

US Boarding Schools and the Abuse of Native American Children

Femi Oke of Al Jazeera convenes a panel to discuss what happened when the US government forcibly removed Native American children from families and sent them to boarding schools.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlqS5HS1nkl> [Jul 13, 2021 (25 mins)]

Panel moderator, Femi Oke begins by stating that the boarding school mission was to, “assimilate Indigenous children into American culture and take the Indian out of them.” The panel describes the harm that occurred, and the truth and reconciliation that must occur. One panel member talked about how her father almost froze to death after escaping; another names her mother a “survivor” of the Catholic Indian Boarding School. Families, “don’t deserve the truth [about what happened], they have a right to the truth.” Beginning in the 19th Century, the US government created, “a system of boarding schools where hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families, taught to shun their cultural heritage, and assimilate to white Christian customs. Also known as ‘Indian residential schools,’ the system included at least 367 institutions run by various US church groups from 1819 until the end of the 1960s (YouTube). The children were humiliated and abused because of their identity and culture—and because their families were prohibited from protecting them. (One panel member describes a survivors’ vestige “game” where his children were taught to “hide” in their own home when the doorbell rang.) The US Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland is an Indigenous person—for the first time in history. Secretary Haaland is leading the Department’s investigation into the schools that have “haunted” Indigenous families. Part of that investigation is looking at records of children who died while attending boarding schools, similar to the 1,000 graves of children recently uncovered in Canada. Panel members relay that whatever is uncovered in the investigation will not be a surprise to Indigenous families; just as their resilience is intergenerational, the schools are part of their intergenerational trauma.

Additional Resources:

Lost Lives, Lost Culture: The Forgotten History of Indigenous Boarding Schools

<https://nyti.ms/3ioo8dT>

[Recent Legislation: Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy Act Harvard Law Review | \(From the 1860s until the 1970s, the U.S. government operated Indian boarding schools intended to expedite assimilation: the early proponents of this system believed it would “\[k\]ill the Indian . . . and save the man.” Recently, U.S. Representative Deb Haaland \(D-N.M.\) and U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren \(D-Mass.\) introduced a bill to establish the Truth...\)](#)

[Secretary Haaland Announces Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative | U.S. Department of the Interior \(doi.gov\) 6/22/2021](#)