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Government Boarding Schools and Indian Communities

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Research Intent

The following research concerns the relationship between U.S-implemented boarding schools and Indian communities. Throughout this paper I'll present the overall initial rationale creating Indian-focused boarding schools, explain how policy and physical facility placement illustrates a type of colonial mechanism, and coerced youth relocation due to government leverage. I'll also be highlighting the importance of students' lived experiences, power of school agents, and continuing boarding school effects. To this extent, the trauma experienced due to sexual violence and abuse is mainly rooted in boarding schools and proves to be a product of colonialism.

Throughout my research for AMST-499 my interest has shape-shifted into not just looking at Indian boarding schools overall, but also analyzing how different forms of abuse within facilities themselves illustrate a broader scheme of colonialism. The legacy of Indian boarding schools illustrates very well abuse as a method of colonialism. The general theory here being how Indian-to-Indian abuse increased in frequency after colonial contact with boarding schools, therefore psychological damage as a consequence of colonialism seeped into students'

communities serving to perpetuate the continuous oppression experienced

intergenerationally by individuals.

Introduction

The post Civil War era marked a turning point for White and Indian relations.

Throughout the two centuries before, Indians experienced the threats of white

disease, religion, railroad systems, and heavy infantry wars. The final threat was

schools (Adams, 5). At this point in time the U.S was experiencing economic barriers

interfering with the colonial intent of taking over Indian country. Seeing that

physically eradicating Indians was costing too much money, government officials

wanted a solution to the "Indian problem." Theoretically, assimilating Indians for

the purpose of building modern society could solve the problem. However, the U.S

needed help on how to go about this idea, and so this is when we see the

implementation of off-reservation Indian boarding schools, beginning in the 1890s

and continuing well into the 1920s.

Quickly looking for an opportunity, reformers sought solutions. Philanthropic

advocates such as Herbert Welsh and Henry Pancoast began the Indian Rights

Association (Adams, 9). Centrally positioned however was Richard Pratt, who

created an off-reservation school model that would "kill the Indian" and "save the

man" (Adams, 51). Distant from Indian communities and by means of compulsory

education, this model was unique because it made controlling Indian youth much

easier. Eventually by providing publicized photos and funds, Welsh, Pancoast, and

Pratt proved to officials that the model worked and Indians had potential to be

assimilated.

Subsequently, funding and interest began to pour in from Christian churches

for at least two reasons. The first reason was due to their ability in managing

Mission schools. Secondly, churches' intent was generally that of teaching religion.

To a reasonable extent then, the government simultaneously depended on the new

reformers, philanthropist, and the Christian church during the initial establishment

of off-reservation Indian boarding schools. The overall rationale involved

eradicating the "savagery" element of Indian life by removing youth away from their

homes for large amounts of time. We know this because other places in the word

also ensued these ideals, such as Mexico and Canada—where there certainly are

parallels to the U.S as these places essentially followed U.S school models (Dawson,

2012). Coincidentally and more specifically, the government aimed to save money

while eliminating "savagery" and advocating for "civilization" with the help of the

previously said groups and the following outlined federal policies.

Policy and Facility Placement as a Colonial Mechanism

Without the help of federal policies, the government's leverage over Indian

life wouldn't have been possible. Crucial policies include Grants' Peace Policy of

1869 and the Dawe's Act of 1887. The former policy drove the impulse to explicitly

formalize on- and off-reservation boarding schools simultaneously while Indian

communities were being relocated into constructed reservations with established

churches. The latter policy of 1887 precisely divided tribal land into sections giving

individual Indians small allotments of land, and what was left over was auctioned off

to whites. Here we see how this policy confined tribes to an unjustly small land

portion. The explicit intention here was to reduce Indian country and disrupt Indian

life. In retrospect, we see the paternalistic power the government produces

beforehand through policy-making while removing Indian youth from their

communities, placing them in facilities away from their families for the colonial goal

of erasing or diminishing Indian culture.

Off-reservation boarding schools were geographically located in the middle

of nowhere in order to pursue and ensure full civilization, which at this time meant,

"stripping away the Indian and saving the man." In this sense, geographical

placement of these facilities illustrates a colonial mechanism. Major figures like

Richard Pratt explain that Indians needed to be away from their communities to be

Americanized, which would lessen the act of running away. Furthermore, this

process would be more easily done if Indians were Americanized at an early age

(Adams, 51). Evidently on-reservations schools weren't working. We also see

limited choices for Indians. These choices were to live the white way and assimilate,

complying with modern society's demands; or vanish completely by the notion of

being ill equipped to participate in modern society. Eventually, Indians

participated—whether through the governments' enforcement processes or the

backlash for not cooperating.

Process of Youth Removal

As mentioned above, the government's process of teaching white cultural ways began by removing Indian youth from their communities and "lawfully" enforcing unjust federal policies. The process was also driven by the fact that many Indian communities were largely impoverished, so we see white education at this time being a viable commodity, which many Indian families recognized as the tool to survive. For example, parents often sent their youth to boarding schools because public school stigmatized Indian people (Lomawaima, 32). In other cases, communal practices such as the Ojibwe orphanages slowly deteriorated causing them to subsequently resort to sending their youth to boarding schools (Child, 17-19). Evidently, forcefully or voluntarily attending boarding schools became a way to escape social issues present in Indian communities. In either case, the government had leverage of Indian life by means of coerced youth removal.

The process of removal initially consisted of an Indian Agent showing up at the doorstep of Indian communities, explaining federal policies to Indian adults. In some cases, children were taken forcibly without the communities' consent; while in others, communities released them at will (Child, 70). Communities neglecting to cooperate with policy regulations oftentimes lost support programs such as food and medical rations provided by the government. For example, a tactic commonly used was rations withholdings. This was aimed at manipulating Indian parents in letting their children be removed and transported or otherwise basic necessities of life, such as food and clothing, would be withheld from distribution (Adams, 63).

Other community members were frequently jailed or sent to prison. Either way,

youth attended off-reservation boarding schools whether or not they wanted to.

Students' lived Experience

Student's perspective relating to boarding schools proves to be a complex

area of study. Here we see intersecting factors at play. Usually ranging from time,

gender and age, to corresponding tribe and geographic location, student

perspectives are extremely diverse, although sharing several unique commonalities.

When youth first physically entered school facilities, some accepted the life that was

about to *be* while others resisted, usually attempting to runaway and by attacking

the facilities' agents. Resistance, however, oftentimes happened throughout the

entire time at boarding schools. For example, students themselves ranked resistance

by actions categorized in levels: (1) passive or active, (2) minor and significant, and

(3) running away (Lomawaima, 101). Through diverse methods of resistance we

begin to see the complexity of student experiences.

White culture attire was an important step to becoming civilized. Before

arrival, all students brought with them their tribe's cultural ways of dressing,

talking, listening, etc. All students initially were forced or encouraged to acquire

different hair, clothing, language, and overall a new demeanor style corresponding

to White culture. As for the new clothing style, some students embraced it while

others saw it as an attack on Indian culture. However, when referring to the change

in language, English Literacy that many students acquired has its complexities.

While some students enjoyed learning this new way of speaking and writing, others

saw it conflicting with cultural values and beliefs. In other cases, students used it to

their advantage. For example, English Literacy became the bridge that connected

miscommunication between interacting students coming from different tribes with

different languages. After students began to use English as a communication tool

across varying tribes, we see their experience shape-shift. This is when we also see

the emergence and embracing of a "Pan-tribal Indian identity" (Lomawaima, xiii).

This newly acquired literacy also helped in communicating with their communities.

Correspondence between students and their families and communities were

often bleak. Letters from parents written to students would oftentimes be

confiscated by the school's mail delivery service, sometimes for decades after the

student had left the facility. For example, Dennis Banks, American Indian activist,

recalls during an interview[1] with independent news network *Democracy Now!* the

inexplicable emotions felt after decades later discovering a shoebox, which held

letters written from his parents. One letter specifically was sent from his father,

containing five dollars, and begging the school superintendent to release his son

[Dennis]. In contrast, some schools were different; we actually see school agents

encouraging parents to write to their children and vice versa. In either case, we see

the salient role school agents played in determining student communication from

the schools and the outside world.

School Agents with Power

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[1] *The Overlooked Tragedy of Nation's Indian Boarding Schools.* Perf. Dennis Banks. *Democracy Now!* N.p., 08 Oct. 2012. Web.

School agents also determined how gender roles were to be fixed. Male and female students were more often than not funneled into "appropriate" areas of study. Male students often studied mechanical, agricultural, and leadership and management skills, while female students studied the domestic sciences such as cooking and sewing, cleaning, infant care, and so forth. Important to note though, is the difference between gender experiences being that schools explicitly desired control over the Indian women (Child, 77). If schools can control Indian women, they can shape how they structure themselves as wives and mothers. Here we see schools beginning to shape Indian women to be part of the nuclear family model. Overall, both genders shared the commonality of receiving equal shares of vocational and academic education in relation to the build-up of the nuclear family model (Lomawaima, 65). Regardless of gender, they were Indian and under the context of modern society, they both got placed at the bottom of the social ladder, but even more so if it was an Indian female not cooperating with modern society's demands of what a women should embody.

End (Continuing) Results

Officially ending in the 1920s, off-reservation boarding schools offered an abundance of tools to survive in modern society. However, they also perpetuated trauma among some students. That said, some students who returned to their communities found success, while others resorted to substance abuse due to negative experiences. And so, the overall outcome of boarding schools was both tragic and alleviating. In some instances, students brought back the new knowledge

acquired, helped build social programs, and became political and intellectual figures

representing the Indian community. In other instances, students also brought back

nightmares ensuing from beatings, classmate deaths, cultural repression,

internalized oppression, sexual violence and abuse, malnutrition, diseases, cold

nights, and confined isolation rooms. In either instance, students brought back their

boarding school experience into the Indian community causing very complex long-

term consequences resonating to this very day.

Sexual Abuse and Violence: A Production of Colonialism

The abuse experienced by students throughout the Indian boarding school

experience was as illustrated by Smith (2005), a violation of human rights. Although

American Indian's relations to boarding schools vary and are extremely complex, we

can account for different forms of abuse being at the heart of a negative lived

experience. For example, there are instances where we see between the years 1878-

1918 that Indian youth's health became a government concern solely due to political

interest. In this sense, this explains government interest of strong moral and

political concern for Indian health in general, particularly among youth (Dejong,

2007). This is to say that the lack of concern for Indian health has been a traumatic

experience. Over time and space, trauma associated with boarding schools and even

sexual violence and abuse has in fact become endemic within Indian communities.

In connection to sexual abuse and violence, indigenous children's rights were

violated--not simply only that the Indian body was being differentiated by those in

power and therefore historically ill treated (Kristianto, 2013)). As Engel (2012)

points out through a sociological lens, even child welfare policies targeted

indigenous youth in the U.S, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These places all

created boarding schools wherein certain governing policies affected these youth.

Overall, these policies' original intents were to formally educated indigenous

peoples with an underpinning theory of using education means to civilize, which

meant to replace colonial with indigenous life styles. This, itself, is an attack on

children. Furthermore, we can see that it is through institutions of power, like

boarding schools, where we begin to notice things like institutional racisms' impact

on children, or what some scholars call ethnoviolence (Helms et al., 2012). This

happens through verbal and physical abuse, malnutrition, overcrowding, and

psychological trauma.

Duran and Duran (1995) reinforce this fact by explaining how sexual

violence and abuse is a production of colonialism on the basis that it created

internalized oppression and an intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorder.

Internalized oppression has been happening since first contact with European

colonizers, however, it was reinforced throughout the acculturation era of boarding

schools. The process of this oppression simultaneously begins with losing power

over self-determinacy and asserting "genuine power" to the greater force (Duran

and Duran, 29). The loss of self-determinacy triggers internalized and externalized

self-hatred. Subsequently, the former self-hatred explains today's high suicide rates

and deaths due to alcoholism; while the latter explains high rates of Native-to-

Native violent crimes and domestic violence.

     Coupled with the above health issues and current health inequalities in communities that historically have been targeted by U.S policies (Walters, 2011), intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorder proves to be detrimental to the Indian community in current times. Rooted in research done after the Nazi Holocaust, this particular trauma is "generationally cumulative" in the sense that survivor's children normalize the survivor's consequential fear, rage, danger, and grief (Duran and Duran 31). Drawing parallels from Holocaust survivors and the Indian community, there are certainly haunting and horrific connections. After all, Indian communities' individuals were simultaneously separated from their family and communal members, as well as another essential loved one, Earth.

     The above scholars are not alone in the research concerning trauma and the Indian community. One of the articles I use poignantly points out how "historical trauma" is a term used to conceptualize "collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who have a specific group identity or affiliation—ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation" (Lajimodiere, 2012). This historical trauma the scholar talks about reinforces that in fact intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder and internal oppression are very real and is part of the effects of colonialism.

     Historical trauma is synonymous to "generational, collective, multigenerational" and "unresolved grieving" (Lajimodiere, 2012). As a whole, they all encompass narrating the impact of colonialism on Indian communities. That in fact, the legacy of white-Indian relations—specifically boarding schools—serve to

explain the enormous lineage of trauma and continue to permeate in everyday lives

over generations. Colonialisms' impact on Indian communities damaged and

continue to damage families and their descendants. We see through the

psychological and social issues we see today.

   The article written by Lajimodiere (2012) explains how research

continuously links the effects of historical trauma throughout studying

intergenerationally the descendants that continue to feel a sort of suffering. In

connection to Engel (2012), government policies implemented as early as the 1840's

have attributed to the historical trauma recoil from education institutions, which

beg for a discussion further concerning indigenous children's rights violations. In

this sense, if you're a person who has a relative or ancestor that experienced trauma

in boarding schools (coupled with internalized oppression) and there's still that

unresolved grief—what happens to those survivors of trauma-impacted survivors?

Interestingly, they're left with soul wounds.

   Soul wounds are characterized by collective trauma ensued by the

oppression many indigenous people experience today. In connection, there's a lack

of social justice surrounding the healing of mental and physical illnesses like soul

wounds and that in fact, there's needs to be more adjustable trauma treatments

(Turner et al., 2009). With that said, some people die without ever being diagnosed

for this sort of post-traumatic stress disorder rooted in the history of boarding

schools.

All in all, we can see why connecting government policies to psychological and social health is crucial when looking at the Indian community in relation to boarding schools. As illustrated by McBride (2003), using a case study in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, they elaborate on the consequences of historical trauma within an indigenous community. Accordingly, this community is a unique example of intersecting structural barriers that are rooted in colonialism. Some of these barriers include poverty and illness, and poor mortality rates. What McBride also points out is that this community space lacks healing from historical trauma, thus, we this sort of trickling down oppression from society into family. Overall, what's necessary to note is the lack of strong identity formation for current and future Indian individuals.

Conclusion

In sum, we see how Indian boarding schools signified a major turning point for White and Indian relations. Initially understood as a good act of will by the U.S government, philanthropists, Christians, and the new reformers—these particular schools complexify the relationship between Whites and Indians. The results, however, still resonate today and are central to the legacy of Indian boarding schools. Student perspectives serve to further add to this paradigm due to their experiences being vastly different yet common on some grounds, depending on variables such as time, age and gender, corresponding tribe and geographic location.

So how does one wrestle with this complex topic? Well, we must first understand the process which Indian boarding schools were first implemented by—

and that in this point in time, the strategies undertaken were part of larger

colonization scheme driven by imperialistic U.S policies. "Indian boarding school

policies...are largely responsible for the epidemic rates of sexual violence in Native

communities today" as well as the "continuing effect of human rights violation

perpetuated by state policies" (Smith, 3).

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