

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Indian Boarding Schools

Tribal Education. In the early 1800s, several nations established sophisticated school systems for their children. The Cherokee and Choctaw created an education network which included over 200 classrooms. Among the Cherokee, tribal literacy and journalism flourished as newspapers were published in both Cherokee and English languages. Their motive was clear, according to a Cherokee elder's advice to younger tribal members,

"Remember that the whites are near us. With them we have constant intercourse, and you must be sensible, that unless you can speak their language, read and write as they do, they will be able to cheat you and trample on your rights." (As quoted in Nabokov, 1991:215.)

Discussion/Writing:

- *According to the Cherokee elder, what was the goal of tribal educational systems?*

- *Do you think that Euro-Americans and the federal government shared the same goal as the Cherokee? _____*

Federally-subsidized education. As early as 1802, Congress passed an Act to "promote civilization among the savages." The following year, Congress passed another act to "civilize and educate the heathens." But it was not until 1819 that the U.S. government made its first direct financial commitment to educate Indian children by creating a "**Civilization Fund**" to subsidize religious schools. The Act authorized \$10,000:

"For the purpose of providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes, adjoining the frontier settlements of the United States, and for introducing among them the habits and arts of civilization, the President of the United States shall be, and he is hereby authorized . . . to employ capable persons of good moral character, to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation; and for teaching their children in reading, writing and arithmetic..." (U.S. Statutes at Large, 3:516-17.)

Discussion/Writing:

- *What were the goals of policy makers who wanted to educate Indian children?*

By the late 1870s, the federal government began to create a coordinated, national system of Indian education. Children would be sent to boarding schools and separated from their families, culture, and religious activities and retrained in a teaching environment firmly orchestrated by Christian Euro-Americans.

Within a decade, the goals and composition of the large non-reservation schools attended by Indian children from across the nation were clearly articulated by former Indian fighter, Colonel Richard H. Pratt:



"I believe that the system of removing them from their tribes and placing them under continuous training in the midst of civilization is far better than any other method... I am sure that if we could bring to bear such training as this upon all our Indian children for only three years, that savagery among the Indians in this country would be at an end... The end to be gained...is the complete civilization of the Indian and his absorption into our national life, [for] the Indian to lose his identity as such, to give up his tribal relations and to be made to feel that he is an American citizen....The sooner all tribal relations are broken up, the sooner the Indian loses all his Indian ways, even his language, the better it will be for him and for the government and the greater will be the economy to both." (Pratt, 1964:260, 265.) In 1892, Colonel Pratt made the following speech: "A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."

Discussion/Writing:

- *What is a non-reservation school and why did Pratt and his federal followers think it was the best way to "civilize" Indian children?*

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- *What was Pratt's goal?* _____

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- *What is assimilation?*

- *Do you think that by committing federal funds to Christians to educate and convert Indian children was a violation of the Constitutional protection of freedom of religion? Why or why not?*
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By the mid-1890s, the federal government planned to create more boarding schools in the Western United States. Under the leadership of a new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, William A. Jones (1897-1904), these schools were shaped by a newer philosophy. Commissioner Jones and his colleagues doubted that Indians could fully assimilate into white society or that they could compete with whites in commercial and mechanical skills. Instead, they believed Indians were better suited for a life of manual labor. Thus, the second generation of non-reservation boarding schools were characterized by the following:

- Indian children were assigned menial labor tasks which gave them very little reason to expect economic or social advancement or equality. The Indian Office was clear that "...an Indian boy or girl will have to make their living by the 'sweat of their brow,' and not their brains." (As quoted in Trennert, 1988:47.)

Upon graduation, Indian children were encouraged to either return home to the reservation where they were to lead their people into a more civilized life, or to find menial employment in white society. This emphasis on training Indians to become general laborers was intensified under the leadership of Frances E. Leupp, Commissioner of Indian Affairs beginning in 1905. Indeed, Leupp remarked shortly after assuming his position:

"Now, if anyone can show me what advantage will come to this large body of manual workers from being able to read off the names of the mountains of Asia, or extract the cube root of 123456789, I shall be deeply grateful." (As quoted in Trennert, 1988:95.)

Discussion/Writing:

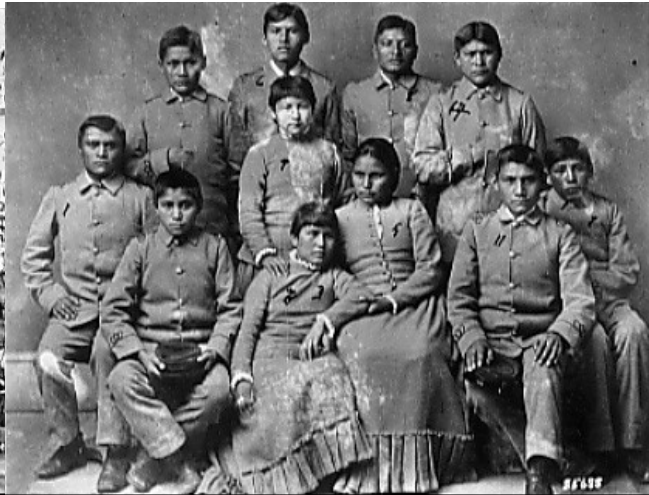
- *Why do you think the Commissioner of Indian Affairs emphasized a vocational rather than an intellectual education for American Indian children in boarding schools?*

- *Do you think that training American Indians to prepare for labor and other vocational jobs will help them assimilate into white society? Why or why not?*





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Discussion/Writing:

- *What do the two photographs above tell you about the assimilation of Indian children at boarding school?*

- *What do you think happened to Indian children after they graduated from boarding schools and returned home to their reservations?*

Summary
