

## Addressing The Impacts of “Indian” Boarding Schools on Native Americans

Aani Nagaiah

### Abstract

This study examines the long-term consequences of Indian boarding schools on US Native Americans. Because these organizations created historical sorrow, we shall offer alternatives. Based on research and personal experience, this paper recommends allowing access to records, teaching boarding school history, embracing traditional healing, and altering the remaining boarding schools to encourage truth-telling. Healing from the past requires certain activities. Legal issues make financial restitution unlikely in the US. Native communities should receive awareness and specific help. This strategy yields more realistic and useful future solutions. Indians need time and practice to recover from major trauma.

### Introduction

1000 graves and counting have been found in the grounds of Canadian Indian boarding schools in recent years. This gave rise to investigations in the United States, those of which doctorate researchers estimated 40,000 bodies to be found overall. The events that caused these deaths can be dated back to the early 19th century, when the first American Indian boarding school opened. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition recites what was done in these schools: “Murder by beating, poisoning, hangings, starvation, strangulation...medical experimentation...torture, involuntary sterilization, and even pedophile rings”. Indian schools originally had no intention to murder. Americans wanted to assimilate the Native population by introducing them to white culture. Studies from the Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society B show that “synchrony suppress[es] the initial urge to argue for one's unique opinion,[and] the desire to continue to argue for one's own opinion, thereby reducing healthy group dissent.” In a larger scale, this is exactly what the boarding schools did, making it scientifically proven they have a huge impact on Native Americans. Uncovering such a thing to the public has put Indigenous communities in the spotlight for once and raised awareness to the tribulations they were put to. They also reveal that “people in a group that experiences synchrony tend to feel more trusting...more similar..[and] .more liking towards group members...even in difficult environments.” This was the intended result of Indian boarding schools, but they quickly turned violent. Another part of the same study shows that “synchrony suppress[es] the initial urge to argue for one's unique opinion,[and] the desire to continue to argue for one's own opinion, thereby reducing healthy group dissent.” On a larger scale, this is exactly what the boarding schools did, by silencing the Native Americans and condemning their culture. Uncovering the travesties of boarding schools to the public has put Indigenous communities in the spotlight and raised awareness of the tribulations they were put to. This discussion raises an important question: What is the best method to address the impacts of Indian Boarding Schools on Native Americans? After careful consideration of government reparations, accurate records being made, education of history, traditional medicine/spirituality, and the modern day use of boarding schools, the three-pronged answer is clear. The steps to recover from the deep-rooted trauma of Indian Boarding Schools are reminding people of the truth and history, using modern boarding schools, and using Traditional Indian Medicine (TIM).

### The Debate

There is really no debate on whether Indian Boarding Schools were bad. However, there is debate on how to deal with the adverse impacts. Some maintain the need for reparations. Others want concrete numbers of deaths and the truth to be made clear. Some even focus on the use of traditional spirituality or keeping the use of modernized boarding schools. After careful consideration of government reparations, accurate records being made, education of history, the use of modern boarding schools, and spiritual rehabilitation, the answers are clear. The steps to recover from the deep-rooted trauma of Indian Boarding Schools are reminding people of the truth and history, using modern boarding schools, and also using Traditional Indian Medicine (TIM).

### The Spread Of Truthful Records And Education

Firstly, to move forward in addressing the impacts of historic Native American Boarding schools, the history and the truth must be unveiled first. Records must be available to Native families, and education about the terrors from boarding schools must be more widespread.

The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition reminds us that: “Many children never returned home and their fates have yet to be accounted for by the U.S. government.” This shows how the case is not yet closed for the US regarding Native boarding schools. Countless ex-students recall how dreadful their time was, with harsh manual labor, facing sexual assault and even being in pedophile rings. Truthful records can jumpstart a solution to heal the native community. Mary Annette Pember, an avid Indigenous journalist and activist, says that “..the government could make records from the time more easily available to survivors and their families. Telling the truth won’t change the facts of all that happened... however, [it would] offer thousands of Native peoples the solace of physical evidence and validation like the kind I got, which could guide a path toward healing.” Simply knowing what happened to one’s ancestors would be important in the steps for recovery. Gaining physical evidence of the graves for the families and public to take note of is another crucial step. Marsha Small is a doctoral student from Montana State University who has found 222 unmarked graves at the Chemawa Indian School cemetery, and says “Until we can find those kids and let their elders...know where they can pay respects, I don’t think the Native community is going to heal, and as such, I don’t think America is going to heal”. Showing the truthful number of bodies will allow for healing. With the truth being spread, it will greatly assist the cause of healing Native American trauma from boarding schools.

### The Modern Day Use Of Boarding Schools

Secondly, modern day boarding schools slowly reverse the damages of old boarding schools and are a viable solution in turn. They are a step forward in reclaiming Indigenous identity and assist in recovery. These schools do this by incorporating Native American culture, like beading, basketweaving, and most importantly, Indigenous language classes. It is the sheer opposite of what went on in the original boarding schools, and lets the youth embrace their culture while giving them a normal education as well. Modern day boarding schools incorporate culture and reinforce it. “They have a beading class,” says Scottie Nez, a junior at Fort Washakie High School who spent his first two years at Sherman. “And pottery—ceramics class. They have a basket-weaving class. And they have a Navajo language class.” In addition, students feel that the environments of modern-day boarding schools welcome them. In the book *Away From*

Home, which highlights first-person boarding school experiences, Christine Begay reminisces: “I live in a white society and it wasn’t working for me right. It wasn’t about my personality, or who I was inside, it was the outside...that they judged. I felt comfortable with all the other Indians here....I came back every year.” Judgmental white society impacted Begay, so she wanted to continue in the Indian school because it was more familiar and welcoming. The schools also open up conversations with elders that allow communities to heal. Rebecca Bell, a student from the 1980s, recalls her time at her boarding school being “much different than what she’s heard of her grandmother’s time at boarding school.” She also mentions “[the elders] didn’t really talk about it then, but they do talk about it now,” Some disagree and instead argue that since the bodies of deceased, abused children reside under many modern boarding schools, the use of boarding schools should not be promoted. Tripp Doener, the principal of Sherman Indian Highschool, says otherwise: “It would be inappropriate to try to remedy some horrible mistakes from the past by eliminating an institution now that is a hopeful place” With all the first-person accounts of how new boarding schools have benefited the users, there is more than enough evidence to keep them around to benefit Native American society.

### The Use Of Traditional Indian Medicine

Thirdly, Trauma is still prevalent in native communities from boarding schools, so reverting to traditional medicine and spirituality will assist the native mental health state. Traditional medicine, as defined by the World Health Organization, is “such as..knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal or mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, ... to treat, diagnose or prevent illness”. With it being recognized by the WHO, it is even more reason to focus on Traditional Indian Medicine as a healing method. Traditional Indian Medicine is an ancient, familiar process, which bonds the Native people together and opens space to address trauma. Mary Vicario, a clinical counselor at a mental health institution called Finding Hope, reveals that “Research is discovering that mindfulness and spirituality engages the brain’s medial pre-frontal cortex, the part that experiences trauma,” This scientifically proves that traditional spirituality practices heal the mind, and should be applied.

### Counterargument

Others would oppose all the other options and instead argue that “the U.S. should be required to make reparations to address the continuing effects of abuses perpetrated by boarding school policies”, similar to the Canadian model. However, researchers argue that since the US Supreme Court “does not grant the same recognition for group rights as does Canadian law, where lawsuits could have some legal effect.” It is safe to say the success Indigenous Canadians have seen receiving reparations cannot be replicated in an American situation.

### Limitations

One major limitation could be the overall cost of the proposed solutions. Another potential limitation could be that people might not take the education seriously, or be open to the fact, like opposers of Critical Race Theory. The education of the true history must be ongoing, until majority of the population knows the truth, just like for any other problem. In the same way, people may not agree with spirituality, so the science of the deed and its benefits must be

proven furthermore. Others may not want boarding schools to continue, so more advocacy must be done so that government officials will come into play and listen to the Native communities' demands. Ultimately, what is at stake here is an entire population of people's education, mental health, social status, and everything related to their life. Taking action to address the impacts of Indian Boarding Schools may seem of concern to only a small group of Native Americans, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about human life.

## Conclusion

Educating all people on truth, using modern boarding schools, and encouraging spiritual rehabilitation will be useful to address the impacts of old boarding schools on Native Americans in the United States. If all of these solutions are applied, many unseen benefits will rise. Not only will Native Americans be helped, but everyone around them will also be aware of the tragedies done to them. Native Americans will gain a sense of support from the US at last. Educating all people on truth, encouraging spiritual rehabilitation, and using modern boarding schools will be useful to address the impacts of boarding schools on Native Americans.

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