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The Impact of Native American Boarding Schools

Process Memo

The biggest challenge of this project for me was feeling overwhelmed by the notion that I needed to do well with my research and the thoroughness of this paper because of how personal this topic is to me. When gathering sources and conducting my interviews, I was very much enjoying what I was learning, but I struggled with narrowing down what I would actually include in my write up. Because of this, there were several stages of editing back content and trying to refocus on my overarching questions.

In the beginning of my research process, I attempted to find my additional sources before conducting my interviews, which proved to be the wrong order for me. After I held my interviews, I did a rough write-up to answer my two questions and then spotted gaps where I wanted statistics or other points of view to round out my answers. During my research, I created several google documents to file my findings under and separate out important information or quotes. It was definitely a messy process, but it worked for me. The class during which you discussed graphic organizers helped me the most, as I created a pros and cons list to demonstrate the complexity of my topic. It was important for me that I showed the ways that the institutions were both beneficial and harmful to students because there was no singular nationwide experience. I felt as though I was able to answer my overarching questions very well.

My second overarching question was: What are the generational effects of Indian boarding schools and how can generational trauma be healed and forgotten traditions relearned? This influenced my choice to make my Instagram post about education and fundraising. This decision was sparked when I was talking to my Uncle about why Native American history is covered so incompletely in the United States schooling system. He said that it is a product of so

few Native people being in positions of power. I wanted viewers to get a taste of history that so badly needs to be taught, and show them that they can play a part in changing education and reviving culture that our government wanted to erase. I chose to include the image of the Native American in front of the Declaration of Independence as a call to action, because the injustices inflicted by the US government on Native people must be recognized, discussed, and ameliorated. I continued the strong pink color from that graphic throughout the post to contrast with the calm earth tones that represent connection to the Earth. When my grandmother spoke the sentence that is the audio for the fifth slide, I knew immediately that I needed to include that in my presentation because it captures the essence of why my research is important. I wanted other people to feel the power of this statement. Additionally, I wanted to connect my research with a fundraiser that goes along with the secondary source that I used the most because I found it to be an incredible coalition. Although I did not expect people to donate because this is simply a school project, I wanted the opportunity for fundraising and further education to be available should the viewer be interested.

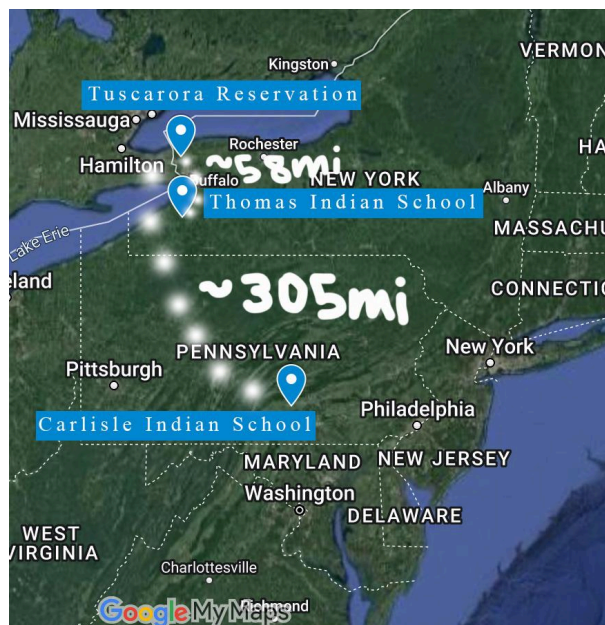
I have learned so much from this course, such as how to be productively curious and how to better write analytically. I am most grateful for the energy you put into teaching and the excitement you encourage in others. Finally, I am thankful for the opportunity to learn so much about my family's past and to have conversations with my family members that have led to a deeper understanding of why we are the way we are, and I do not know if I would have delved into it if not for this amazing class.

What were Indian Boarding Schools?

-“By 1926, nearly 83% of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools” (US Indian Boarding School Healing Coalition)

-367 boarding schools operated in 29 states (US Indian Boarding School Healing Coalition)

“Beginning with the Indian Civilization Act Fund of March 3, 1819 and the Peace Policy of 1869 the United States, in concert with and at the urging of several denominations of the Christian Church, adopted an Indian Boarding School Policy expressly intended to implement cultural genocide through the removal and reprogramming of American Indian and Alaska Native children to accomplish the systematic destruction of Native cultures and communities.



The stated purpose of this policy was to “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” (US Indian Boarding School Healing Coalition).

Faye: “Well, really, they didn't consider the people from the reservations as civilized, so it was to Christianize and Westernize and civilize the people starting with their children.” Faye explains that she believes that the government’s goal of the school was to cut off the future of the tribe by cutting it off at the source, their youth.

Chris: “I think that in those instances, those operators of boarding schools, Indian boarding schools, felt that Indian language, Indian culture, Indian religion, or all things that were impediments to the success of an Indian.”



Thomas Indian School

Source Overview

The majority of my research came from two interviews that I conducted with my father's side of the family- one with my grandma (Faye) and one with my uncle (Chris). My first interview was with my grandmother whose mother, Clemence Hewitt, attended the Thomas Indian School (along with her brother Calvin Hewitt).



Thomas Indian School graduating class of 1912, including Melissa Anderson.

Faye's grandmother, Melissa Anderson, attended both Thomas and Carlisle Indian Schools. The lives of these three people were the central part of my discussions with both my uncle and my grandmother. Both of my interviewees are highly educated in the history of our family as well as the history of Native Americans. My grandmother has dedicated a good amount of her life to genealogy research through Ancestry.com and my uncle is a Native American lawyer in Upstate New York. Interestingly enough, for a time he worked out of the very medical building at Thomas Indian School (since repurposed) that our distant relatives lived in.

Both interviews covered in detail the lives of my three relatives that grew up in Indian Boarding Schools and the impact of these schools on identity and future generations. My grandmother spoke passionately about the ripple effect she sees in her own life as a passing down of the lessons taught to children in those schools and the ways the lives of her predecessors impact her values. My uncle was, like the lawyer he is, adamant about cementing the fact that

these institutions were both helpful and hurtful in their own ways. I found this interesting in comparison to my grandmother's interview, which was much more biased against these institutions. I contrasted the experiences of my family members with letters that I found of graduated students in *Boarding School Voices: Carlisle Indian School Students Speak*. These letters were overwhelmingly positive when describing the writers' experiences at the Carlisle School which served as a varying perspective into the point of view of Native American boarding school students. Additionally, I supplemented my research with statistics and definitions from the Boarding School Healing Coalition and an article from the Tulsa Law Review titled "The Indian Boarding School Era and Its Continuing Impact on Tribal Families and the Provision of Government Services".

Form CW-1c. 4-8-38-50,000 (8-7946)		State of New York—Department of Social Welfare	
REPORT OF DISCHARGE OF CHILD FROM FOSTER CARE			
Pursuant to State Charities Law, Section 301			
1a. Surname Hewitt	Full given name Clemence	2a. Name of agency or institution Thomas Indian School	3. Case number: State Agency 332 Public dept. Children's court
1b. Alias, if any		2b. Address Iroquois, N. Y.	
4. Date of discharge (from foster care) 8/11/38	5. Sex M...F... M	6. Date of birth: Mo. Day Year 8 5 1918	
7. Type of discharge (check) a. To another child caring organization..... b. Returned to own home..... c. Adopted..... d. Own responsibility..... e. State penal institution..... f. State home or hospital for mental defectives..... g. Other hospital..... h. Died..... i. Other [specify].....	8a. Name of institution, agency, or person to whom discharged or by whom adopted 9a. If adopted, name of judge making order of adoption 9c. Address of court 9e. Where is adoption order recorded? 10a. If dead, date of death 10b. Cause of death	8b. Address of institution, agency, or person 9b. Name of court 9d. Date of adoption order 9f. Date of recording adoption order 10c. Place of burial	
Remarks:			
11a. Signature of person reporting.....		11b. Title of person reporting..... Superintendent	

Documentation of Hewitt Clemence.

How does forced assimilation affect one's sense of identity?

The complex nature of the Indian Boarding School resulted in several positive and negative effects on the students' sense of identity. According to my research, these schools provided opportunities for students by giving them access to food, shelter, running water, and electricity which were not always available on reservations. These schools also provided higher levels of education and taught many employable skills such as cooking, cleaning, dairy farming, and artistic development. Students were taught that success was becoming a domestic, living in the city, and raising a family rather than valuing herbal and seasonal understandings, being “protective of their spiritual side and quietly cultivating artistic venues (Faye)”, and avoiding greed. Furthermore, Faye explained what success looked like to a Native person:

My grandmother likely would have considered that Success would be to have a small home, a water pump in the yard, wood in the stove, friends, food in a kettle, oil for your lanterns, clothing and shoes for your children, knowledge of your ancestors and an interest in achieving these necessities presently and for seven generations forward.

While of course success looks different to each person, shifting the values and dreams of an entire generation of youth away from the teachings of their communities creates a rift between individuals and the community from which they came. Additionally, this shift alludes to the notion that “success” in the eyes of a Native person is silly or inadequate, and leads to the abandonment of cultural appreciation.

The schools isolated children from their family and tribe creating a sense of abandonment for some. They were not allowed to engage in native cultural activities or speak their mother tongue and often were unable to go home for summers or holidays, further distancing them from any connection to a Native identity. Children were also raised by adults who saw them as their wards, and grew accustomed to not being shown love. For some students, the distance from home (if they would consider it as such) created a sense of curiosity and yearning, and for others

they lost any connection or interest in returning, rather wishing to find success off their reservations. When you walked through the threshold of one of those schools, you were meant to become a different person. Traditional clothes that the children came in were burned, not only so that they could be indoctrinated further and lessen their sense of individuality by wearing different clothes, but also to get rid of the risk of spreading Tuberculosis. Administrators would cut the children's hair, yes because it was valued culturally, but also to make treating lice easier. The students were banned from speaking their native language, in favor of learning English to "become more civilized," and according to Faye, discourage uprisings and private conversations. All of these things, even if unintentional, affected the way a child develops and views their sense of identity and self-worth. Assimilation happened in a way that was harsh but at the same time, came across to the children as though it was for their own good.

The schools leave a scar. We enter them confused and bewildered and we leave them the same way. When we enter the school we at least know that we are Indians. We come out half red and half white, not knowing what we are... I wouldn't cooperate in the remaking of myself. I played the dumb Indian. They couldn't make me into an apple-red outside and white inside. From their point of view I was a complete failure. (18. Lame Deer & Erdoes, *supra n. 1*, at 146-47. Haag, 2007)

The institutions' goal of eliminating Native American culture may have had a complex array of motivations, however the effect of their efforts was poignantly tied to the confusion of one's identity, and impressed upon Native youths that they were implicitly less than the typical American if they rejected assimilation.

The students who attended these schools graduated with varying perspectives on their impact and intentions. There are several letters included in *Boarding School Voices: Carlisle Indian School Students Speak* that provide insight into the positive aspects of the school as regarded by previous students. One letter written by Wm. F. Campbell stated:

I was greatly benefitted by going there and I shall always look back to my Carlisle experience as the turning point in my life. And if I make a success of life I shall attribute it to

the ennobling influences with which I was surrounded during my stay with you. (Krupat, 2021).

Similarly, a previous student named Julia Wheelock claimed that, “Since my return from Carlisle, I have never been out of work (Krupat, 2021).” At first glance, these letters may come across as redeeming, however according to discussion with my Uncle, it is important to acknowledge that these positive letters were often written directly to the institutions at which they had been educated, often to either brag about their success or to ask for information. This being the case, it is understandable that the content of said letters would be biased positively as to impress or glean favor of the reader. While some focussed on their benefits and the success they were able to achieve post education, the framing of their education pushed for jobs outside of the reservation, furthering attendees identity and connection from their Native roots and weakening the future of the Tribe. “It [the displacement of native youths] was bad for the nation because whenever the nation loses its children, it loses its future,” said my grandmother.

What are the generational effects of Indian boarding schools and how can generational trauma be healed and forgotten traditions relearned?

The generational impact of these boarding schools and coinciding migrations can be seen in values, parenting tactics, and much more decades after the last boarding school closed in 1996 (Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). There is currently a push to educate the masses on the oppression faced by Native peoples and to revive traditions and language that was buried in the past.

There are several ripple effects that I can see in my family as a response to my distant relatives' experiences at Thomas and Carlisle Indian Schools. My grandmother and her mother

were adamant about enrolling their children in the Tribe as to connect them with it. My grandmother expected her children to go to college and was clear that they were to complete their chosen majors. I believe that this is a whisper of the push for education that caused my great great great grandmother to send Mellisa Hewitt to Thomas Indian School generations prior, as educational opportunities were limited on the reservation. My grandmother also explained that she was conservative with her use of money, as was taught by her mother. As a result, she showed little support at times for her sons' hobbies- a disinterest which she now regrets and attributes to the way she was raised. "The one thing I do know is there can be a coldness or a stiffness. As much as I knew my mother loved me, I knew that I was being raised to go on my own," said my Grandmother. She told me that she believes she is a product of the system that years ago that taught the women who taught her. They had grown up with little affection from the adults around them, as they were not raised by family, and developed a difficulty with expressing love. My uncle told me about a conversation he had with Tuscarora community members and long time friends Wendy and Jim Bissell :

"Does your mother ever tell you that she loves you?" [asked Wendy]. And I thought about it and I said "no." And she said, "The reason why I asked that question is not a criticism of you [my Grandmother] it's an observation, and I see it throughout all the families on this reservation. Every family that has had somebody go to one of these boarding schools, [because of] the way that they are raised and the way that they are assimilated and educated, they have a very difficult ability to show and express love and said "It's not a criticism, It's just something that we struggle with." And I noticed afterwards Gram (Faye) making a concerted effort. "And I think having it observed out loud, set in motion something in my mother, your grandmother, that she has made a concerted effort over the past 20 years to make sure that this is not something that we would remember about her."

Today when I think of my grandmother, I think of a woman who is so outwardly warm, and always sings to me and my cousins "*Who loves you? Who loves you? You know that I do.*" This conversation shocked me, because she has wildly changed her own expression of love as a reaction to the resentment she had for that generational ripple of disconnection from family. Gram also possesses the strongest will to keep family together out of anyone I know, even going

as far as driving more than four hours in a day just to have lunch with me, and I believe that to be an echo of the loss of that opportunity for generations before her. My grandmother also explained to me that she sees a passing down of defensiveness, argumentativeness, and the idea that one will not allow themselves to be taken advantage of. She alluded to the idea that older generations get used to the reality of the injustice their people faced because “You’re not supposed to cause trouble”, but “what trickles down is some anger.” I can see in myself the anger I feel on behalf of my ancestors and the poverty that is still faced by many Native communities today. I think that my anger is fueled by today’s acceptance of speaking out rather than accepting reality for what it is. I only hope that this anger fuels change and encourages people to listen.

Of course there is the loss of opportunity for those with Native blood today to be easily exposed to language, stories, culture, religion, and tradition as was the goal and accomplishment of these schools. When I asked my grandmother what current generations can do to help, she said, “Well, I think the first step is acknowledging.” An important step to heal generational trauma is teaching our country’s youth about Native American history, rather than turning the other cheek, and in order to accomplish that we need to get more Native people in positions of political and educational power to change public school course content requirements. According to my Uncle, we need to talk about the dark parts of our country’s history. He feels it is important that our current generation learns that what has happened in the past is unacceptable and why- so that similar things do not happen again and so that harmful viewpoints of past generations do not continue into future ones. It is crucial that Native American history is taught in more depth than just mentioning Pocahontas, Sacagawea, and longhouses- the “flowery and romantic” parts as my grandmother put it. In order to broaden children’s rudimentary understanding of Native American history and culture that is taught by most school systems now, my grandmother went

into her three sons and my own elementary school classes to show a book her mother had put together. “I would take beadwork, I would take sweetgrass, I would take basketry, I would take dolls, I would take a false face, but I would speak reverently about it,” said my grandmother. Additionally, Faye believes that it is imperative to the strengthening of Native Nations to break the stereotype that they are all wealthy casino owners and to raise funds to heighten the standard of living as “more than one in three American Indian and Alaska Native children live in poverty” (Native Youth Report, 2014) .

What is happening to revive the culture that was squandered in these boarding schools? Currently, there are scholarships given out to children with Native blood, which encourages them to learn about and give back to the Native community- like the G. C. Newbold fund that led to my desire to conduct this research. There are school programs on reservations that have night classes and elementary school classes that are taught all in the Tuscarora language as well as Indigenous Student programs in colleges that encourage students to learn the lost arts- like beadwork and ribbon skirt making. There are also efforts to reignite ceremonies on reservations. For example, in the late 1800’s, the Longhouse, used for ceremonies on the Tuscarora reservation was burnt down by Baptists, but it was recently rebuilt and ceremonies are happening on site for the first time in generations. Lastly, there is a push to repatriate Native American art to its rightful tribe, rather than it being part of a collector's gallery that might never teach current generations about their past.

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