

Name _____ Date _____

Boarding Schools and Forced Assimilation

The **boarding school** experience for Indigenous children began in 1860 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs established the first **on-reservation** Indigenous boarding school on the Yakima Indian Reservation in the state of Washington. These schools were part of a plan devised by well-intentioned, eastern reformers Herbert Welsh and Henry Pancoast. The goal of these reformers was to use education as a tool to "assimilate" Indigenous tribes into the mainstream of the "American way of life."



Photo courtesy of Cumberland County Historical Society in Carlisle

As time progressed, boarding schools became the ideal instrument for **forced assimilation** of Native American youth. The first priority of the boarding schools would be to provide the basics of religious and academic education. As part of this federal push for

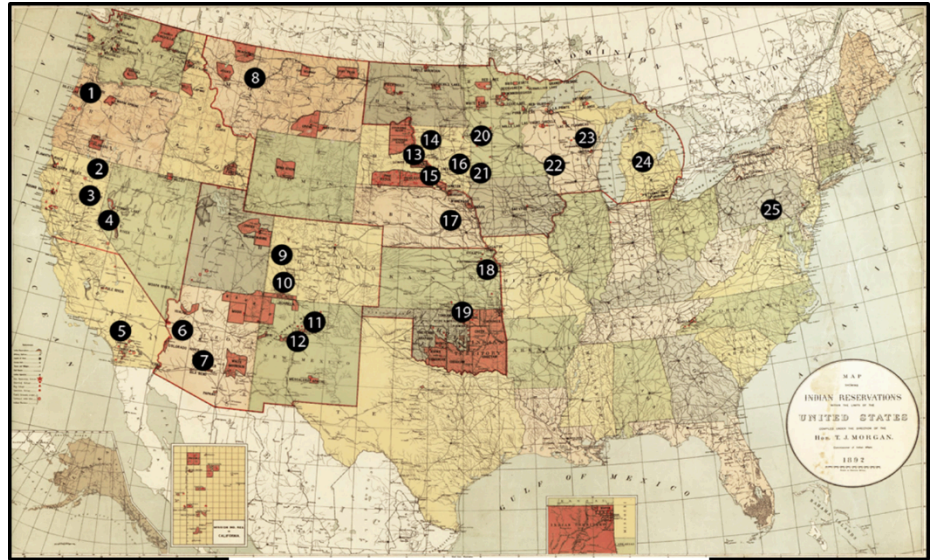


Children learning a song, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Photograph by F. Johnston, courtesy of the Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, JO-01-04

assimilation, **off-reservation** boarding schools forbid Native American children from using their own languages and names, as well as from practicing their religion and culture. They were given new Anglo-American names, clothes, and haircuts, and told they must abandon their way of life because, "the colonizer / school / government

said" it was inferior. The end goal was to remove all reminders of Native American culture.

By the 1880s, the United States operated 60 schools for 6,200 Indian students, including reservation day schools and reservation boarding schools. The reservation day school had the advantage of being relatively inexpensive and caused the least opposition



Library of Congress, United States Office of Indian Affairs

from parents. The reservation boarding school spent half a day teaching English and academics and half a day on **industrial training**. Boarding schools imitated military life and students spent endless hours marching to and from classes, meals, and dormitories. Order, discipline, and self-restraint were all prized values of their new society.

Not all boarding school experiences were negative. Some of the Indigenous students had some good memories of their school days and made friends for life. They also acquired knowledge and learned useful skills that helped them later in life. One good outcome of the boarding schools is that the Native Americans formed new tribal **alliances** and learned little bits of each other's languages. School graduates married into other tribes and summer celebrations became more and more inter-tribal. Despite their negative impacts, the schools became an important part of tribal history.

Check for Understanding

Questions 1 -7, match the definition with the vocabulary words:

- 1) To take in and incorporate as one's own by choice. _____
- 2) to involuntarily take in and incorporate as one's own. _____
- 3) Boarding schools established on the reservation, close to families. _____
- 4) Boarding schools established off of the reservation, far from families. _____
- 5) Shops for mechanical instruction for boys. _____
- 6) Their primary purpose was to assimilate children to their new culture. _____
- 7) A union formed for mutual benefit.

Vocabulary Words

- a) assimilate
- b) on-reservation
- c) off-reservation
- d) boarding schools
- e) forced assimilation
- f) alliance
- g) industrialized training

8) The boarding school experience for Indigenous children began in _____ when the Bureau of Indian Affairs established the first _____.

9) According to the text, as time progressed boarding schools became?

- a) instruments for forced assimilation
- b) places to learn how to read, write, and do math.
- c) a place where religion was forced upon children
- d) all of the above

10) According to the text, in some cases, what good outcomes could come from boarding schools?

- a) marching to and from classes
- b) forcing children to assimilate to the American way of life
- c) forming new tribal alliances and learning bits of each other's languages
- d) removing all reminders of Native American Culture