

APPENDIX B

TO THE REPORT ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

AMERICAN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

Response to the Periodic Report of the United States
to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination
of Racial Discrimination

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CERD SHADOW REPORT AMERICAN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

Brief History

During the 19th century and into the 20th century, American Indian children were forcibly abducted from their homes to attend Christian and U.S. government-run boarding schools as a matter of state policy. This system had their beginnings in the 1600's when John Eliot erected praying towns for American Indians where he separated them out from their communities to receive Christian civilizing instruction. However, colonists soon concluded that such practices should be targeted towards children because they believed adults were to set in their ways to become Christianized. Jesuit priests began developing schools for Indian children along the St. Lawrence River in the 1600s.

However, the boarding school system became more formalized under GrantsPeace Policy of 1869/1870. The goal of this policy was to turn over the administration of Indian reservations to Christian denominations. As part of this policy, Congress set aside funds to erect school facilities to be run by churches and missionary societies. These facilities were a combination of day and boarding schools erected on Indian reservations.

Then, in 1879, the first off-reservation boarding school, Carlisle, was founded by Richard Pratt. He argued that as long as boarding schools were primarily situated on reservations, then 1) it was too easy for children to run away from school; and 2) the efforts to assimilate Indian children into boarding schools would be reversed when children when back home to their families during the summer. He proposed a policy where children would be taken far from their homes at an early age and not returned to their homes until they were young adults. By 1909, there had been 25 off-reservation boarding schools, 157 on-reservation boarding schools, and 307 day schools in operation. The stated rationale of the policy was to Kill the Indian and save the man. Children in these schools were not allowed to speak Native languages or practice Native traditions.

Interestingly, Richard Pratt was actually of the friends of the the Indians. That is, U.S. colonists, in their attempt to end Native control over their landbases, generally came up with two policies to address the Indian problem. Some sectors advocated outright physical extermination of Native peoples. Meanwhile, the friends of the Indians, such as Pratt, advocated cultural rather than physical genocide. Carl Schurz, at that time a former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, concluded that Native peoples had this stern alternative: extermination or civilization. Henry Pancoast, a Philadelphia lawyer, advocated a similar policy in 1882: We must either butcher them or civilize them, and what we do we must do quickly.

Thus, when Pratt founded off-reservation boarding schools, his rationale was Kill the Indian in order to save the Man. Separate children from their parents, inculcate Christianity and white cultural values into them, and encourage/force them to assimilate them into the dominant society. Of course, because of the racism in the U.S, Native peoples could never really assimilate into the dominant society. Hence the consequence of this policy was to assimilate them into the bottom of the socio-economic ladder of the larger society. For the most part schools primarily prepared Native boys for manual labor or farming and Native girls for domestic work

The rationale for choosing cultural rather than physical genocide was often economic. Carl Schurz concluded that it would cost a million dollars to kill an Indian in warfare, whereas it cost only \$1,200 to school an Indian child for eight years. Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller argued that it would cost \$22 million to wage war against Indians over a ten-year period, but would cost less than a quarter of that amount to educate 30,000 children for a year. Consequently, administrators of these schools ran them as inexpensively as possible. Children were given inadequate food and medical care, and were overcrowded in these schools. As a result, children routinely died in mass numbers of starvation or disease. In addition, children were often forced to do grueling work in order to raise monies for the schools and salaries for the teachers and administrators. Overcrowding within schools contributed to widespread disease and death.

Attendance at these boarding schools was mandatory, and children were forcibly taken from their homes for the majority of the year. They were forced to worship as Christians and speak English (native traditions and languages were prohibited). Sexual/physical/emotional violence was rampant. While not all Native peoples see their boarding school experiences as negative, it is generally the case that much if not most of the current dysfunctionality in Native communities can be traced to the boarding school era.

Today, most of the schools have closed down. Nevertheless, some boarding schools still remain. While the same level of abuse has not continued, there are still continuing charges of physical and sexual abuses in currently operating schools. Because these schools target American Indians specifically, they are in violation of CERD.

Continuing Effects of Human Rights Violations

Human Rights Violations

A number of human rights violations have occurred and continue to occur in these schools. The U.S. has provided no recompense for victims of boarding schools, nor have they attended to the continuing effects of human rights violations. The Boarding School Healing Project has begun documenting some of these abuses in South Dakota. Below are some of the following violations that have targeted American Indians, constituting racial discrimination.

Religious/Cultural Suppression

Native children were generally not allowed to speak their Native languages or practice their spiritual traditions. As a result, many Native peoples can no longer speak their Native languages. Survivors widely report being punished severely if they spoke Native languages. However, the U.S. has grossly underfunded language revitalization programs. A survivor of boarding schools in South Dakota testifies to these abuses:

Because boarding schools were run cheaply, children generally received inadequate food. Survivors testify that the best food was saved for school administrators and teachers. A principal had never investigated any allegations of abuse. J.D. Todd taught at a BIA school on the Navajo Reservation before twelve children came forward with allegations of molestation.

Paul Price taught at a North Carolina BIA school between 1971-1985 before he was arrested for assaulting boys. In all cases, the BIA supervisors ignored complaints from the parents before their arrests. In one case, Terry Hester admitted on his job application that he has been arrested for child sexual abuse. He was hired anyway at the Kaibito Boarding School on the Navajo Reservation, and was later convicted of sexual abuse against Navajo students. According to one former BIA school administrator in Arizona:

I will say this. . . child molestation at BIA schools is a dirty little secret and has been for years. I can't speak for other reservations, but I have talked to a lot of other BIA administrators who make the same land of charges.

Despite the epidemic of sexual abuse in boarding schools, the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not issue a policy on reporting sexual abuse until 1987, and did not issue a policy to strengthen the background checks of potential teachers until 1989. The Indian Child Protection Act in 1990 was passed to provide a registry for sexual offenders in Indian country, mandate a reporting system, provide rigid guidelines for BIA and IHS for doing background checks on prospective employees, and provide education to parents, school officials and law enforcement on how to recognize sexual abuse. However, this law was never sufficiently funded or implemented, and child sexual abuse rates are dramatically increasing in Indian country while they are remaining stable for the general population. Sexual predators know they can abuse Indian children with impunity. According to the *American Indian Report*: "A few years ago . . . a patient who had worked in a South Dakota-run facility where many of his victims were Indian children. . . was caught and acquitted. . . After [he] was released, he attacked three more kids and is now serving a 40-year sentence."

Survivors testify:

"There was the priest or one of the brothers that was molesting those boys and those girls."

"It seems like it was happening to the little ones. The real little ones. And that...I know that guy that they were accusing of that would always be around the little ones...the little kids...the little boys."

"One of the girls, who was nine, nine or ten. jumped out the sixth floor window. The older girls were saying the nuns and the priests would take advantage of her and finally one of them explained to us younger ones what it was. And she finally killed herself. That was the most overt case that I can remember. They have been others that I have made myself forget because that one was so awful."

As a result of all this abuse, Native communities now suffering the continuing effects through increased physical and sexual violence that was largely absent prior to colonization. However, the US fails to redress these effects by not providing adequate healing services for boarding school survivors.

Forced Labor

Children were also involuntarily leased out to white homes as menial labor during the summers rather than sent back to their homes. In addition, they had to do hard labor for the schools, often forced to do very dangerous chores. Some survivors report children being killed because they were forced to operate dangerous machinery. Children were never compensated for their labor.

“We had to wash all the kids’ clothes, and the priests’, and their clothes, and iron them. The other thing that one of our nuns, she saved stamps. I remember she’d soak them, and we would get the stamps, put them in our hand, peel off the stamp, put it over here, and dry them...like you had to put them all in rolls. I don’t know what she’d do with them.”

Deaths in Schools

Thousands of children had died in these schools, through beatings, medical neglect, and malnutrition. The cemetery at Haskell Indian School alone has 102 student graves, and at least 500 students died and were buried elsewhere. These deaths continue today. On December 6, 2004, Cindy Sohappy was found dead in a holding cell in Chemawa Boarding School (Oregon) where she had been placed after she became intoxicated. She was supposed to be checked every fifteen minutes, but no one checked on her for over three hours. At the point, she was found not breathing, and declared dead a few minutes later. The US Attorney declined to charge the staff with involuntary manslaughter. Sohappy’s mother is planning to sue the school. A videotape showed that no one checked on her when she started convulsing or stopped moving. The school has been warned for past fifteen years from federal health officials in Indian Health Services about the dangers of holding cells, but these warnings were ignored. Particularly troubling was that she and other young women who had histories of sexual assault, abuse, and suicide attempts were put in these cells of solitary confinement.

Two paraphrased testimonies:

Two children died in school, and the administrators took the bodies home. However, the parents weren’t there, so they administrators dumped the bodies on the parents house floor with no note as to what happened to them.

I used to hear babies crying in my school. Years later, the school was torn down, and they found the skeletons of babies in the walls.