

“THE BEST POSSIBLE EDUCATION”: FEDERAL INDIAN EDUCATIONAL  
POLICY IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1969-1980

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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The scholarship regarding the education of American Indians has focused primarily on the trials and atrocities of the period between 1870 and 1930. This thesis expands this analysis and explores the shifts in Indian educational policy that occurred in the mid to late twentieth century. Whereas federally controlled institutions had served as the primary means of educating Indian students prior to the 1930s, between the 1940s and 1960s, the federal government began shifting Indian children into state-controlled public schools. Unbeknownst to federal policymakers, this shift effectively limited federal control of Indian education by putting this control largely in the hands of local white communities whose goals for Indian education often differed greatly from those of the federal government. This limiting of federal power was most clearly demonstrated in the 1970s, when federal policymakers attempted to create a policy of self-determination for Indian education that was applied in only a limited fashion by state public schools.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION:

#### VARIABILITY IN THE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF INDIAN STUDENTS

During the 1973-1974 school year, only 23 percent of male Paiute students and 11 percent of female Paiutes graduated from high school in Utah's Iron, Milliard, and Sevier counties. In those same counties, the overall graduation rate for white students was approximately 66 percent for both men and women.<sup>1</sup> For every one white student who dropped out of school, male or female, three Paiute boys and six Paiute girls would follow. These numbers are shocking, and during that year they were the same throughout the nation. Indeed, Native American children across the country, both rural and urban, averaged four fewer years of education than their white counterparts, and the majority lived in poverty.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, these figures were not the result of the infamous assimilation-focused boarding schools, or religiously-affiliated mission schools that sought to strip Indian children of their culture through physical and emotional trauma. Rather, these figures came from the public schools that were supposed to offer an improvement over the dehumanizing practices of their federally and religiously run counterparts. Moreover, these children came from families who "support[ed] the idea of education. [Who] often expressed ... a wish for their children to 'do better'... [and] see in

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<sup>1</sup> Martha C. Knack, "Beyond a Differential: An Inquiry into Southern Paiute Experience with Public Schools," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9, No. 3 (1978): 221.

<sup>2</sup> Knack, "Beyond a Differential," 221.

education the means to such social advancement.”<sup>3</sup>So what went wrong? Why did these student’s struggle, and what caused them to fail?

In truth, not all of them did. A closer examination of the individual school districts in these three southern Utah counties brings into focus wild variations in the ways local whites treated Indian students, and the ways that Native Americans perceived their school experiences. In Millard County’s Fillmore school district, in the eastern portion of central Utah, Indian graduation rates were considerably higher as a result of local Paiute and Navajo children forming a large united Native American minority that was able to collectively demand special attention from white teachers and administrators.<sup>4</sup> In the Ritchfield school district in Sevier County, teachers and administrators denied that Indian children struggled at all and listed acculturation as one of the school’s primary goals for Indian students. Not surprisingly, only one Native American student made it as far as the twelfth grade during the 1973-1974 school year in Richfield.<sup>5</sup> Whites in these two school districts treated Indian children differently, and despite the small successes of schools like Fillmore, those differences led to weak educational performance for Indian students overall. Indeed, the treatment of Indian children in these schools varied because they were small, autonomous schools, devoid of any directly centralized control.

By the end of the 1960s, the federal government had adopted a radically new policy that “encourage[d] Indian parents and tribal leaders to assume increasing

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<sup>3</sup> Knack, “Beyond a Differential,” 223.

<sup>4</sup> Knack, “Beyond a Differential, 223.

<sup>5</sup> Knack, “Beyond a Differential, 221-223.

responsibility for the education of Indian children in accordance with the concept of community action.”<sup>6</sup> And yet despite this call for Indian self-determination, which had been prompted by a series of senate hearings that took place between 1967 and 1969, the education of Native American students would continue to fail well into the 1980s. The emphasis of these hearings had been on giving Indian people a voice in the direction of their education. But the loss of federal control had put them at the mercy of local communities. This thesis argues that the effectiveness of the federal government’s call to put Indians in control of their children’s education was limited by the decentralized nature of the American educational system.

The paradoxical nature of this argument is readily apparent. Given the acts of war, genocide, and confinement that Native Americans suffered at the hands of the federal government, it stands to reason that Native Americans would be best served by being as far removed from federal power as possible.<sup>7</sup> And yet this distance proved virtually unobtainable. Having been stripped of their land, their traditional subsistence practices, and their very sovereignty by confrontations with an ever-expanding white population, Indian peoples were forced into a colonial relationship that placed their lives under the control of the federal government. In short, the realities of Indian-white relations created a set of conditions where the fates of Native people were no longer under Native control. Federal hegemony meant that federal policies could change swiftly and drastically, for better or for worse. In just sixty years, between the 1870s and 1930s, Indian education

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<sup>6</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, November 1969, p. 583.

<sup>7</sup> For more information Native American genocide, as well as acts of war against native populations, see Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and US Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Lawrence Davidson, *Cultural Genocide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

would change from a system that sought to tear down Indian cultural values, to one that attempted to preserve traditional practices and tribal sovereignty. It was this variability, this nimbleness, which was perhaps the only strength of this federal system. As federal policymakers changed their minds regarding what constitutes effective Indian policy, the system itself could change just as rapidly. The possibilities inherent in such a centrally controlled system were tantalizingly clear. While this relationship attempted cultural genocide in the boarding school era, what if policymakers had decided to return control of Indian education, and Indian policy as a whole, to Indian people?

At the end of the 1960s, policymakers seem poised to answer this question through legislative action. Yet despite the reorientation of federal policy regarding Indian education that occurred in 1969 and 1970, self-determined education for Native American students has yet to become a widespread reality. The current scholarship on Indian education does little to explain why this is so. While the education of Indian children has become a subject of great scholarly interest over the past forty years, most of it has focused on the period of time from the 1870s to the late 1930s and early 1940s. This “boarding school era,” is rife with compelling stories of tragedy, accommodation, and resistance in the face of terrible adversity and hegemonic power; all of which was extraordinarily well documented by teachers, administrators, and students. The heart-rending stories and the sheer volume of letters and official reports from this period makes this focus quite understandable; however, it does little to describe the complete story of Indian education.

The study of these early types of Indian schooling are, however, very important for understanding the cultural impact assimilation on Tribal communities. The horrors of

the boarding school era have left deep wounds on the collective Indian consciousness, and understanding these historical issues is essential for exploring how Native Americans viewed education in more modern eras. The scholarly discussion of Indian education largely began with Robert Trewnert's, *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935*, which established for the first time that Indian boarding schools were, in reality, brutal tools in a federal project of Indian assimilation.<sup>8</sup> While this assessment was something that was at least partially understood in the academic discussion of nineteenth century Indian policy, Trewnert's study was both bold in its forthrightness and monumental in the way it would shape the future discussion of Indian boarding schools. Indeed, most of the scholars who have written subsequently on the subject of Indian boarding schools consider this fundamental thesis to be true, and rather than attempt to challenge it, they have used their works to add breadth to this discussion. David Wallace Adams, for example, in his book, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, used much the same argument as Trewnert, but with a broader focus that analyzed Indian boarding schools as whole and created a comprehensive history of federal educational policy for Indian students.<sup>9</sup> Brenda Child also preserved Trewnert's thesis, but used *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* to shift the focus of the conversation to the interactions between Indian students and their families.<sup>10</sup> While each of these scholars

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<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Trewnert, *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), xi.

<sup>9</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

presented their own unique contribution to the discussion of the Indian boarding school experience, all of them preserved the arguments laid down Trennert. The durability of his thesis is a testament to its validity, and these analyses of the federal government's assimilative project, are essential for understanding the grievances held by Indian communities in the twentieth century.

Far fewer scholars have focused much attention on Indian education in the twentieth century. While this boarding school era is essential for understanding the tragic legacy that Indian students would grapple with, a more complete study of Indian education in the twentieth century is necessary to create a more nuanced picture of Indian education. One historian who attempted to create a trailblazing study of Indian children in local schooling was Stephen Kent Amerman. His book, *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools, 1940-2000*, was one of the first to analyze the experiences of Indians in the public school system. Like Trennert did two decades years earlier, Amerman focused on the schools of Phoenix, Arizona to paint a picture of what education was like for Indian students. Amerman examined the local politics of the Phoenix school system and illustrated the ways in which Indians struggled against local discrimination and their historically second-class status within the broader culture of the Phoenix area. Moreover, he deftly illustrated what measures Indians took to make their voices heard in educational process and how Native peoples interacted with other minority groups to effect real change in the local educational administrative process.<sup>11</sup>

Other historians, like Teresa L McCarty, avoided the issue of Indians in public schools altogether and instead focused on the ways that Native American people

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Kent Amerman, *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools, 1940-2000* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 179-180.

attempted to take control of their own education in the twentieth century. Her book, *A Place to be Navajo: Rough Rock and the Struggle for Self-determination in Indigenous Schooling*, provided an ethno-historical account of indigenous schooling at the Rough Rock demonstration school. Through her work, McCarty hoped that Indigenous issues might “penetrate the ‘mainstream’ debates on education reform, bilingualism, multiculturalism, literacy learning, and language planning and policy.”<sup>12</sup> To do this, McCarty explored the efforts of Navajo men and women to establish a school that provided bilingual education, culturally inclusive learning environments, and real community control of their children’s curriculum. While it is clear that McCarty considered the ideas that led to the school were truly noble, she also pointed out the ways that the school fell short of its goals. Both McCarty and Amerman stop short of analyzing the complicated relationship between the federal government and local school districts that began in the 1930s and continued throughout the twentieth century, and neither author tackles the academic challenges Indian students faced, nor what might have led to these academic failings. These questions are essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the evolution of Indian education.

What all of these studies make painfully evident is the fact that Native American students have been failed by the American education system. Teresa L. McCarty’s work suggests that Indian educational success could be rooted only in Indian control of their educational future. The national discourse on racism in the 1960s allowed a few enlightened policymakers, such as the senators who made up the Special Subcommittee on Indian education, to embrace this idea and challenge the educational policies of the

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<sup>12</sup> Teresa L. McCarty, *A Place to be Navajo: Rough Rock and the Struggle for Self-Determination in Indigenous Schooling* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), xviii.

past. For these senators, Indian people, like all Americans, deserved the right to teach their children about their histories and educate them in the manner they deemed the most appropriate and effective. As this study demonstrates, the tragic irony was that by the time the federal government came to this conclusion, it had lost the power to make it a reality.



## CHAPTER II

### PAST FAILURES:

#### FEDERAL INDIAN EDUCATION, 1792-1967

Education has been part of the United States' interactions with Native Americans since shortly after the nation's founding, and has undergone several variations from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. At first, education was meant to be a mutually beneficial endeavor. Indian leaders viewed Euro-American education as attractive because it was a means of learning how to more effectively communicate with the white communities that seemed to be growing by the day. For whites, it was a means by which to foster good relations with the Indian communities that lived just outside of their borders. As time passed, however, the benefits of education would become decidedly one-sided as whites began to utilize educational programs as a means of breaking down the social structures of Indian society. Indeed, over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the goals and methods of Indian educational programs would evolve dramatically to suit the federal government's changing concepts of effective Indian policy. From what many consider the cultural genocide that occurred during the nineteenth century's assimilation-focused educational models, to the call for a renewal of tribal sovereignty in the early twentieth century, the federal government's centralized control of Indian educational policy allowed them to alter the course of Indian schooling quickly and dramatically as the ideological goals of Indian education changed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Jacobs explores this concept of centralized federal Indian policy by comparing the assimilation strategies of the United States and Australia. See Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler*

The first programs of Indian education in the United States were generally ad-hoc measures meant to foster good relations between Indian tribes hostile to ever-growing white communities. Beginning with the 1792 treaty negotiations with the Seneca Nations, the federal government took upon itself the role of primary arbiter of Indian educational welfare. Here, the United States agreed to set aside funds for the provision of educational and vocational training for Seneca children. The tactical, yet peaceful, power of these measures became readily apparent to federal policymakers, and such provisions quickly became commonplace in treaties between Indians and the federal government. By 1794, the federal government agreed to provide funding to help educate the Oneida, Tuscarora, and Mahican people.<sup>2</sup> For these eighteenth century policymakers, education served as a means by which they could neutralize Indian groups they viewed as hostile without force of arms. Through education, whites hoped to “civilize” Native Americans and by introducing modern Euro-American thought and technology, win their cooperation.

As the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, the numbers of whites on American soil grew, and policymakers replaced their peaceful educational goals with policies of forced removal and all-out war. Growing populations coupled with a budding sense of moral superiority led many white Americans to believe that it was their “Manifest Destiny” to spread Euro-American cultural values from coast to coast, and that under “nature’s eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect [they] must accomplish it.”<sup>3</sup>

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*Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 425-39.

<sup>2</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights, Montana Advisory Committee, “History of Indian Education Initiatives in the United States,” *Equal Educational Opportunity for Native American Students in Montana Public Schools* (Washington DC: The United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2001), <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps13587/www.usccr.gov/pubs/sac/mt0701/ch1.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> John L. O’sullivan, *The United States Democratic Review* 6, (1839): pp. 426-430.

In short, whites wanted land, and throughout the 1800s wars between Native Americans and US forces became commonplace as white communities chafed at the legally agreed upon borders their government had established with Indian groups. And while Native tribes battled US troops at every turn, the outcome of this fighting was catastrophic for Native peoples. Natives lost huge swaths of their homelands as well as numerous culturally important sites. By the late 1860s, the federal government had invested a great deal of time, money, and lives into forcing Native peoples onto small, federally controlled swaths of land called reservations.<sup>4</sup> These reservations, which may or may not have included parts of the traditional homelands of the Natives living therein, were small federally operated patches of land where Indians were supposed to be sequestered away from the white communities who had stolen their homeland. To many of the indigenes living there, however, the reservations were little more than corrals where whites could keep an eye on them and regulate their actions. Because of these feelings and despite the fact that almost all Native American tribes had a reservation on which they could live, many Indian groups refused to simply give in to white authority. As such, federal wars with Indian communities would continue into the 1890s.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time that Indian wars were taking the lives of Natives and whites throughout the western United States, in the eastern United States whites had begun to call for the preservation of Indian people and a less extermination-focused set of Indian

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<sup>4</sup> This is a tremendously condensed version of the overview found in Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism, from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 40-85.

policies.<sup>6</sup> These reformers, who often coalesced into groups like the Friends of the Indian, comprised some of the leading religious and abolitionist figures of the era. Their status within society at this time ensured that they had a hand in crafting Indian policy.<sup>7</sup> These white philanthropists viewed Indians as part of a vanishing race who had to be preserved through the creation of programs designed to “uplift” them and take them beyond their “savage nature.”<sup>8</sup> Fundamental to their program of preservation was the return of concrete educational policy for Indian children. This physical preservation, though, would come at the cost of their culture. Even in the reform-focused mindset of the mid-nineteenth century, Indian culture represented a dangerous set of values that undermined the very uplift these eastern whites hoped to create. In the minds of eastern policymakers, it was only through the Indians’ full assimilation into white society that their destruction might be avoided, and schools seemed the best means of effecting this outcome.<sup>9</sup>

The implementation of these first assimilationist schools, demonstrated for the first time just how quickly the federal government could, through the centralized control of Indian educational policy, take new ideas about education and make them reality. The earliest examples of these assimilation-focused institutes were the religious mission

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<sup>6</sup> K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 46-48.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of a vanishing race inspired countless works of art and literature and was a major component in the American conception of “Manifest Destiny.” For information regarding the concept of a vanishing race see, Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Robert J. Miller and Elizabeth Furse, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport: Praeger, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–271.

schools that started springing up on reservations throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century. These mission schools stood at the forefront of the new educational program primarily due to the general autonomy they enjoyed, relative to the federally funded schools that would come later. Though these schools were often partly funded by the federal government and subject to some federal oversight, they were not, strictly speaking, federally operated schools. Rather, Protestant or Catholic orders operated the schools and used them as outlets by which to bring charity to those they believed to be downtrodden and the gospel to those they felt to be in need of proselytization.<sup>10</sup> In many ways, mission schools were the proving-grounds where the practice of assimilation was first tested and honed. For example, mission schools were the first to require Indian students to spend most of the week at the school, allowing them to go home for only one day on the weekends. While these schools did offer some day school facilities, by the 1850s most mission schools had switched to this boarding school format.

These first mission boarding schools combined a religious mission with a harsh regimen of discipline that sought to break down the cultural identity of Indian students and replace it with one more in keeping with Euro-American ideals.<sup>11</sup> Few accounts exist that tell the story of what these early mission schools were like. One rare example comes from Francis La Flesche, a member of the Omaha tribe and a renowned anthropologist. In his book, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*, La Flesche provides a detailed description of his life in the Presbyterian Indian Mission School, just outside of

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<sup>10</sup> N.G Taylor, *Report on Indian Affairs by the Acting Commissioner, 1867* (Washington: Washington Printing Office, 1868), 285-86.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 15-30.

Omaha, Nebraska, during the 1860s. Like so many of the Native Americans that would come to describe the federal boarding school program of the 1870s, La Flesche paints a picture of himself, and most of the students who attended the school, as children caught between two cultures. While he longs to be home with his family eating traditional foods and taking part in the annual buffalo hunt, he is instead forced to regiment his days in a fashion dictated to him by white instructors.<sup>12</sup> La Flesche highlights both the joys and trials of growing up in a boarding school, taking note of both his own acts of resistance to white authority and the punishments that ensued. For example, when La Flesche and his friends are caught telling traditional stories and running home at night during the week, the headmaster beats all of the boys mercilessly with a stick.<sup>13</sup> The measures these schools took to eradicate the cultural identities of their Indian students were often brutal and ruthless; however, these practices were deemed necessary by policymakers and would become a hallmark of all future models of assimilation-focused schooling.

The late 1860s saw the establishment of some of the first schools that were entirely-controlled by the federal government. Despite the fact that wars with Indian groups continued in the western United States until the 1890s, by the mid-1860s the incongruence of justifying the death of thousands while citing the moral superiority of an expanding white population lead to a broader call for assimilation-focused schools among influential whites.<sup>14</sup> This assimilation focused educational system consisted of three

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<sup>12</sup> Francis La Flesche, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 83-96.

<sup>13</sup> La Flesche, *The Middle Five*, 112-122.

<sup>14</sup> Richard H. Pratt, "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites," *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian" 1880-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260-271.

major types of schools: on reservation day schools, on-reservation boarding schools, and off-reservation boarding schools. And while the roles these schools played in the overall education of Indian students would change as time passed, each of these different types of schools would continue to be a part of the federal education program for Indian students well into the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

In much of the country, these first schools that were entirely under federal control took the form of on-reservation day schools, which were designed to take in Indian students daily, then release them to their families every evening.<sup>16</sup> Much like the mission schools, these schools were designed to break down students' cultural identity using strict regimentation and brutal discipline. On the first day of schooling, administrators took students into a room, hidden from view so as not to cause a panic, where teachers unceremoniously cut the students' hair and took their traditional clothes to be disposed of. In many Indian cultures, hair and traditional clothing was a source of pride and strength. They cut their hair only in times of mourning. As such, this first day experience for many was an attack on their individual identity—their very soul—and this loss was to be mourned.<sup>17</sup>

This effort to demolish students' identities continued when, on the first day of classes, teachers forced students to give up their traditional names, which were usually

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas G. Andrews, "Turning the Tables on Assimilation: Oglala Lakotas and the Pine Ridge Day Schools, 1899-1920s," *Western Historical Quarterly* (Winter 2002), 408.

<sup>16</sup> Andrews, "Turning the Tables on Assimilation," 412. It is also important to note that while day schools were the first form of federal schooling on many reservations, on others it came much later and was used to supplement or prepare students for the residential schooling system. On the Pine Ridge Reservation, for example, day schools were places where Indian children could begin their formal education before moving on to more challenging on- and off-reservation boarding schools. Moreover, they did not become commonplace in Pine Ridge until the 1890s. See Andrews, "Turning the Tables on Assimilation," 407-408.

<sup>17</sup> Andrews, "Turning the Tables on Assimilation," 419-420.

rife with personal meaning, and adopt a new European name. Often, this name change occurred simply because it was easier for teachers to pronounce European names than it was for them to pronounce Indian names.<sup>18</sup> As classes continued, teachers began to assault the students' traditional modes of temporal organization by forcing them to follow a strictly regimented schedule, controlling them with a series of bugle calls, bells, and whistles. All of this occurred while students struggled to understand a language that was not their own. From the moment these students set foot in the school, their native language was forbidden. Regardless of the fact that many of the children knew no English prior to their schooling, students still faced brutal punishment if they were caught communicating in their native tongue.<sup>19</sup>

Initially, policymakers believed that these schools would be the ultimate tool of acculturation, not just for Indian students, but for the reservation as a whole. Policymakers hoped that students would receive the acculturating influence of instruction during the day and then bring that instruction back to their homes at night, thus spreading it throughout the whole of the reservation.<sup>20</sup> It was soon made apparent, however, that this was not how things actually worked. For many students, these attacks on the physical representations of their cultural identity were only superficial. Indeed, resistance to attempts by school officials to control the bodily appearance of students was common throughout the assimilation schooling program, and in many cases, this shared resistance

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<sup>18</sup> Andrews, "Turning the Tables on Assimilation," 418-419.

<sup>19</sup> N.G. Taylor, *Report on Indian Affairs by the Acting Commissioner, 1867* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Andrews, "Turning the Tables on Assimilation," 412.



only strengthened the bonds of Indian communities.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the idea that Euro-American cultural ideals would pervade Indian communities through Indian children was soon proven wrong. In reality, Indian families used the time their children spent at home to reinforce their connection to their cultural traditions and their language. In 1867, G.A. Vermeusch, a teacher on the Umatilla reservation in Oregon, decried the way that all attempts at acculturation were lost when children went home in the evening and re-immersed themselves in their traditional cultures. Indeed, Vermeusch went so far as to call for the federal government to adopt the boarding school model set forth by some of the mission schools, because, in his mind, this was “the only plan that can be adopted, [sic] which will secure a lasting benefit to Indians.”<sup>22</sup> In response to these perceived failings in the day school system, the government continued the assimilation effort by shifting the focus of their educational program to boarding schools.

Initially, these boarding schools were located on the reservations of Indian students; however, it soon became apparent that these schools suffered from many of the same “weaknesses” as the on-reservation day schools. Students still managed to stay engaged with their culture through family members, which the government viewed as counter-productive to the cause of assimilation. As such, when retired Army captain Richard Henry Pratt provided a new model for assimilative schooling in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Congress pledged almost immediate financial support. In 1879, having

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<sup>21</sup> K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “Domesticity in the Federal Indian Schools: The Power of Authority Over Mind and Body,” *American Ethnologist* 20 (May, 1993), 235.

<sup>22</sup> N.G. Taylor, *Report on Indian Affairs by the Acting Commissioner*, 84. Vermeusch was not the only teacher who felt that the day schools failed to create true assimilation. In 1869, Charity Gaston, a teacher on the Navajo reservation, called for “a provision [to be] made for gathering them [her Indian pupils] into a family where they would be constantly under the eye of the teacher [where] they would progress more rapidly in learning the English language, and in civilization generally.” See, N.G. Taylor, *Report on Indian Affairs by the Acting Commissioner, 1869* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870), 153-154.

recently found success in “rehabilitating” a group of Apache warriors at Fort Marion, Florida, Pratt opened the Carlisle Indian Industrial School.<sup>23</sup> As summated by the school’s motto, “to civilize the Indian, get him into civilization. To keep him civilized let him stay,” the Carlisle boarding school sought to remove Native American children from their reservation homes and sequester them away in boarding schools located outside of reservations. Utilizing the rigid disciplinary model established by the on-reservation system, Carlisle used distance to break down Indian cultural bonds and ensure a more constant immersion in Euro-American cultural values.<sup>24</sup> Aside from simply removing them from the reservation, Pratt also believed that by placing students in the midst of towns devoid of Indians –Carlisle, for example, was located in the almost all white city of Carlisle, Pennsylvania –students would reap the benefits of the constant acculturating effects of white society. This idea impressed white policymakers, and by 1900 there were more than twenty-five off-reservation boarding schools funded by the US government.<sup>25</sup>

Both the on- and off-reservation boarding schools were often terrible places for Native students. In both types of school, the cramped quarters, low-quality food, and heavy workload turned these institutions into hotbeds of diseases like tuberculosis and trachoma. Indeed, some estimates suggest that more than 20 percent of Indian students who attended boarding schools died during the first few years of their education.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 28-47.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, ed. Robert M. Utley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>26</sup> In Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 125-130, Adams indicates that one fifth of the students who entered Carlisle in 1881 died either at school or shortly after returning home from school. He goes on to say that this death toll was probably much higher due to the numbers of students who were dismissed from the

Unique to the off-reservation schools, however, was the crushing isolation they created for Indian students. Children were often taken from their homes at an incredibly young age, and homesickness exacerbated the miserable conditions in the schools. Ernest White Thunder was a boy from the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota whose father, White Thunder, sent him to Carlisle in an effort to build good relations with the US government. Ernest wrote home repeatedly, begging to return to his family and his traditional way of life. After being admonished by his father and after several attempts to run away from the school, Ernest eventually grew ill and died, with his nurses noting he had lost the will to live.<sup>27</sup> This sad story illustrates just how terrible homesickness could be for Native students and the lengths to which it magnified the difficulties they faced in the boarding schools.

Along with these health-related and emotional hindrances to Indian education, it also soon became apparent that the boarding schools rarely provided the complete assimilation that policymakers had hoped for. While many boarding school students, to some degree, did take up the trappings of white society, many others found it hard to maintain these values outside of the boarding school environment. Notions of white supremacy often barred them from occupations outside of the reservations, yet because of the boarding schools' emphasis on "civilization," many of the students who attended schools like Carlisle felt cut off from their friends, family, and culture when they returned home. Not only that, but in many cases, the years of training these students had received often proved to be of little use back on the reservation. As a result many students "went

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school for health related reasons. Because of this, an official percentage of Indian students who died as a result of their time in the boarding does not currently exist.

<sup>27</sup> Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons*.

back to the blanket,” or relinquished the cultural practices of white society and adopted those they had had prior to their enrollment.<sup>28</sup>

The failures of these boarding schools, particularly their horrid health conditions and the death toll, soon began to weigh on the public consciousness of the time. For policymakers, the high cost of operating these schools, coupled with their limited ability to fully assimilate Indian students, led to a belief that the boarding schools “trained too few Indian youths at too great an expense.”<sup>29</sup> Partially because of these educational failings, the Secretary of the Interior commissioned a survey in 1926 to analyze the effect that assimilationist policies had on Indian communities throughout the United States. To ensure impartiality of the results, the survey itself was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, a philanthropy that was not affiliated with the US government. The survey team, headed by Lewis Meriam, an experienced analyst of government operations, would be composed of specialists whose knowledge ranged from government affairs to public health and family life.<sup>30</sup> This team would travel to nearly every Indian reservation throughout the US and observe the effects of government policy on Indian lives. The final report of this survey, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, known colloquially as the Meriam Report, was published in 1928 and presented a damning indictment of federal assimilationist policy, particularly in its analysis of education. Opening with pithy understatement, Meriam stated that “the most fundamental need” of Indian education

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Alexander Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916; repr., Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), 103-109; Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 273-306. See also, Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), 57.

“was a change in point of view.”<sup>31</sup> From here, Meriam proceeded to enumerate the struggles that Indian students faced in all forms of education and suggested that the government needed to treat Indians not as savages in need of civilization, but rather as human beings with their own educational needs and abilities.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars continue to debate the effect that this report had on actual Indian policy and usually cite the fact that boarding schools persisted as a major form of education for Indian students as evidence of how little the Meriam Report actually affected policy. Such *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* reasoning, however, ignores many of the nuances of Indian education in the twentieth century. David Wallace Adams, for example, suggests that the logistics of educating Indian students on remote reservations, unfortunately, necessitated the use of boarding schools until the infrastructure needed to make day-schooling more available was put into place.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, to completely disregard the effects of the Meriam Report would be to disregard the burgeoning reform movements and legislation that took root following its official publication. Indeed, as a result of the Meriam Report’s documentation of ineffectual and harsh treatment assimilationist fervor cooled in the twentieth century. New reform-minded policymakers attempted to shift Indian students away from boarding schools like Carlisle and into the public school system, and because of the centralized control that the federal government had over Indian policy, they were able to. Indeed, while assimilation-focused institutions would linger into the twentieth century, the direct control that the federal government had over

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<sup>31</sup> Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 346.

<sup>32</sup> Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 346.

<sup>33</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 332.

Indian policy meant that the ideas regarding reform that began to shape public consciousness in the 1930s would almost immediately become part of Federal Indian policy.

Beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt's appointment of John Collier to the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933, Indian education began to move away from the assimilationist ideals of the past. In many ways, Collier's tenure as commissioner could be summarized as good intentions leading to disappointing results. Idealistic in his beliefs and ardent in his support of tribal sovereignty and dignity, Collier used rhetoric and implemented policies that embodied the spirit of change that came as a result of the Meriam Report.<sup>34</sup> Collier developed a deep respect for the traditions and communal practices of Native Americans during a two-year period he spent living in Taos, New Mexico. During his time at Taos Pueblo, Collier witnessed the interactions between white society and Indian people, and saw the effects of the government's assimilationist policies on Indian society. For the decade that followed this transformative experience, Collier would challenge the status quo of assimilation-focused Indian policy and speak out against the General Allotment Act of 1887 and the abhorrent conditions Indian children faced in BIA-run boarding schools.<sup>35</sup> These challenges would eventually win Collier the attention of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, who would recommend that Collier be appointed commissioner and be given the power to really change the treatment of Indian people.

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<sup>34</sup> Laurence M. Hauptman, *the Iroquois and the New Deal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 24.

<sup>35</sup> Hauptman, *the Iroquois and the New Deal*, 24.

John Collier brought his zeal for Indian rights to bear during his time as the commissioner of the BIA; however, despite his good intentions, Collier's policies often failed to recognize the differences that existed between Native American groups and as a result created only marginal progress for many Indian groups. A grand example of this can be found in Collier's 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), known colloquially as the "Indian New Deal." This piece of legislation was Collier's attempt to overturn the General Allotment Act and to return Indian lands to communally focused, tribal control. The IRA was also supposed to return tribal sovereignty to Indian people and place them in control of their land and other assets.<sup>36</sup> While this act did return some level of self-government to tribal communities, the IRA, in practical terms, fell short of its ideal. Indeed, the act did little to bring previously allotted lands back into the tribal holdings, and as a result, many reservations were checkered with a mixture of private and tribally controlled holdings.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the act did little to recognize the unique desires of different tribes. For example, while the policies of the IRA might have worked well for some of the Pueblo villages in the Southwest, they failed to take into account the experiences of the east coast tribes that composed the government-recognized group "Iroquois." Many of the smaller bands that composed this diverse group were incredibly resistant to any formal attempts by the US government to reorganize their tribe, due to what they saw as a long history of tribal self-governance. As a result, many of these east-coast Iroquois never actually adopted the IRA and exhorted other tribes to do the same.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This synopsis is taken from Graham D. Taylor's, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: the Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act 1934-1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

<sup>37</sup> Taylor, *the New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, 122-123.

<sup>38</sup> Hauptman, *the Iroquois and the New Deal*, 24-40. This, however, is not the only case of Collier's monolithic treatment of Native Americans completely tarnishing the effectiveness of a program that

Mixed results like these plagued many of Collier's attempts at reform; however, these results did not stifle his desire to remake all aspects of Indian policy, including education. Collier's most important educational reform came in 1934, with his introduction of the Johnson-O'Malley Act. This piece of legislation attempted to correct the educational failures of the assimilation era by allowing the secretary of the interior to contract directly with the states to subsidize the public education of Indian students.<sup>39</sup> The idea behind this act was both to encourage Indian children to attend public schools, as opposed to the existing BIA boarding schools, and to offset the cost of their attendance.<sup>40</sup> Because state public schools were funded primarily through regional property taxes, those schools whose district boundary lines encompassed a great deal of reservation land, which was exempt from property taxes, found themselves saddled with more students and less revenue. Prior to this bill, the government had attempted to offset this cost with per-capita payments of ten dollars per Indian student. These funds, however, fell far short of what public schools needed to provide an effective learning environment for the surge of Indian children that began attending public schools in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>41</sup> Through the JOM, Collier hoped to provide schools with enough

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appeared to be beneficial. For, example, in an effort to conserve the grasslands on the Navajo reservation, Collier enacted a policy of livestock reduction that limited the amount of sheep and other livestock that could be held by Navajos and even went so far as to kill, en masse, thousands of "extraneous" animals. Because he lacked an understanding of the fundamental importance of livestock in Navajo culture, these acts not only stripped Navajos, and particularly women, of their power in society, but was also tantamount to an attack on Navajo culture. See, Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> While the primary focus of the Johnson-O'Malley Act was to provide for the public education of Indian students, it did have some provisions for providing limited healthcare and other social services. See, Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 91.

<sup>40</sup> Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 90.

<sup>41</sup> Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 89-90.



funding to create strong educational programs that not only addressed the unique needs of Indian students, but also aimed to encourage the preservation of Indian culture.

One example of how these ideals translated into action was the reintroduction of some of the traditional tribal practices from which Indian students had long been prohibited. Indian music programs, for example, saw some growth under Collier's tenure, as did some traditional Native American dances.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps even more pronounced was the resurgence of Native American arts and crafts, which Collier hoped would not only preserve some traditional Indian cultural practices, but also provide some level of economic independence to tribal communities. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, Collier made a point of encouraging Native arts and crafts both in schools and on the reservations as a whole. He even created an Indian Arts and Crafts board, whose job it was to encourage a national marketplace for Indian-made goods.<sup>43</sup> By providing more funding to schools through the Johnson-O'Malley Act and by encouraging Indian arts and crafts, Collier attempted to subvert the culturally destructive legacy of assimilation policy and allow Native students to connect with the cultural practices of their ancestors.

Like so many of his programs, though, this effort too fell short of the intended goal. In its initial form, the Johnson-O'Malley Act proved to be so overly complicated that most states shied away from utilizing it. With only two states even attempting to take advantage of the Johnson-O'Malley Act in its initial form, it would not be until the early 1940s, after several amendments to streamline the act that a majority of the states that

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<sup>42</sup> John W. Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879-1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 318-323.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Fay Schrader, *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board: an Aspect of New Deal Indian Policy* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 3.

served Indian students would sign on for this funding.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, while this attempt to move students into public schools and out of assimilationist boarding schools was laudable, the fundamental infrastructure necessary to facilitate this transition was so limited in the 1930s and 1940s that a full transition was little more than a fantasy.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of these failings, however, the Johnson-O'Malley Act, and Collier's commissionership as a whole, signaled an attempt to move federal Indian policy in a direction that valued Native American culture and sovereignty. This shift demonstrated just how quickly and dramatically the federal government was able to alter the course of Indian education in only a few years. One administrator's desire for change managed to redirect the focus of Indian policies from assimilation to the preservation of tribal sovereignty. The years following Collier's term as commissioner would continue to demonstrate this point; however, the effects of the policy changes of this new era would be far less beneficial to Native communities.

Collier's reign as the commissioner of Indian affairs ended in 1945, and in post-World War II America, Native Americans, and some whites, began to rethink the place Native Americans had held in society for so long. Since the beginning of the reservation era, Native Americans had been forced by the government to live as dependents. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall defined the relationship aptly when he described Indians as "wards to their guardian."<sup>46</sup> For nearly two generations –and in spite of the fact that the government sought to strip them of their culture and force them into the mold of

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<sup>44</sup> Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 81-105.

<sup>45</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 332-335.

<sup>46</sup> *Cherokee Nation vs. Georgia*, 30 Reports 1 (18 March 1831).

a white laborer –the reservation system had made Native Americans dependent upon the government for material survival. Often when Indians tried to break out of this mold and find work outside of federally mandated confines, they met with tremendous resistance from the local white communities in which they lived. Finding their path to financial success blocked by whites who did not want to share job opportunities with Indian workers, Indians were essentially trapped into conditions of intense poverty.<sup>47</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, however, Native Americans began to reexamine their place in the wider American polity. In 1924, Indians were extended the rights of citizenship, and by 1945, they had helped shoulder the burdens of two world wars.<sup>48</sup> The federal government now allowed Indians to vote just like whites, though, like so many other minority groups, they faced state literacy tests and other measures that kept them from doing so.<sup>49</sup> In the minds of most Native Americans, Indians had proved themselves to be more than wards of the state, and the model of Indian-white relations needed to change to reflect this. Interestingly, many white policymakers agreed. The petty racisms of the past, while incredibly strong in their power to dictate public policy, were becoming even more difficult to justify, both to Native Americans and to other whites. As such many white policymakers in the 1940s and 1950s began pursuing

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<sup>47</sup> Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), ix-xii.

<sup>48</sup> For information regarding Indians during war time see, Thomas A Britten, *American Indians in World War I: at Home and at War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997) and Alison R Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II: toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)

<sup>49</sup> Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, xii.

legislation that would terminate the trust relationship between whites and Native Americans.<sup>50</sup>

The reasons behind this reorientation of policymaker opinion, however, were based more on fiscal concerns than on altruistic understanding of the changing roles of Indians in America. While most policymakers couched their termination legislation in altruistic sentiments, federal support of Indian communities provided virtually no return on investment to the federal government.<sup>51</sup> As a result, Congress officially passed House Concurrent Resolution 104 in 1954, which effectively terminated the federal government's trust relationship with several Indian tribes in Washington, Oregon, Texas, and Florida, dissolving the reservations and the federal government's financial support of the tribes.<sup>52</sup> The dissolution of the reservations meant that whites could now begin purchasing land formerly held by Native Americans, and the lack of federal financial support coupled with the often extreme isolation of tribal communities meant that many Indians had to move to urban centers to find some sort of employment.<sup>53</sup> As such, termination era legislation radically altered the landscape of Indian society and forced many Native people into areas they had never before occupied.

It is important to note that not every Indian tribal community was terminated; however, the legislation that facilitated termination did have some sweeping effects on Indian education. Termination era legislation –not only H.C.R. 104 but other bills as well

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<sup>50</sup> Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, ix.

<sup>51</sup> Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 133-84.

<sup>52</sup> Several other tribes would eventually be terminated as well, including the Menominee tribes in Wisconsin and the Catawbas in South Carolina. Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 97.

<sup>53</sup> Donald Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 26-42, 43-48.

–tremendously reduced the budget for the BIA.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, one of the primary goals of termination was the elimination of the BIA, an organization that many politicians saw as an inefficient and expensive waste of taxpayer resources.<sup>55</sup> One of the primary ways that policymakers began to attack the power of the BIA was by shifting the control of BIA schools into the hands of local public school systems. Again, this was not true everywhere, but this shift was encouraged both on the now dissolved reservations of terminated tribes, as well as on many of the reservations that continued to exist.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the termination era in many ways represented a continuation and streamlining of the policies laid down by John Collier. In the 1950's, several amendments to the Johnson-O'Malley Act made the process of contracting with the federal government much easier for states wishing to shift their Indian students into public schools.<sup>57</sup> This coupled with the influx of Indian families into urban areas, meant that the federally-run reservation schools had less power than ever before.

On a superficial level, each of these individual eras in Indian policy seemed radically different from one another. Over the course of just eighty years, politicians set Indian students on a path to assimilation, then a flawed path to self-determination, and finally a path that abandoned their unique educational needs entirely. While these seemingly disparate eras of Indian educational policy shared little in the way of a unifying educational philosophy, one similarity that they all shared was a strong

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001) 5-17.

<sup>55</sup> Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 81-105

centralized body that could reverse the course of Indian education to fit an evolving educational ethos. As new leaders with new visions of Indian education came to power, the federal government's centralized control allowed for a quick implementation of the plans and curricula necessary to make these ideas a reality. Such agility did not necessarily benefit students, considering the cruelty of the boarding schools, but it had the potential to do a great deal of good for Indian people, as evidenced by Collier's attempts at reform. Unfortunately, the federal government's shifting of Indian students into state public schools in the first half of the twentieth century essentially eliminated this one potentially beneficial aspect of the federal system of Indian education. As we shall see in the following chapters, despite the federal government's shift towards self-determination in 1969, the new reality of state-controlled public education for Indian students meant that this policy shift would be severely limited in its practical results.

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW PATH:

#### THE HEARINGS BEFORE THE SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN EDUCATION

In the late 1960s, race and discrimination were issues of national importance. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* brought national attention to issues of race and education, and by the early 1960s, even amidst the seemingly all-consuming nature of Cold War politics, the civil rights of minority groups in America had become one of the most important issues of political debate.<sup>1</sup> While most of this political discussion was focused on African American communities, the educational experiences of other minority groups, including Native Americans, also came under a broader examination than it had in the past. It was in the midst of this climate of change that President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the creation of a Special Subcommittee on Indian Education. The job of this subcommittee was to evaluate the state of Indian education in America and make recommendations as to how it could be reformed to better serve Indian people. Like the Meriam Report, which itself criticized federal Indian educational policy, the findings of this group would not only serve as a harsh censure of the educational resources provided to Indian students, but also call for Indians to be put in control of their own educational future. These hearings took place at a time when

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of the American Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Norton, 1990) and Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).

America was uniquely focused on the civil rights of American minority groups, and they were led by men who were deeply interested in Indian rights. Indeed, the 1967-1969 hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education demonstrated the federal government's willingness to embrace ideas of self-determined education for Indian students. Moreover, these hearings also demonstrated a willingness, for the first time, to look to Indian people for solutions to the problems of Indian education.

The 1967-1969 hearings arose out of earlier civil rights and social legislation enacted during the Johnson administration. In his first State of the Union address, President Johnson declared what he called an "unconditional war on poverty."<sup>2</sup> From this point on, his domestic policy would be shaped by his commitment to wage this war and turn America into the Great Society he felt it could be.<sup>3</sup> Fundamental to this war on poverty was a massive restructuring of the educational system in America. Despite solid opposition from Republicans in Congress, in 1965 Johnson was able to pass the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which allowed the federal government to provide aid to local school systems that served children living in poverty. Funds from the act could be used to provide everything from teacher development resources to culturally relevant educational materials.<sup>4</sup> The potential usefulness of this piece of legislation for schools that served Indian children, including the extant BIA-controlled schools, was readily apparent; however, nothing in the bill explicitly guaranteed that these funds would be made available for Indian students. As such, in 1966 several new amendments

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<sup>2</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1965), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 105.

<sup>4</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 138.



to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act were proposed that would make Indian students eligible to receive funds due to their high rates of poverty and low academic performance. Before these amendments could go into effect, though, members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare called for a series of hearings that would evaluate the current condition of Native American education and provide evidence that demonstrated the level of Indian need for these funds.<sup>5</sup>

Even before the hearings began in December 1967, it was clear to policymakers that something was amiss regarding Native American education. Not since the Meriam Report of 1928 had there been a major survey of Indian education, though a few studies in the early 1960s had examined how the reforms of the 1930s and 1940s had altered the educational preparedness of Indian children.<sup>6</sup> The results of these smaller studies were grim. Senator Paul Fannin of Arizona, one of the key members of the newly commissioned Subcommittee on Indian Education, summarized these issues, writing, “What few statistics there are [regarding Indian education] present a bleak tableau . . . .Of the 140,000 Indian children in school, 50 percent of them drop out before the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In 1966 it was determined that at least 16,000 school age Indian Children [sic] did not attend school at all . . . .The overall educational level of all Indians under federal supervision is five years.”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, Indian students were struggling in school, and it was

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<sup>5</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 236-37.

<sup>6</sup> For studies on post-Merriam Indian education see, Rosalie H. Wax, “The Warrior Dropouts,” *Trans-Action* 4 (1967), 40-46.

<sup>7</sup> United States Senate, Committee on Rules and Administration, *Authorizing a Study of Matters Pertaining to the Education and Related Problems of Indian Children*, S. Rep. 544 (Washington D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1967), 2.

essential to Senator Fannin and the other members of the special subcommittee that they find out why.

The Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education comprised six senators who were either deeply interested in the cause of Indian education or whose home states encompassed a large Native American population. Of these six members, four men seemed to be the most vocal throughout the hearings. Senator Robert F. Kennedy was, in many ways, the driving force behind these hearings. He held the title of chairman of the subcommittee until his assassination in June 1968. A Democratic senator from New York, and brother of the late President John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy left his mark on American history as a dogged supporter of the African American Civil Rights Movement.<sup>8</sup> His civil rights advocacy, however, did not stop with African Americans. In his first few years as senator, Kennedy developed an interest in issues that affected all poor and minority Americans, particularly Native Americans. In his autobiography, Democratic Senator Fred Harris of Oklahoma recalled that Kennedy “spent a lot of time talking to LaDonna [Harris’s wife of Cherokee descent] about the subject of Native American issues.”<sup>9</sup> Kennedy eventually turned these discussions into action by regularly visiting the tribes of upstate New York and speaking out in support of Indian organizations like the Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, who helped fight termination

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 286-317.

<sup>9</sup> Fred R. Harris, *Potomac Fever* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 126.

legislation.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Robert Kennedy was such an outspoken supporter of Indian equality that the Oglala Sioux tribe bestowed upon him the title of honorary Indian.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps just as pivotal in the orchestration and organization of the hearings was Senator Paul J. Fannin. This Kentucky-born senator from Arizona was an unlikely candidate for this rather progressive move towards racial inclusion. Considered “a pillar of Arizona Conservatism,” Fannin had a history of voting against legislation that gave the government more power and encouraged inclusion, and he would continue to do so even after these hearings.<sup>12</sup> Despite his conservative leanings, Senator Fannin would prove to be an ardent supporter of Native Americans gaining more control over their educational future. At several points throughout the hearings, Fannin demonstrated pride in the “dedicated teachers and concerned administrators” who were “trying all sorts of new ideas, applying imagination and creativity to the solution of [Indian] problems.”<sup>13</sup> He also demonstrated true shame towards what he saw as a failure of a nation that had “a vital interest in Indian Education.”<sup>14</sup>

The other two most outspoken senators of the subcommittee were Democrats Ralph Yarborough of Texas and Wayne Morse of Oregon. Both of these men came from states with large Native American populations and, as such, had a vested interest in the

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<sup>10</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, 793-4.

<sup>11</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education*, 90<sup>th</sup> Cong, 1st Sess., 1001, [HTTP://congressional.proquest.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1967-lpw-0057?accountid=14698](http://congressional.proquest.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1967-lpw-0057?accountid=14698).

<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Saxon, “Paul J. Fannin, 94, Who Served in Top Elected Offices in Arizona,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, 991.

<sup>14</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, 990.

outcome of these hearings. Moreover, both were fiery characters who had proved they were willing to support equality, even when it would jeopardize their political standing. Yarborough, for example, supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964, despite criticisms from more conservative Texas voters and policymakers.<sup>15</sup> Wayne Morse had shown a similar support of civil rights and a willingness to challenge prevailing political opinions, as demonstrated by his early opposition to the Vietnam War.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Morse had served as the chairman of the federal government's broader Senate Subcommittee on Education during much of the 1960s, and because of this, during Senator Kennedy's absences as a result of his presidential campaign, he served as the interim chairman of the subcommittee.<sup>17</sup>

Each of these senators, perhaps with the exception of Senator Fannin, had careers that showed they cared deeply about racial equality in America, and even Senator Fannin demonstrated a deep personal interest in the cause of Indian education. This, coupled with the strong civil rights legislation that had been passed earlier in the decade, indicated that the federal government, perhaps now more than ever, was willing to make real strides towards changing the relationship between Indians and whites.

One of the first ways that this commitment manifested itself was in the way the committee structured the hearings. Aside from the first day of testimony, which took place in Washington D.C., these hearings were held on the reservations, or in states and cities with large Native American populations. Admittedly, holding hearings on Indian

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick L. Cox, *Ralph W. Yarborough: The People's Senator* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), xvi-xvii, 122-39.

<sup>16</sup> Mason Drukman, *Wayne Morse: A Political Biography* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Printing, 2004), 25-60.

<sup>17</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1001.

land was not unheard of. The survey that led to the creation of the Meriam Report, for example, took members of the survey team to various Indian reservations, as well as other areas that had heavy Indian populations.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the fact that these methods had been employed before, the senators of this subcommittee hoped that locating these hearings on Indian land would demonstrate their commitment to solving the problems of Indian education. On the first day of the hearings, Senator Paul Fannin stated, “uppermost in our minds is the resolve to search for...answers among the Indians, to ask for their opinions, their advice. If this takes the subcommittee to the remote and rugged plateaus and canyons of the Southwest, the lonely plains of the Midwest, the frozen ice of the Alaskan frontier, then all the better. It is the Indians’ attitudes we want, not confirmation of our own.”<sup>19</sup> This focus on Indian localities and the ability of the committee members to see the institutions that were being discussed, demonstrated the subcommittee’s desire to see the reality of the challenges that faced Indian people. Moreover, by locating the hearings close to the homes of the Indian families, the federal government ensured that the Indian voices would be heard.<sup>20</sup> By venturing into Indian lands, the senators of the subcommittee were trying to demonstrate that they viewed Indians as members of equal standing in American society, and that their places and their time was just as important as any those of other Americans.

Senator Fannin’s statement also indicates how the choice of witnesses also demonstrated the desire of the subcommittee to address the failings of the prevailing

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 66-79.

<sup>19</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 4-10.

system of Indian education. Whereas earlier policy decisions regarding Indian education were made without the input Native communities –the boarding schools, for example, were implemented under the pretense that “Indians would have to change or be overwhelmed” –these hearings were undertaken with the idea that Native American input was essential for improving the condition of education in their communities.<sup>21</sup> Senator Kennedy corroborated the statements of Senator Fannin, stating, “we have chosen a course of learning as obvious as it has been ignored: we are going to listen to the Indian people speak for themselves about the problems they confront and about the changes that must be made in seeking effective education for their children.”<sup>22</sup> In a way that they never had before, the federal government in 1967 looked almost solely to Native American communities to establish effective policy regarding the education of their children.<sup>23</sup>

This sensitivity to Indian desires, however, does not mean that the concept of self-determination was a preordained outcome of these proceedings. At the outset, both Senators Kennedy and Fannin seemed to be under the impression that these hearings would provide policymakers with a path to improve the current system, not completely overhaul it. At several points early on in the hearings, both Kennedy and Fannin suggested that the failings in the system were not structural, but rather failures of implementation. For example, when Ben Black Elk, a member of the Lakotas’ Pine Ridge

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<sup>21</sup> Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> On occasion, educational researchers like John Buckanaga were called to provide hard statistics to corroborate assertions made by Native witnesses. See Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1248. In addition, on two occasions Bureau of Indian Affairs officials were brought to the stand and berated for not carrying out their duties as promised. See Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 3.

Reservation, testified that the very structure of the American educational model was insufficient to provide Indian children with a truly effective and culturally relevant education, Senator Kennedy reacted with overt incredulity. “What is it that an Indian child is learning at the age of 5 which makes the educational system that we have established unsatisfactory to him?” Black Elk retorted by pointing out that while the programs in place were sufficient to teach children the skills deemed necessary in white society, they did nothing to connect Indian children with their Indian traditions. For Ben Black Elk, this connection to culture was essential, for without it schooling for Native American children was little more than a practice in assimilation. Indeed, Ben Black Elk went so far as to question whether the federal government defined educational success for Indian students as exceptional educational performance or as the ability of Indian children to act like whites.<sup>24</sup> Kennedy and the other members of the subcommittee had assumed that the federal government’s failure to provide effective education to Indian students was symptomatic of a lack of effective teachers or another similar cause. As more and more Native witnesses spoke on the subject, however, it soon became apparent that the failings of the Native American education system were structural, rooted in a lack of community control.

This idea of self-determined education for Indian students was a politically difficult one for the senators who made up this committee. Even during the heyday of Collier’s attempts to reform Indian educational policy, the primary arbiters of Indian education had continued to be whites, and any major changes in this formula could have been deemed as radical. Moreover, the rationales of those who called for changes in

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<sup>24</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, pp. 33-35.

Indian educational policy were widely varied. Ben Black Elk, for example, saw education as a means of challenging the hegemony of the federal government. “[To] start out with we eliminated Custer. We wiped him out. But in turn . . . the white man has almost eliminated us by all of their methods. In order to strike back, we have to compete with the white man in education.”<sup>25</sup> For Ben Black Elk, education was a tool for subversion, a way for Indian children to stand against what he saw as the destructive tide of white culture and control. For others, like Robert Roessel, Jr., head of the Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo Reservation and a frequent witness in the hearings, self-determined education legitimated the abilities of Indian communities and demonstrated to the rest of American society that Indians were not just racial stereotypes incapable of providing for their children.<sup>26</sup> Despite these differing motivations, the representatives of the subcommittee reoriented themselves and reaffirmed their commitment to creating a new Indian educational policy that focused on letting the desires of Indian communities shape their children’s education.

But what aspects of the educational experience would self-determination actually change? What were these witnesses trying to change by testifying in these hearings? The answers to these questions were by no means unanimous. As became evident during John Collier’s reform era, what worked for one group of Native Americans often did not work for another. Even within the same general group of Indian people, factional tensions based on issues wholly outside the realm of education could impede the creation of a cohesive educational policy. The Cherokee population in Oklahoma is a perfect example

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<sup>25</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>26</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, 10-14.



of just such a situation. The Cherokees were a particularly large tribe, whose rights had been dissolved in the early twentieth century and then marginally reconstituted during the Collier years.<sup>27</sup> This shifting status, coupled with a great deal of intermarriage with local whites, led the Cherokees to be an incredibly diverse group of Native Americans dispersed throughout the state of Oklahoma. During the subcommittee's stop in Oklahoma in the spring of 1968, testimony revealed that a great deal of factional tension existed between those Indians who followed the established Cherokee Nation tribal government, which had been partially recreated under the Indian Reorganization Act, and those who did not. The cause of this tension is not entirely clear, but what is clear is that when local Native Americans who were not affiliated with the tribal government distributed questionnaires in an effort to gather data for their presentation to the subcommittee, some members of the tribal government publicly charged that these studies were communist and subversive in nature. Because of these allegations, few Cherokees were willing to participate in the survey, and any attempt to create a unified Cherokee concept of Indian education was stymied by tribal infighting.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of these individual disagreements, certain patterns did arise throughout the course of testimony, most of which pointed towards a desire for self-determination. The largest area of commonality among the witnesses was the idea that the schools should be controlled by the communities that they served and that there should be structures in place that helped Indian parents break the stranglehold whites held on Indian

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<sup>27</sup> Howard L. Meredith, *Modern American Indian Tribal Government* (Tsaile, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1993), 20.

<sup>28</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, pp. 585-600.

education. Regardless of the educational model with which they were most familiar, almost every Indian parent called for an increase in the community control of education.

For those whose children attended boarding schools, community control meant the right to hire and fire teachers, as well as the elimination of the assimilationist practices that persisted in the remaining schools like the Toyey Boarding School in Arizona and Chemawa in Oregon. Due primarily to the size of some reservations, the isolation of some Indian communities, and the lack of infrastructure connecting them to larger towns, boarding schools remained the primary form of education for approximately 48,000 Indian students.<sup>29</sup> The Navajo Reservation, for example, enclosed some 25,000 square miles of land in the three states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.<sup>30</sup> With an area this immense and a lack of public schools near many of the tribal communities, boarding schools remained the primary form of education for most Navajo children. The communities that were served by these boarding schools had very little say regarding how the schools were run. Consider the Toyey Boarding School, which continued to hire teachers who were BIA employees and came from white communities off of the reservation.<sup>31</sup> These teachers were federal employees, and as such, local communities were unable to hold teachers and administrators accountable for their actions in the classroom. While many of these teachers were bright-eyed idealists who were trying to help those people in need, others were paternalistic and racist. Mildred Ballenger, a mother of two children who attended BIA boarding schools, recounted how several

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<sup>29</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 105.

<sup>30</sup> Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as in the 1870s, one of the primary concerns of the boarding schools in the 1960s was to keep students from “going back to the blanket.” See Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, pp. 61-78.

teachers treated the students poorly and referred to stereotypes of “the dumb Indian” and “the drunk Indian.”<sup>32</sup> Despite this flagrantly racist behavior, the community could do nothing to chastise these teachers or hold them accountable to the people they served.

Moreover, some boarding schools continued long established practices that Native communities detested but could do nothing to stop. At Toyei, for example, officials took children away from their families at the age of six. In order to justify their federal funding, BIA boarding schools had to demonstrate that their services were still needed on the reservations. To do this, officials needed students and –just as they had in the nineteenth century –they often went into the homes of Native Americans and seized children despite their parents’ protestations. Annie Wauneka, the first female member of the Navajo tribal council and a survivor of the boarding school system herself, recounted her observation: “And, so Toyei school isn’t filled yet, so they are going to come around again and take some more of these little bittie ones to fill that school to keep Congress happy.” In response, Senator Kennedy, having recently visited Toyei, corroborated this practice and stated that such actions were “a disgrace.”<sup>33</sup> Practices such as these demonstrated a complete disregard on the part of the boarding schools for the wishes of the parents whom they served. Only through community control of the boarding schools could parents hope to correct these injustices.

Community control was also the primary goal of those Indian parents whose children attended public and parochial schools. By 1966, some 91,000 Indian children

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<sup>32</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 546.

<sup>33</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings Day 3*, 1001. For information on Annie Wauneka, see Caroline J. Niethammer, *I’ll Go and Do More: Annie Dodge Wauneka, Navajo Leader and Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), iii-xxvi.

had begun attending public and parochial schools throughout the United States.<sup>34</sup> Despite this fact, school boards and school administrations remained bastions of white control. In his history of Indians in the Phoenix public school system, Stephen Kent Amerman noted that “for the first half of the twentieth century especially, the vast majority of superintendents, school board members, and teachers were Anglo, and they administered the schools with Anglos students as their primary concern.” Throughout the hearings, Indian witnesses corroborated this interpretation and indicated that as of 1968, Indian representation on elected governing bodies like school boards was incredibly low. Low school board participation was often the result of candidate requirements instituted to make sure only “qualified” citizens could serve as a member of school government. Usually based on past education, these requirements often prevented Indian parents, who rarely had a high school education, from serving on local school boards and thus stifled their ability to work for the improvement of their children’s education.<sup>35</sup> Rather than let the democratic process take effect and risk the incorporation of Indians into school governing bodies, white school board members used candidate restrictions to bar most Indian parents from running altogether.

To address these concerns, Indian parents suggested a host of measures that would help break down these racial barriers and grant a greater measure of control to Native communities. In his statement to the subcommittee, Logan Koopee, a sixty-five year old member of the Hopi tribal council, captured the feelings of the many when he suggested that the government provide a program for Native parents that would train

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<sup>34</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 105.

<sup>35</sup> Amerman, *Urban Indians*, 40.

them to effectively carry out all of the duties that would be required of them as members of a school board. According to Koopee, even when Indians were able to make it onto school boards, white superintendents most of whom catered to the interests of more powerful Anglo parents, undermined Indian attempts at change. As such, Koopee also recommended that more authority be given to local tribal groups in the educative process so that “the educational program may be more receptive to the special needs and abilit[ies]” of Indian children. This special authority, much like in the boarding schools, would ideally give Indian communities a voice in the hiring and firing of teachers and administrators that served large numbers of Native students. This type of control would have allowed Indian parents to curb discrimination and would have granted them the power, at the very least, to call for the elimination teachers and administrators who demonstrated an “unwillingness or inability to function as professionals,” and to have those demands taken seriously.<sup>36</sup>

While community control was the largest area of consensus among Native Americans who testified at the hearings, there were a great many other issues that they felt needed to be addressed if real educational success for Indian students was to be achieved. The majority of both boarding school and public school parents also sought the inclusion of Native culture and language into their children’s classrooms. After almost a century of government policies aimed at destroying and vilifying the Native way of life, Native Americans students had started not only to lose large chunks of their culture, but also to feel ashamed of the cultural markers that demonstrated their Indianness. The high levels of academic failure within the Native American community, according to Indian

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<sup>36</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1004.

and white educational researchers, were largely the result of the low self-esteem that pervaded Native American communities. In a case study of Ponca tribal members in White Eagle, Oklahoma, Francis McKinley suggested that many students could find nothing about their Indian heritage in which they could take pride. One student even told researchers that “the only positive aspect of being Indian is that Indians are almost white.”<sup>37</sup> This kind of emotional dejection and lack of self-esteem was a wound on the collective psyche of Native American societies, and only through programs designed to encourage pride in Native culture could this wound begin to heal. In a written statement to the subcommittee, Robert Roessel, Jr., suggested that books and programs “must be developed which present Indian biographies, history, current problems and programs as well as presenting the kinds of stimuli and challenges which lie ahead of Indian youth.” He continued to say that Indian education must “bring the parents, their life, and language, into a partnership with the school.”<sup>38</sup> Like so many other concerned parents and administrators, Roessel believed that the performance of Native students, and the effectiveness of the schools, rested in creating a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment.

Coupled with their desires for the inclusion of Native cultures and languages, nearly every parent considered the learning of English a top priority for Native children. Many witnesses recommended the development of preschool and kindergarten programs so that students could begin learning the basic concepts of the English language at a young age and acclimate themselves to the school environment. Stanley Smartlowit,

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<sup>37</sup> Francis McKinley, Stephan Bane, and Glen Nimnicht, *Who Should Control Indian Education?* (Berkeley: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1970), 25.

<sup>38</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, pp. 18-19.

chairman of the Education Committee on the Yakima Reservation in south-central Washington, asserted that “a great deal of the problem of poor accomplishment with our children . . . is due to the lack of preschools and kindergartens.” He went on to endorse Head Start, an organization that provided educational services to poorer, and often more culturally diverse, communities throughout the United States.<sup>39</sup> Head Start, many Indian parents felt, would be an effective way to both ease Indian children into the English language and simultaneously maintain a higher level of community control than they would receive in public kindergartens.<sup>40</sup>

Along with these direct changes to the educational system, parents of both boarding and public school students desired a change in the role that schools played in Indian communities. Dr. Alfonso Ortiz, a member of the San Juan Pueblo tribe of New Mexico and an anthropologist from Princeton, described the situation best, stating that “the school on the reservation, with its fence, is often regarded as analogous to an embassy or legation of a foreign power; as something set apart from the vital concerns of the community, instead of being at the center of it.”<sup>41</sup> Indian parents felt that one of the keys to making schools work more effectively for Native students was to make schools more than just educational facilities, but also community centers, for both Indians and whites. Moreover, many parents who testified advocated the incorporation of Indian

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<sup>39</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1931.

<sup>40</sup> The emphasis on Head Start participation in early-childhood education programs was significant. Head Start would not only help alleviate the financial burden of kindergarten and preschool programs, it would also incorporate parents into the schooling process, making sure that these programs would be sensitive to the desires of the Indian community. See Janette Valentine and Evan Sark, “The Social Context of Parent Involvement in Head Start,” in *Project Head Start: A Legacy of the War on Poverty*, ed. Edward Zigler and Jeanette Valentine (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 292.

<sup>41</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 62.

teachers into the school systems, as well as the incorporation of white teachers into the civic events of Native society. By incorporating whites into some of activities and celebrations of tribal communities, many Native American parents thought that they might be able to curb some of the racist tendencies that took place in the schools. While whites wouldn't be privy to some of their more guarded cultural practices and rituals, participation in some tribal events might demonstrate to them the value of Natives' cultural traditions. Similarly, making schools into community centers would bring Indian children and parents into closer contact with white communities, which would help break down the boundaries that fed white animosities. By blurring the divisions between what was white and what was Indian, Native parents hoped to make their children feel less like outsiders within the predominantly white local schools.

The subcommittee was also interested in hearing what Indians felt an effective model of Indian education would look like. Because the unique needs of some tribes made certain schooling models more feasible than others, there was a great deal of disagreement between individual witnesses as to which model would be the most beneficial for Indian students. In the end, however, two competing visions of Indian education garnered the most discussion. One model embraced community control to the extreme, while the other advocated a more responsible and racially sensitive version of the public school system already in place.

The outspoken head of the Rough Rock Demonstration School, Robert Roessel, Jr., presented the most radical vision for structuring Indian education. Rough Rock was established on the Navajo reservation and was designed to illustrate how local Indian



communities could effectively run their own schools.<sup>42</sup> This school, whose board was composed entirely of Indian parents with little or no education, attempted to integrate the culture and history of the local Indian tribes into the curriculum. Rough Rock also combined the day and boarding school models, with a twist. Dormitories for those students who lived so far from school that they could not commute offered space for the families of these students to stay with their children, thus alleviating the burdens of homesickness that plagued the off-reservation boarding schools of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.<sup>43</sup> Finally, by reaching out to local members of the Navajo communities, this school also provided a bilingual education program that taught students English, but also helped students learn and preserve the Navajo language.<sup>44</sup> All of these things, Roessel felt, made Rough Rock the ideal model for Indian education. It was community run, oriented toward cultural preservation, and designed for the unique needs of Navajo students. And yet, while this type of education worked well on the Navajo Reservation, schools like Rough Rock were hardly a viable option for the majority of Indian children, who attended public schools and whose educational challenges were not the same as those on isolated reservations. As a result, Roessel's model had many detractors even within the Indian community.

One such voice of opposition was the Indian rights activist Sam Deloria. The acting director of the Oglala Sioux planning office, Deloria created a name for himself as both a proponent of Indian rights and a fiery challenger of the status quo in Indian

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<sup>42</sup> Robert A. Roessel, Jr., "An Overview of the Rough Rock Demonstration School," *The Journal of American Indian Education* 7, no.3 (May 1968): 2-13.

<sup>43</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1025-1034.

<sup>44</sup> Roessel, "An Overview," 5-7.

politics. Having earned a degree from Yale University in 1964, Deloria spent much of his life questioning the motivations of Indian leaders and working for what he felt was true equality for Native peoples.<sup>45</sup> Deloria was a harsh critic of the demonstration school concept and leveled a scathing critique of Roesell's school. "We now have school boards made up of first grade dropouts, illiterates teaching the three R's to other illiterates," Deloria argued, "[and] there always seems to be a PhD or a doctor of education always [sic] hovering in the background and taking the bows."<sup>46</sup> For Deloria, the very idea of an Indian demonstration school was a flawed one. In his view, Indians should not have to demonstrate or prove their ability to take part in their children's education; it should be their fundamental right to do so. Yet, Indian people also should not shut out the benefits white educational regimes or the experience of white educators. To Deloria, demonstration schools like Rough Rock were meant to bolster the careers of "PhD[s] or doctor[s] of education" like Roessel, not to present a new and realistic model for the future of Indian education.<sup>47</sup>

Deloria's vision of Indian education was far more conventional than Roessel's was; however, it still retained the same forceful call for Indians to have more power in the shaping of the educational programs that affected their children. Deloria advocated an almost complete shift to a system of local public schooling for Indian students.<sup>48</sup> Within local schools, he argued, the federal government should set up rules that would allow

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<sup>45</sup> Dennis Domrzalski, "Sam Deloria Delights in Straight Talk," *New Mexico Business Weekly*, March 8, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1231-1232.

<sup>47</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1232-1234.

<sup>48</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1232.

Native Americans the chance to represent their communities on local school boards. Deloria argued that the school systems should stop asking Native people to prove themselves worthy of their rights to representation and simply let them represent their communities' interests. To Deloria, the school boards "must see Indian communities as intrinsically valuable, worthy of preservation, worthy of attention, and not as pawns in a thousand games of self-perpetuation. Indian communities should have the opportunity to run the best or the worst, the most bizarre, most imaginative, or most orthodox schools systems in the country."<sup>49</sup> And while this statement –if implemented in a literal fashion in places where Native populations dominated –would almost certainly have been a detriment any non-Indian students, Deloria's basic premise was clear: Indian educational opportunity hinged upon the Indians having an equal say in the formation of educational policies and the implementation of educational programs.

The hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education culminated in a 1969 report that documented not only what the senators of the subcommittee had learned about the state of Indian education in America, but also their recommendations for the future. After spending a great deal of time on the reservations and hearing from dozens of Native people regarding how to best improve education for Native students, the members of the subcommittee were quick to point out that the academic failure of Native students was the result of far more than just an ineffective system of schooling. Indian students struggled with the shame they felt for being Indian, as well as the cultural legacy of the boarding schools that, in some places, were still in operation. In the public schools, teachers treated Indian culture with indifference and disdain, and white administrators

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<sup>49</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Hearings*, p. 1231-1232.

barred Native parents from the official positions that would allow them to influence in the education of their children. The academic failure of Indian students was a structural problem rooted in the larger political and social interactions between white and Indian communities and, realizing this, the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education took steps to correct these issues. In 1969, the subcommittee recommended the implementation of programs directed at “encourage[ing] Indian parents and tribal leaders to assume increasing responsibility for the education of Indian children in accordance with the concept of community action.”<sup>50</sup> The same year, Congress ratified amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that gave Indian students access to ESEA funds. Finally, in 1970 President Richard Nixon, in a special message on Indian affairs, called for “a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions.”<sup>51</sup>

The 1967-1969 hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education demonstrated the federal government’s willingness to open the sphere of Indian education to concepts of self-determination and to look to Indian people to solve the problems of Indian education. In the 1970s, the federal government would attempt to implement an educational plan similar to the one endorsed by Deloria, with measures aimed at encouraging the continued growth of Indian populations in public schools. Moreover, funding for programs like the Johnson-O’Malley Act would be amended so that schools – as a condition for funding – had to create councils of Indian parents who

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<sup>50</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, 583.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Nixon, “Special Message on Indian Affairs, July 8, 1970,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon, 1970* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1970), 564.

would help create and implement educational programs. These changes, however, were tinged with a tragic irony. As the next chapter will show, the incorporation of Indian students into the decentralized system of public education led to an uneven application of this new educational directive.

## CHAPTER IV

### LOCAL EDUCATION ON THE GROUND:

#### PUBLIC EDUCATION IN MONTANA AND WASHINGTON, 1969-1980

The tragic irony of the 1967-1969 hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education was that by the time the federal government began to shift towards more self-determined policies in Native American education, it had already relinquished much of its control over Indian education to the states. While their intentions may have been sincere, the senators of the subcommittee were operating within an outdated paradigm. By 1970, 65 percent of Native American students attended public schools, and this meant that their educational experiences were no longer under direct federal control. Indian education was no longer nimble, able to change as quickly as the minds of policymakers. Rather, it was now administered by state and local governments whose accountability was diluted by bureaucratic distance from the people who made policy. Policymakers shifted Indian students into public schools because state and local governments were supposed to provide for the unique needs of local Indian populations in a way that broad, sweeping federal policy could not. Such were the rationalizations of the time. In reality, this policy led to wildly varying approaches to the education of Indian students, depending on how different school districts interpreted their mandate, and with these variable approaches came wildly variable results.

The best way to see how different school districts interpreted the goal of providing effective education for Indian students is to follow the money. Where did federal dollars—

in this case Johnson-O'Malley funds— go and how were they spent? In the 1970s, at both the state and local levels, school boards and school administrators created educational programs for Indian children using primarily federal grant money. The Johnson-O'Malley Act had by this time undergone several transformations, and while the act's initial goal had been to offset the financial burden of Indian students on public school systems, by the end of the 1960s the focus of the act had changed so that it now helped schools provide educational opportunities for Indian students that were equal to those of their white counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

This concept of Indian and white educational equality, however, was difficult to define. During the 1967-1969 hearings, Walter Carpenter, the superintendent of New Mexico's Ganado Public School District, located on the southern edge of the Navajo Reservation, testified:

I think we are all aware of what the public school philosophy is; that is, the best possible education for all youngsters, and this more nearly, I think, meets the needs of all the people. We put in the public schools the Navajo child, a Spanish child, the colored child, all into the same classroom, and it depends upon the law...whether or not Navajo or Hopi...are allowed to be spoken. Generally speaking [we] do not use it in the classroom, but neither do [we] frown on it if they use it on the playground and to and from schools by bus.<sup>2</sup>

Because classrooms in the 1960s and 1970s were becoming increasingly multi-ethnic, Carpenter suggested that the only fair way to provide equal education for all students was

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1969-1970* (Olympia: Office of Public Instruction, 1970), 7-9.

<sup>2</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Hearings*, p. 1040-1041.

to provide the same education to all students. Whether they spoke English, Navajo, or Czech, in the classroom the official language was English. While this type of educational model was equal in its application, it clearly favored white, English-speaking students. Students from other backgrounds, such as Native Americans students, struggled to grasp not only the host of new concepts that they encountered every day, but also the very words being used to convey these concepts. Moreover, students who were of a different cultural background from that of the majority would find that, because they were different, their cultural modes of teaching and learning— their very modes of thinking— were not worthy of consideration.<sup>3</sup> In a multi-ethnic society, truly equal education requires that special accommodations be made for those whose educational and cultural needs may not be the same as the needs of the majority.

Because the source of the funding programs that provided for these special accommodations was federal, however, it would be reasonable to assume that the federal government put oversight measures in place to ensure that any use of these funds was in keeping with federal goals for Indian education, and at times this was the case. On paper, Johnson-O'Malley funds came with a host of regulations to ensure that educators created culturally sensitive educational programs and that Indian parents participated in this process. In 1971, one school district, which was left unnamed in the report, misused approximately \$16,050 of Johnson-O'Malley funding on programs that did not benefit Indian students. Because of this an oversight committee placed the district under formal

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of multicultural education in the classroom, see Donna M. Golnick and Phillip C. Chinn, *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society* (Columbus, Ohio: C.E. Merrill, 1986).



investigation during the following year.<sup>4</sup> In spite of occasional cases like this one, however, several Native American witnesses in the senate hearings expressed deep concerns regarding this very issue. Iola Hayden, a Cherokee woman from Oklahoma, asserted that one of the gravest problems facing Indian students was the fact that “at almost every turn, the federal government has yielded control of various programs dealing with Indians to the state and local level with few or no strings attached.”<sup>5</sup> In her experience, local whites were able to run Indian education any way they wished, and federal government did little to stop it. As the rest of this chapter will show, in many areas this was exactly the case.

The federal government was in many ways limited by the practical realities of Indian education in its ability to regulate school districts. While withholding money from those schools who chose not to abide by federal guidelines was certainly an option, Indian children were still subject to compulsory education laws.<sup>6</sup> Depriving schools of this money simply meant that Indian students would lose what few benefits they may have received had the government taken no action. Moreover, ceasing to provide funds for Indian education was reminiscent of the termination policies that had been enacted just two decades earlier, the shadow of which, and its unpopular reception by many Native people, still loomed large in the minds of federal policymakers and Native Americans alike. Carl Mindell, a psychiatrist for the U.S. Public Health Service, pointed out that “the

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<sup>4</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report of Indian Education: Johnson-O'Malley Activities Fiscal Year 1971* (Helena: Office of Public Instruction, 1971), 26. The 1972 and 1973 *Annual Reports* indicated that no further actions were taken; however, they also did not explain what the unnamed school district did to satisfy their investigation.

<sup>5</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Hearings*, p. 586-587.

<sup>6</sup> Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 114.

specter of possible termination of Government services is always in the background” for Indian communities and that the removal or withholding of any government funding program, including educational funding programs, would be tantamount to abandoning Indian students entirely to the whims of local communities.<sup>7</sup> In essence, the realities of Indian public education limited the federal government in its capacity to punish those school districts that chose not to follow the educational model laid out by the 1967-1969 hearings. As such, there was tremendous variability in how different states and school districts utilized government funds to provide educational programs to Indian students.

Take the state of Montana, for example. In the 1970s, Montana was home to seven Native American reservations and had between twenty-eight to thirty-two school districts that served Native American students from both on and off of the reservations.<sup>8</sup> The majority of the Native students in Montana were educated in the public school system. While most of the districts discussed here served white and Indian students together, some school districts, like the Dixon district near Montana’s western border with Idaho, served populations that were almost entirely Native American. All of these school districts utilized the money made available through the Johnson-O’Malley Act as a primary source of funding for their Indian students; however, there was a great deal of variation from district to district as to how readily schools adopted programs that were in keeping with the desires of the local Indian communities.

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<sup>7</sup> Subcommittee on Indian Education, Hearings, p. 1244.

<sup>8</sup> Redistricting throughout the decades led to a steady increase in the number of districts. Also, because the facts and statistics presented here are taken from Johnson-O’Malley annual reports, “Native American” in this case means any student with one-quarter Indian blood or more. See Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report of Indian Education: Johnson-O’Malley Activities Fiscal Year 1969* (Helena: Office of Public Instruction, 1969), 3.

One example of this variation was in the way that different school administrators hired and utilized home-school liaisons. To receive Johnson-O'Malley funds, schools had to utilize a portion of their funding to provide Native communities with at least one home-school liaison. That person's job was to reach out to the Indian communities and encourage Native parents to involve themselves in the educational process.<sup>9</sup> These liaisons, also known as home-school coordinators or home-school counselors, were also supposed to serve as a lifeline for students who were thinking about dropping out. The counselors were to go into the homes of high-risk students and work with parents to design programs that would enhance their child's learning.<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that these coordinators were expected to fulfill these federally mandated roles, many administrators employed home-school coordinators whose actual performance fell far short of their job descriptions. Gladys Pease, a counselor to high school students in the Lodge Grass school district in the southeastern portion of the state, helped only those students who she felt wanted to help themselves. Rather than going to the reservations to proactively address the students' challenges and needs, Pease helped only those who came to her.<sup>11</sup> In other school districts, these coordinators served as little more than truant officers, whose job it was to "investigate and report findings of student's absences."<sup>12</sup> In both of these cases, home-school liaisons provided only a semblance of their intended service and missed the

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<sup>9</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1969, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1973, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, her focus seemed less on the academic performance of her students and more on the negative effects of the new pop machine that had been installed at the school. She wrote in the annual report to the superintendent, "It is messy, pop is constantly being spilled, cans left lying around and on the whole it is very unsanitary." See Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1973, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report of Indian Education: Johnson-O'Malley Activities Fiscal Year 1976* (Helena: Office of Public Instruction, 1976), p. 23.

opportunity to bring Indian communities into a closer and more fruitful partnership with school policymakers.

Interestingly, this kind of mediocrity was not a statewide phenomenon. In the Browning school district near the Canada border, for example, the home-school coordinator Rita Bremner went to 167 homes in 1973 to inform parents of their children's poor performance in school and to counsel them on how to help them improve.<sup>13</sup> In the St. Ignatius school district just north of Missoula, the home-school coordinator worked not only with parents and students, but also with the school staff, "to provide a better working relationship between Indian people, students, and the school."<sup>14</sup> Examples like these demonstrate just how effective these coordinators could be at encouraging Indian participation in the schools and at building bonds of trust between white and Indian communities. More importantly, these differences exemplified just how much variability could occur between school districts within the paradigm of Indian education under the Johnson-O'Malley Act.

The way that schools implemented what could be considered "cultural enrichment classes", those classes meant to increase Indian students' pride in their culture, also demonstrated the varying approaches to Indian education that could occur under this new paradigm. This was one of the most important issues for Native communities during the 1967-1969 senate hearings. Nonetheless several schools in Montana did little to address this desire. For some schools, this failure was, admittedly, simply a matter of logistics and needs. The Box Elder district in the vast plains of northeastern Montana, for

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<sup>13</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1973, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1973, 32.

example, was too small and received too little funding from the federal government to make such classes possible. In schools like this, the majority of their Johnson-O'Malley funds were spent providing lunches and transportation to Indian students who travelled long distances to school and whose access to wholesome meals was limited by isolation and a lack of economic opportunity.<sup>15</sup> Other districts, however, like Browning and Heart Butte, received funds that allowed for these cultural enrichment classes. Their differing approaches do much to illustrate how local perceptions of Indian people could create fundamentally different examples of Indian cultural enrichment.

In 1971, administrators in the Browning school district created summer educational programs that included not only remedial English study, but also elements geared towards a “review of Indian heritage material.”<sup>16</sup> This program took American Indian students to tribal heritage sites and encouraged the incorporation of Native history and culture into their study of local history. Heart Butte, a small school district just east of Glacier National Park, on the other hand, chose a different path. Administrators here, utilized \$2,500 of their allotted Johnson-O'Malley funds to provide Indian children not with programs meant to build pride in their heritage, but rather with summer field trips to “Seattle, Disneyland, and the Northwest part of the state.”<sup>17</sup> In the case of Browning, administrators tried to implement the kind of programs that Native communities wanted for their children. Their classes were culturally relevant and demonstrated an effort to increase the students' pride in their Indian heritage. In Heart Butte, the goal seems to be

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<sup>15</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1971, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1971, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1973, 14.

less clear. While there may have been sites of cultural importance for Indian students in the northwest portion of the state, it is not readily apparent what cultural relevance Disneyland had for Montana Indians. Indeed, the primary focus of Heart Butte's cultural enrichment programs seems to be exposing these students to the amusement parks and urban areas that were hallmarks of Euro-American culture.

A similar difference of intention is evident in the St. Ignatius and Ronan school districts' approaches to cultural enrichment. In 1974, the St. Ignatius School District offered a high school level Indian-studies class that "provide[d] insight and appreciation of cultural diversity between Indians and non-Indians and provide[d] a mechanism for Indian students to preserve dignity, pride and identity."<sup>18</sup> While classes like this one were aimed squarely at creating a sense of cultural pride within the Indian student body, Ronan's approach seemingly did the opposite. In Ronan, a school district south of Whitefish on the Flathead Reservation, administrators created an outfitter and packer guide class that sought to connect the perceived stereotypical outdoor lifestyles of the Flathead Indians with the vocational education programs that were already part of the school district's curriculum.<sup>19</sup> The class was deemed a successful venture in the end because "many of [the students] have been hired for summer jobs as assistant packers."<sup>20</sup> And while one goal of education is to prepare students for the workforce, Ronan policymakers chose to forgo cultural enrichment in favor of a vocational program. Instead of bringing actual concepts of Indian culture into the classroom environment, the

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<sup>18</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report on Indian Education: Johnson-O'Malley Activities Fiscal Year 1974* (Helena: Office of Public Instruction, 1974), 20.

<sup>19</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1973, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1974, p. 43.

creators of this program simply worked under the assumption that all Native people were, by their nature, gifted at tracking and guiding. Moreover, even if these assumptions were somehow correct and a major aspect of Flathead culture was tracking and guiding, the importance of these skills was not measured by the level of pride students took in their culture, but rather by the profit gained through the commoditization of that culture. Projects like this, instead of reinforcing pride in Indian heritage, communicated to students that Indian culture was worthwhile only as long as it fit into the American capitalist system.

All of these examples illustrate the incredible variability that could occur between school districts under the 1970s paradigm of Indian education; however, they do not tell the whole story of Indian public education in Montana. Indeed, there were a few areas where almost all Montana policymakers seemed to agree. Unfortunately for Indian students, the more uniform measures taken by the state Montana were aimed squarely at keeping Indian parents out of the decision making process.

Federal administrators, for example, required recipients of Johnson-O'Malley funding to create Indian parent advisory committees to review program choices and make suggestions regarding how schools should spend their Johnson-O'Malley funds.<sup>21</sup> The federal government hoped that these parental advisory committees— even more than the home-school liaisons— would ensure that Native opinions and desires shaped the education of their children. All across Montana, administrators uniformly limited the power of these groups and made sure that whites remained in control of Montana's public education system. As early as 1971, white administrators— ignoring the fact that Indians'

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<sup>21</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1971, p. 3-5.

inexperience with public education was a result of discriminatory efforts to keep Indians out of the decision making process—voiced concerns about allowing inexperienced and uneducated Indian parents to help create programs for local schools.<sup>22</sup> In an effort to stymie the incorporation of Indian parent advisory committees into the decision making process, several districts created a series of guidelines that parent advisory committees would have to meet in order to wield the powers granted to them by the federal government. In 1975, Georgia Rice, the superintendent of the Montana public schools, reported that the first Indian parent advisory committees had begun writing the constitutions and bylaws that her district required for their participation in the policy making process. On the surface, requiring parent advisory committees to create bylaws and constitutions does not seem to be a particularly onerous request; however, Rice makes it clear that these steps determined “the amount of input they were allowed in local school programs.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that nowhere in the Johnson-O’Malley Act did it say that bylaws and constitutions were necessary for parent advisory committees to gain a voice in public school systems, administrators like Rice used bureaucratic processes to hinder and prevent Indian parents from taking part in the education program creation process. This hindrance of parent committees demonstrated the ways that white administrators skirted the concept of community control and maintained authority at a local level despite calls from the senate to bring Indians into educational governing bodies.

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<sup>22</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1971, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1975, p. 1.



The creation of kindergarten programs was another area where the whole of Montana united against the inclusion of Indians in the educational process. At the beginning of 1970, only five school districts had implemented kindergarten programs, and by the following year, “funds were used in part or in whole to fund kindergarten programs located on all the Indian Reservations in Montana.”<sup>24</sup> On the surface, this explosion in the number of kindergarten programs seemed to be in line with the desires of many Native Americans. Indeed, throughout the 1967-1969 hearings on Indian education, numerous Indian witnesses called for the establishment of kindergartens that encouraged Indian parental participation in the policy-making process. Indian parents, however, wanted these kindergartens to be extensions of the recently established Head Start program, which advocated the, “‘maximum feasible participation’ of the poor in its programmatic efforts.”<sup>25</sup> While Montana administrators created kindergarten programs for Indian communities, they failed to tie them to the Head Start programs that would have given Indian parents greater control over their children’s education. Not one of these kindergartens was affiliated with a Head Start program or any other group that could provide a structure for community control.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the motivation for programs like these was probably far more selfish than it might appear. Kindergarten programs allowed administrators to utilize Johnson-O’Malley funds for more than just Native American students. According to the Johnson-O’Malley Act’s restrictions, classes created using

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<sup>24</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report of Indian Education: Johnson-O’Malley Activities Fiscal Year 1971* (Helena: Office of Public Instruction, 1971), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Janette Valentine and Evan Sark, “The Social Context of Parent Involvement in Head Start,” in *Project Head Start: A Legacy of the War on Poverty*, ed. Edward Zigler and Jeanette Valentine (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 292.

<sup>26</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1971, p. 13.

these funds were open to white students, as long as the programs were geared primarily towards serving the needs of Native Americans.<sup>27</sup> These administrators could provide for white students using money that was meant to address Indian needs. By not connecting these programs to groups like Head Start, white administrators were able to limit the Indian control of these programs and ensure that they would serve the needs of the dominant majority, not the Indian minority. While this decision perhaps makes fiscal sense, these kindergartens were supposed to help begin bridging the achievement gap between Indian and white students. In short, that money was meant for Indian children.

The variability inherent in the decentralized system of state education also created enormous differences in the way that different states handled the education of the Native children within their borders. The state of Washington, for example, had a far more unified vision of Indian education than did Montana. Whereas Montana school districts created a patchwork of educational programs that varied as to how much they encouraged Indian educational success and community control, Washington schools, as a whole, made the goals of their local Indian communities the standard by which all of their educational programs could be judged. At the front of every Indian Education Annual Report, the State Superintendent for Public Education presented a list of the major desires of Washington's Native communities.<sup>28</sup> While symbolic, this list suggested that Washington administrators considered Indian desires sufficiently valuable to take the time and money to poll local communities and compile their desires into a single record. Furthermore, putting it at the front of each annual report turned the list into a rubric by

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<sup>27</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1971, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1969-1970* (Olympia: Office of Public Instruction, 1969), 5.

which federal policymakers could evaluate the effectiveness of their educational programming decisions.

Significantly, almost all Washington administrators actually used the list as a guideline for the creation of programs. For example, one of the major desires of Washington's Native communities was the creation of a "new teaching methodology that that [took] into consideration the bi-cultural conflict and its effects on Indian children in the classroom."<sup>29</sup> Essentially this was a call by Washington's Native communities to acknowledge and address the fact that the historically hostile and paternalistic relationship between whites and Native Americans might be part of the problem that Native students faced in classrooms. In an effort to correct this, several school districts, such as the Cusick district in northwestern Washington, hired a number of new Native American teachers and teachers' aides.<sup>30</sup> Such actions solved multiple problems at once. By incorporating Native Americans into the classroom as teachers and aides, administrators provided Native students with teachers who fully understood, and had experienced, the unique needs and experiences of these children. Moreover, hiring several new teachers ensured that these students received a more individualized classroom experience, which was beneficial to struggling students. This more culturally sensitive approach to Indian education created a real improvement in the performance of Native students. In Cusick, the smaller class sizes and more focused attention from

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<sup>29</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1969*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1971*, p. 26.

Native teachers brought student attendance levels up to almost 90 percent, a level unheard of prior to this program.<sup>31</sup>

Another example of this kind of culturally sensitive and Indian focused program was the Granger school district's programs, which satisfied both the cultural and physical needs of Indian students. The Granger School District, just southeast of the town of Yakima in south-central Washington, served a Native student body with a very diverse set of needs.<sup>32</sup> While some students simply needed academic enrichment—programs that might help them improve their reading, writing, or arithmetic skills—others had needs that were far more basic. For many Native students in the Granger school district, access to food, clothing, and basic medical treatment constantly affected their ability to learn. In 1972, with a budget equal to that of similar-sized school districts in Montana, Granger managed to provide not only food, clothing, health care but also educational programs designed to increase student's pride in their cultural heritage. Having made it a goal to “increase the students' knowledge of their own tribe, as well as their knowledge of other [tribes],” Granger administrators not only fed the children who needed it, but also created culturally relevant field trips, cultural exchanges, and a cultural studies class that used Native materials to increase students' understanding of their cultural past.<sup>33</sup> In this way, Granger managed to utilize their funds to provide for the needs of Native students, while also satisfying the wants and desires of their tribal communities.

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<sup>31</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1971*, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1971-1972* (Olympia: Office of Public Instruction, 1972), 12.

<sup>33</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1972*, p. 12.

Other Washington school districts took a different tack in an effort to provide a more culturally equitable education to Indian children. Rather than creating special classes that sought to inject an hour of Indian culture into every school day, some schools attempted to retrain the educators themselves and make every class more tailored to Native needs. In 1972, the Auburn school district utilized several thousand dollars of Johnson-O'Malley funding to create a series of workshops that took teachers directly into the Native communities they served. Native parents and cultural leaders led these workshops and taught teachers about the unique challenges of Native students and the role that their heritage and culture played in their students' classroom behaviors.<sup>34</sup> While the focus of this program was different than the cultural enrichment programs of schools like Granger, it appears that it was no less effective. Indeed, this district recorded an improvement in attendance similar to that of Cusick in 1969.<sup>35</sup> By focusing its money and attention on the cultural understanding of its educators, the Auburn school district took a holistic approach to creating a learning environment for Native students that was more culturally understanding and aware. That was the real spirit of the Johnson-O'Malley Act in action.

Significantly, there was also a statewide push in Washington to incorporate Native parents into the educational decision-making process. While in Montana there had been a great deal of variability in the way that home-school liaisons performed their duties, in Washington home-school liaisons almost uniformly strengthened relations

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<sup>34</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1972, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1972, p. 9.

between tribal communities and school administrations. Washington's school district administrators and Native parents both raved about the role these people played in creating a learning environment for students that was tailored to the unique needs of Native students.<sup>36</sup> In 1971, for example, the Quillayute Valley school district, located on the northern portion of the Olympic Peninsula, hired a home-school coordinator who was a member of the local Indian community. This, unfortunately unnamed, coordinator was extremely popular with Native parents and worked with local tribal members to get Native approved programs into the curriculum. At the same time, this Native coordinator worked with troubled students to ensure that they could overcome their challenges and stay in school.<sup>37</sup> So successful was this, unfortunately unnamed, home-school coordinator that the principal of Quillayute valley noted that "the Indian pupils' dropout ration [sic] has dropped considerably since the adoption of this program."<sup>38</sup> This description was in no way unique to Quillayute valley. Indeed, good home-school liaisons like this one were an excellent use of Johnson-O'Malley funds and, throughout Washington, brought white and Native communities into closer, more effective contact.

Similarly, school districts throughout the state of Washington were also far more receptive to the creation and actual implementation of Indian parent advisory committees. Of fundamental importance to Washington's Indian parents was "that Indian parents, themselves, be allowed to participate in all phases of education planning, programming,

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<sup>36</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1972, p. 9-11.

<sup>37</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1969, p. 12- 13.

<sup>38</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1969, p. 13.

and evaluation of programs that effect their children.”<sup>39</sup> As in Montana, the Johnson-O’Malley program required the creation of Parent Advisory Committees, and yet, unlike Montana, most Washington State school boards did not try to stifle the effectiveness of these organizations.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, by 1972 Parent Advisory Committees existed in all of the school districts that served Indian students and ranged in size from three to forty parents, depending on the size of the school being served.<sup>41</sup> Compared to Montana, this level of Indian participation in the educative process was enormous. Rather than creating obstacles to Native parents who wanted a voice in their children’s education, every school district in the Washington public school system helped to create these parent organizations. Moreover, these organizations had real power over the implementation of educational programs meant to help Native children. According to the 1969 *Annual Report on Indian Education*, before any district could implement a program utilizing Johnson-O’Malley funds, both the State Superintendent of Public Education and the head of the district’s Parent Advisory Committee had to review and approve it. If either of these two people rejected the program, it could not go into effect.<sup>42</sup> Never before had Native families enjoyed this much control over the public schooling of their children.

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<sup>39</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1969, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Most, but not all. In 1971, the Washington State Superintendent for Public Education noted that that, for three school districts, the involvement of Indian parents caused “turmoil” in some communities and, in some cases, “hampered program implementation.” See Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report, 1970-1971* (Olympia: Office of Public Instruction, 1971), 5. Despite these isolated cases of dissent, the overwhelming majority of Washington schools wholly embraced the inclusion of Indian Parent Advisory Committees.

<sup>41</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1972, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1969, p. 5.

Through the effective implementation of Parent Advisory Committees, Washington State created a climate of self-determination that stood in stark contrast to more restrictive states like Montana.

These efforts to include Indian parents also did not stop with Parent Advisory Committees. Indeed, the Washington State school systems made efforts to include Native parents in an even more official capacity. By 1970, Washington State's Native American parents began to take active roles on school boards throughout the state. This participation increased dramatically as the decade wore on, and by 1972 "twenty three Indian parents were serving on nine different school boards throughout the State of Washington."<sup>43</sup> This level of participation, while remarkable in comparison to states like Montana, was still quite limited, given that thirty-six school districts served Native American children. Only a quarter of Washington schools, then, put Native parents in a position of educational governance.<sup>44</sup> While this level of participation is still incredibly low, such participation in school administration was unheard of throughout much of the United States at this time. These school board positions gave Native Americans the chance to have a real voice in the development and implementation of classroom programs that would affect the self-esteem and educational preparedness of their children. They also served as a symbol of Washington administrators' desire to provide Indian communities with some level of educational self-determination. More so than even the increased importance placed on Parent Advisory Committees, the inclusion of Native

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<sup>43</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1972, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1972, p. 7.



parents on local school boards demonstrated Washington's willingness to work towards the ideal of self-determination.

By comparing the Montana and Washington approaches to Indian education, it is easy to see the variability that could occur under the decentralized American education system. But what caused this variability? Why did Montana administrators treat the Indian children enrolled in their schools differently than did the administrators from Washington? K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty posit that the root of such difference was white perceptions of Native culture as safe or unsafe. In their book, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, Lomawaima and McCarty contend that federal Indian policy was largely a result of "each generation ... working out ... its notion of a safety zone ... where dangerously different cultural expressions might be safely domesticated and neutralized."<sup>45</sup> These terms— safe culture and unsafe culture— are used to categorize practices based on the level of danger they are perceived to present towards the dominant culture in power. Native American arts and crafts are an excellent example of what this shift from unsafe to safe culture can look like. In the 1870s, when Americans viewed Indians as dangerous impediments to whites' Manifest Destiny, they deemed Indian material arts and culture as little more than symbols of savagery that had to be shed so that Indian people might integrate into civilized white society. By the 1930s, however, the view of Indian culture had shifted. Indians were now seen as somehow fundamentally American, so integral to the identity of our country that losing their culture would be losing something of real value. Moreover, their material culture no longer symbolized the threat to Euro-American

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<sup>45</sup> K. Tsianina Lomawaima, and Teresa L. McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 3.

values that it once had and, as such, was safe to practice once again. Indeed, the federal government went so far as to create an Indian arts and crafts board that would encourage the creation and sale of Indian products.<sup>46</sup>

When applied to the educational examples set by Montana and Washington, this theory would suggest that Washington schools deemed Indian cultural expression less dangerous than did the administrators of the Montana schools. Given the wealth of programs in Washington State that were directed at improving Indian self-esteem and respect for their cultural heritage, it is clear that their fears of Indian culture, if they had any, were very much outweighed by their desire to improve student performance. Moreover, there is a clear difference in the way that local teachers and administrators viewed Indian practices and the challenges that faced Native students. In Montana, for example, several teachers seemed to put a great deal of effort into correcting perceived problems in the way Native students dressed and groomed themselves. In the Dixon school district, one home economics teacher discussed how “the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades were instructed in personal hygiene, proper dress ... and manners. We feel that this was a real contribution to the young girls of this age.”<sup>47</sup> While on the surface, this statement might not seem like a prejudiced commentary, it was, in many ways, playing to an offensive Indian stereotype. The emphasis on “proper dress” as well as appropriate “manners” denigrated the behaviors that these girls possessed prior to taking this class. This statement also reinforced an earlier belief that Indians, unless they accepted the

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<sup>46</sup> Schrader, *The Indian Arts and Crafts Board*, 1-20.

<sup>47</sup> Montana Department of Public Instruction, *Annual Report*, 1970, 8.

accoutrements of Euro-American culture, were somehow unclean, in need of the cleansing practices of white society.<sup>48</sup>

Washington State, on the other hand, seemed far more willing to alter traditionally Euro-American practices in order to tailor them to Native American needs. In 1969, administrators in the Port Angeles school district in northwestern Washington reworked extra-curricular programs within the school system in an effort to make them more attractive to Indian students. By altering the schedules of extra-curricular events to fit with needs of Native students with limited transportation, and through campaigns that reached out to specifically to encourage their participation in sports and other activities, administrators “encouraged many... to become involved to a degree that school has more holding power for them.”<sup>49</sup> Rather than forcing the Native Americans to change so that they might fit white social expectations, administrators in schools like Port Angeles re-evaluated the practices themselves and changed them in ways that made them seem more appealing to Native Americans. These differences, however, do not necessarily indicate differing opinions on the safety of Indian cultural expression. They could, for example, reflect actual differences in the Indian communities present in these two states. Moreover, given the broader pan-Indian social movements of the 1970s, namely the Red Power movement, it seems unlikely that either of these states would view Indian cultural expression as particularly safe.

The 1970s saw the genesis of a new type of Native American political activism. Responding to a lack of political power and infuriated with the inability of the federal

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<sup>48</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 124-136.

<sup>49</sup> Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Indian Education Annual Report*, 1969, p. 11.

government to bring real change to Native populations both on the reservations and in cities, Native Americans throughout the United States began organizing Pan-Indian political, legal, and economic organizations like the National Indian Youth Council, the National Indian Education Association, and the National Tribal Chairman's Association.<sup>50</sup> Beginning in 1969, these Pan-Indian organizations were joined by protest groups that gained national attention through the occupation of government controlled sites like Alcatraz Island, Mount Rushmore, and Plymouth Rock.<sup>51</sup> Collectively, these attempts by American Indians to improve their conditions through organization and protest became known as the Red Power movement. This movement culminated in 1973 with the violent seventy-one day protest at Wounded Knee, the site of the 1890 massacre of more than 150 Indian men women and children from the Pine Ridge Reservation Indian Reservation in southwestern South Dakota. This protest, which would later devolve into an armed standoff between Indian protestors and federal agents, led to the deaths of two Indian occupiers and two Federal Bureau of Investigation agents, as well as multiple people wounded on both sides.<sup>52</sup> Citing the earlier massacre at Wounded Knee, the protesters, led by Frank Fools Crow, Peter Catches, Ellis Chips, and others, would go so far as declare that "this [occupation] is an act of war, initiated by the United States."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson, "Introduction: 'You Are on Indian Land,'" *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom*, ed. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Josephy, Nagel, and Johnson, "Introduction," 2-6.

<sup>52</sup> Josephy, Nagel, and Johnson, "Introduction," 48.

<sup>53</sup> Frank Fools Crow et al, "Demands of the Independent Oglala Nation, 1973," *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom*, ed. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 49.

One can imagine that the proximity of Montana to the events of Wounded Knee might have aroused some fear of Indian culture among whites. Indeed, the Crow reservation on Montana's southern border was a scant three hundred miles from the very site of the protest. What is interesting, however, is that even if events like this did suddenly make Indian culture seem unsafe to Montana whites, it does little to explain why there was such a difference between Montana and Washington, especially given Washington's history of militant Red Power protests during the 1970s. In the spring of 1970, 160 Indian protestors, whose ranks were bolstered by celebrity activists like Jane Fonda, began the first of several attempts to take over the Fort Lawton military base in Seattle, Washington. The protestors hoped to convert the base, which was scheduled to be decommissioned by the military, into a community educational and cultural center.<sup>54</sup> An attempt storm the base and occupy it culminated in a violent confrontation with military police officers and the burning of an outbuilding on the fort grounds.<sup>55</sup> All told, more than ninety Indian protestors and Jane Fonda went to jail as a result of the ongoing protests, and several would go on to file lawsuits against the military police at the fort for brutality.<sup>56</sup> Despite this violent standoff inside Washington's largest city, Washington whites managed to maintain a level of cultural sensitivity and general openness to Indian needs that was far more pronounced than it was in Montana.

Why is it that the populations of these two states differed so greatly in their treatment of Indian students? All that is clear is that the reason is certainly not rooted in any one

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Simmons, "Indians Invade Fort Lawton," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 9, 1970.

<sup>55</sup> Associated Press, "Fort Lawton Military Defeats Indian Attack," *Bremerton Sun*, April 3, 1970.

<sup>56</sup> Jerry Bergsmen and Paul Henderson, "Indians Invade Army Post," *Seattle Times*, March 9, 1970.

particular cause. More importantly, however, there was no longer a powerful, centralized system of federal education to create a more uniform educational experience for Indian students. Just as significantly, the steps towards Indian self-determination that had been taken at the end of the 1960s were applied unevenly as a result of this new paradigm of Indian public education. While it is certainly true that the federal system of education had once betrayed Indian communities by actively destroying their culture, this decentralized model of schooling betrayed these same communities by often stifling their chances to take full control of the educational future of their children

## CHAPTER V

### EPILOGUE:

#### NEW PATHS TO EFFECTIVE INDIAN EDUCATION

In April 1970, Bertha Lorenzo, an elderly Navajo woman from Ramah, New Mexico, walked up to the doorway of the BIA building in Washington D.C., threw a blanket down, and sat there. Lorenzo, a tribal elder of the Navajo satellite community just south of the Navajo Reservation, refused to get up again until BIA officials approved a funding request by Ramah Navajos to open up a tribally run high school in their town.<sup>1</sup> Lorenzo and a small contingent of other Navajo elders had come to Washington, D.C. in hopes of finding a way to end the haphazard treatment of their children's educations. Each one of them had witnessed Navajo children carted onto busses and dragged to distant boarding schools or had seen them taken from their homes so that they might be fostered out to white Mormon families and attend public schools. Lorenzo and the Navajos that accompanied her wanted a school that belonged to their community, and on April 20, 1970, they got one.<sup>2</sup> On that day, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Louis Bruce approved their funding request and officially paved the way for the Ramah Navajo High School, the country's first Navajo community-controlled high school.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Manuelito, "The Role of Education in American Indian Self-Determination: Lessons from the Ramah Navajo Community School," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly: Indigenous Epistemologies and Education: Self-Determination, Anthropology, and Human Rights* 36, (2005): 77.

<sup>2</sup> Manuelito, "The Role of Education," 78-79.

The school's first years were not particularly auspicious. The land for the school was dedicated on September 15, 1970, and Ramah's first classes took place in the small shabby buildings that had already stood on the land for years, as well as surplus army tents provided by local Indian families.<sup>3</sup> They faced challenges from the local school board and the New Mexico Superintendent of Education, Leonard Delayo, because "the school's ... conditions and aims were different than in other parts of the state." In short, they wanted to incorporate Indian culture and language into the classroom, and that made local whites uncomfortable.<sup>4</sup> With the help of the sympathetic U.S. Senator Joseph Montoya, the school was able to stay open and continues to provide an educational curriculum that balances traditional Navajo beliefs and culture with modern academic subjects like math and science. By 2005, the humble tents and ramshackle buildings had given way to a multimillion-dollar campus that provides education for students from kindergarten through high school. Important to its success, the school continues to provide programs for Navajo children that arm them not only with the knowledge they will need to function in the white world, but also with classes designed to preserve the language, rituals, and cultural practices that form their Navajo identity.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the federal government's calls for Indian self-determination in education at the end of the 1960s, the predominance of public education as the primary form of Indian schooling meant that this directive was applied in a far more limited fashion than

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<sup>3</sup> Manuelito, "The Role of Education," 79.

<sup>4</sup> Manuelito, "The Role of Education," 79.

<sup>5</sup> Manuelito, "The Role of Education," 79-85.



it might have been under a more centralized federal system. Bertha Lorenzo knew this. All of the Navajos who went with her knew this, and thus, they sought a new means for providing the education they wanted their children to receive. Nor were they alone. In 1971, the Rock Point Community School District, located in the northeast corner of Arizona, created a completely bilingual education program that taught students in both English and Navajo throughout the students' grade school education.<sup>6</sup> In this program Navajo teachers taught kindergarten and first grade children almost entirely in the Navajo language. As students progressed through the grades, Navajo instruction was gradually replaced with English instruction so that by sixth grade, English was the primary classroom language.<sup>7</sup> Programs such as this one turned conventional wisdom regarding language learning on its head and showed that children who learned language concepts in a tongue that they actually understood had improved knowledge of English later on. Standardized testing in 1976 showed that the Navajo children involved in the bilingual education program were reading at almost a seventh grade level in sixth grade, which was a full two grade levels higher than those students not involved in the program.<sup>8</sup>

Native Americans in urban areas faced different educational challenges than Natives who lived on the reservations. Though they generally had far more access to public schooling, urban Indians typically comprised a small minority in the public schools, and they had to fight to be noticed and to have their unique educational needs

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<sup>6</sup> Lillian Vorih and Paul Rosier, "Rock Point Community School: an Example of a Navajo-English Bilingual Elementary School Program," *TESOL Quarterly* 12 (1978): 266.

<sup>7</sup> Vorih and Rosier, "Rock Point Community School," 264.

<sup>8</sup> Vorih and Rosier, "Rock Point Community School," 266.

recognized.<sup>9</sup> Near the reservations, Indian communities could create unified schools organized around the goals of the principal Native community. In urban areas, however, the diversity of the Native groups such unified educational models virtually impossible. Instead of community schools, Native American people living in cities would band together with those of different tribal affiliations to create what would come to be known as “survival schools.” In Minneapolis, for example, Native American parents and activists banded together in 1971 to create the Heart of the Earth Survival School.<sup>10</sup> This school, which was located on an old U.S. Coast Guard base that had been seized by Red Power activists, brought Indians from multiple tribal affiliations under one roof and attempted to provide educational programs that were attuned to the special needs of Indian children as a whole. One of the primary focuses of the Heart of the Earth School’s curriculum was to encourage pride in Indian culture and heritage.<sup>11</sup> Rather than gear cultural instruction towards values that a specific tribe might deem important, the Heart of the Earth School instead provided classes on broader themes in Indian art, history, and culture.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps more importantly for urban Indians, the school provided a place where Indian students were no longer a small minority plagued with problems that few other students could understand. At the Heart of the Earth School, Native Americans could learn with other children who were like them and who understood their unique needs and challenges. This new educational concept for urban Indians proved effective. Dropout rates for urban Indians in Minneapolis, which were four times higher than the national

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<sup>9</sup> Alan L. Sorkin, *The Urban American Indian* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1978), 87-90

<sup>10</sup> Sorkin, *The Urban American Indian*, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Sorkin, *The Urban American Indian*, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Sorkin, *The Urban American Indian*, 104.

average in 1971, dropped dramatically thanks to the Heart of the Earth School and would remain low until the school's closure in 2008.<sup>13</sup>

Other Native American communities chose to supplement their community-driven primary and secondary educational programs with tribal colleges that could train Native teachers, doctors, and other professionals who might then use their higher education to give back to their Native communities. The Navajos, for example created not only the Ramah and Rock point schools, but they also established the Dine College in 1968. Dine College provided higher educational opportunity to Navajos who wish to continue their schooling, and who wish to improve their job prospects through continued education.<sup>14</sup> In Keshena, Wisconsin, a town northwest of Green Bay, the Menominee Nation chartered the College of the Menominee Nation, which provided technical degrees and coursework in variety of specialties ranging from hospitality and gaming to natural resource management.<sup>15</sup> Just two years after this school's founding in 1993, the college went from offering only four courses for Menominee students, to offering a host of courses in dozens of different fields. Moreover, the College of the Menominee Nation has partnered with larger public universities throughout Wisconsin to ensure that the students who start their collegiate education in Keshena can continue at schools throughout the state.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of dropout rates, see Sorkin, *The Urban American Indian*, 102. The Heart of the Earth Survival School unfortunately closed due to mismanagement and embezzlement by administrators; see Patrice Relerford, "Minneapolis Cuts Ties to the Heart of the Earth Charter School," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 12, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Garrison, "The Diné Educational Philosophy (DEP) and its incorporation into the Associate of Science Degree Program in Public Health at Diné College," *The Journal of Interprofessional Care* 21, (2007): 67.

<sup>15</sup> D. Michael Pavel, Ella Inglebret, and Susan Rae Banks, "Tribal Colleges and Universities in an Era of Dynamic Development," *Peabody Journal of Education: Access and Equity in Postsecondary Education* 76, (2001), 54.

<sup>16</sup> Pavel, Inglebret and Banks, "Tribal Colleges and Universities," 54.

Rather than focusing on new school types, most of the current movements in Indian educational reform have focused largely on curricular changes. Schools focused and run by Indians are still a goal for several communities, however, approximately 90 percent of Indian children still attend public schools.<sup>17</sup> As such, current reformers of Indian education have focused more on the theory and practice of Indian education, rather than on schools themselves. Much of the current discussion regarding Indian education has focused on changing the way Indians and Indian lifestyles are portrayed in the classroom environment. In the town of Standing Rock, on the Lakota reservation, researchers James Fenelon and Dorothy LeBeau advocated for history classes that painted a real picture of what tribal dealings were like in nineteenth century. Indeed, in the case of the Sioux, both Fenelon and LeBeau want students, both Indian and white, to be exposed to clear depictions of how the Black Hills and other “valuable lands were in effect ‘taken’ from the Lakota,” and how the creation of the reservation system was actually a “political part of a vast conquest indigenous peoples.”<sup>18</sup> Other researchers advocated the inclusion of more bilingual education programs in places that served large numbers of Indian students, as well as classes that incorporated Indian traditions and ways of knowing into the daily curricula. Carl Hild, a researcher of Alaskan Indian cultures, advocated the incorporation of Indigenous familial teaching models in the schools, where elders would actively take part and utilize their own experiences to help shape young minds. Rather than simply having college-educated whites teaching all

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<sup>17</sup> John W. Tippeconnic, III, “Tribal Control of Education: Observations since the 1960s with Implications for the Future,” *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*, eds. Karen Cayton Swisher and John W. Tippeconnic, III (Charleston: AEL, Inc., 1999), 41.

<sup>18</sup> James V. Fenelon and Dorothy LeBeau, “Four Directions for Indian Education: Curriculum Models for Lakota and Dakota Teaching and Learning,” *Indigenous Education and Empowerment: International Perspectives*, eds. Ismael Abu-Saad and Duane Champagne (Lanham, NY: Alta Mira Press, 2006). 25.

children, Hild believed that creating a familial learning environment with elders at the head would create a more balanced and respectful generation of young people.<sup>19</sup> Rather than advocate for new types of schools, these Indian researchers and activists have focused on reshaping the present school models to be more culturally sensitive and aware.

Through all of these different educational models and calls for reform, Native Americans have shown a desire to take control of their children's education and a willingness to find creative ways to do so. For more than one hundred years whites have tried, and largely failed, to act as the primary arbiters of Indian education. Whites have ripped Indian children from their families and their culture, leaving many of them to die in disease-ridden boarding schools far away from friends and family. They have shuffled Indian students into public schools, both urban and rural, and left them to fend for themselves against local white majorities that often cared little about their unique educational needs. The history of white-controlled Indian education has been a history of failure. Perhaps it is time to once again shift the paradigm of Indian education and help fund a new type of schooling that can provide the specialized attention Native American students need to truly succeed. Tribes like the Navajo and the Menominee have demonstrated that they are willing and able to take on this task. And honestly, could they do any worse?

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<sup>19</sup> Carl Hild, "Alaska Native Traditional Knowledge and Ways of Knowing," *Alaska Native Education: View From Within*, eds. Ray Barnhardt and Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network Center for Cultural Studies, 2010), 161-167.

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