and customs of their homes, and forcing the European American language and culture upon them. In this way, it was hoped by the government that Native Americans would then become "White", and that their traditional languages and cultures would die.

The first boarding school, Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, was founded by Captain Richard Henry Pratt. His belief in the inferiority of Indian ways to those of Whites led to his guiding principle, "kill the Indian and save the man." Between 1880-1890, dozens of other boarding schools opened across the United States, some on reservations, and others hundreds of miles away.

Native American children did not receive a warm welcome at boarding school. For the most part, the boarding school experience was a deeply traumatic one. Native languages were forbidden to be spoken. Native clothing was replaced with uniforms. Children's hair was cut short. Indian names were replaced with Christian ones. Harsh punishments were given to those who broke rules. But most devastating, children lost contact with their families and their traditional ways of life, and were taught that their previous lives were inferior.

During the 1920's, investigations of Indian boarding schools found inhumane conditions - poor diets, hard labor for children, military conditions, high mortality rates, overcrowded conditions, and numerous spreads of diseases. Eventually, changes in Indian education included an end to the traditional boarding schools and a reintroduction to Indian history and culture, as slight as it was. However, to this day, the boarding school era has left its legacies on Native American people.

***Look at the set of photos below and answer the questions on the Photo Worksheet. Make sure you are looking at the correct set before you answer the questions!!**



Tom Torlino before entering
Carlisle School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania 1886

After.....

Native Americans, Carlisle Indian School,
as they entered between 1880-1900

After.....





**Chiricahua Apaches as they arrived to Carlisle Indian School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania
1886**



**4 months after arriving at Carlisle Indian School, Carlisle Pennsylvania
1886**

Photos by: John N. Choate Western History/Genealogy

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