

The Hardships Of Native American Boarding Schools

Posted on October 8, 2018

History Of Boarding Schools:

Before commencing with the quotes and the authors of those quotes, a brief overview of history will be discussed. The boarding schools were founded in the year 1860 with the establishment of the first Indian boarding organization set by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Indian boarding school was located on the Yakima Indian Reservation in the state of Washington. The boarding schools were set as a part of a plan that was formulated by the eastern reformers Herbert Welsh and Henry Pancoast. Both these men are responsible for setting up organizations such as the Board of Indian Commissioners, the Boston Indian Citizenship Association and the Women's National Indian Association. Henry Welsh and Henry Pancoast aimed to utilize education as an instrument to bring the Native tribes into the mainstream American lifestyle. The American lifestyle was based on the Protestant ideology that was followed during the middle of the 19th century. By bringing the Natives into the mainstream American way of life, the Indians could be taught various things like the aspect of owning property, the purpose of having wealth, and the concept of a monogamous family system. For the reformers, it was crucial to educate the Natives so that they could be made to accept the beliefs and value systems of the white man. Boarding schools served as the best tool to make the Natives absorb the ideologies of the white people. By bringing the Indians to schools, a change could be brought about that would help the white people in overcoming the hurdles. Boarding schools made it their top priority to teach the Natives the basics of education such as four skills that consisted of reading, writing, listening and speaking the English language so that teaching them the American beliefs would become easier. By teaching the Indian youth different discourses such as history, arithmetic, arts, and science, they could be individualized. After getting the Natives to learn the basics of the language, the next step would be to teach them about [religion and have them accept the Christian](#) faith. In addition to this, the Indian students would be taught about democratic societies and the different institutes of any state so that they would be given citizenship training. With the expansion of boarding schools, around the 1880's, there were about 60 schools in the U.S. which over 6200 Indian students. The good thing about reservation schools was that it was inexpensive, and therefore, the parents of the Indian students had no issues with letting their kids go to school. The reservation school had divided its hours into two portions, in the first half, the students were taught academics and other discourses related to it, and in the latter half, the students were taught industrial training. The reason behind giving the Indian youth industrial training was to have them join the labour force soon enough. The white reformers ensured that the Indian students knew everything there was to know about discipline. They were trained by having them march all day to and from classes, meals were provided on the scheduled hours, and restraint was exercised as it was the way

of the American lifestyle. The boarding schools aimed to produce such individuals who had enough knowledge about the way society worked that they were economically self-sufficient. This was attained by teaching them skills and conditioning the beliefs of the students so they possessed individualism and knew how to operate in any society. The American way of life contrasted with the Indian way of life as the Natives believed in communal ownership, which allowed people to stay together on one land.

Boarding Schools – Henry Ward Beecher And Sitting Bull

Around 1800's, there were several boarding schools that were used to gather up Indians, to be introduced to the concept of becoming more "Americanized." During this time, numerous critics arose to detest the very notion of this practice. Notable names among the critics that repelled such a change were Sitting Bull, a well-known native Indian leader, and Henry Ward Beecher, known for his contributions as an American Civil Leader of his time. Henry Ward and Sitting Bull held their views about boarding schools, but they shared a mutual understanding and took a stance towards a mutual stance. They detested the very thought of separating children from their parents and sending them over to schools that reeducated them according to the standards of white American society (Kidwell 2007). Sitting Bull was the leader of the Lakota people. Although his name Sitting Bull was initially known as "Slow" because of "his display of deliberate manners and awkward movement of his study body." During his early years, as he was growing up, Sitting Bull took part in war parties, earning prestige for himself as the years went on. Through numerous Acts of heroism, Sitting Bull finally took the role of leadership in 1857, becoming chief to Hunkpapa. During his leadership phase, Sitting Bull had to deal with Americans on several occasions, testing his skills to lead his people. On the topic of white American people trying to persuade Natives to assimilate to the American view on things, Sitting Bull had his own quote to express his feelings towards the gravity of this issue. Sitting Bull's quote translates his view in terms of the belief of the Lakota people in the Great Spirit, and this being stated, he mentioned that if the Great Spirit wanted them to be White, he would have done so in the first place. Sitting Bull mentioned this to convey his message to the White Americans, to let them know that there is no need for them to bring in a change amongst the Natives. On the other hand, Henry Ward Beecher was best known as the American Civil Leader for his earlier years as a Preacher and for his thoughts towards the subject of Slavery. Beecher wanted to abolish the practice of slavery and the concept of Catholic Roman God. His efforts greatly resembled the views and concepts of Sitting Bull. Beecher, since his early years as a minister, was against the concept of slavery, and through his efforts, he tried to educate the people. His concept towards the concept of common schools that were opening up to serve the best interest of the white [American society](#) (Lynerd 2015). Through his quote, Beecher mentioned that the sole purpose of these schools opening up was to accommodate the needs of American society towards assimilating to their views. In his quote, he gave the example of the Ox, associating it with the student and the Lion of the school. He mentioned that the students, who are being sent to the school, will take in whatever knowledge is delivered to

them, however, they will take in whatever they wish to learn. By doing so, these schools will only assist the students to give form to their ideas.

Experiences Of The Children

Most of the Indian children attending the boarding schools absorbed the knowledge that was being taught to them in the classes, while some of the students benefited more than others by becoming more self-aware and strengthening their ideals. One such example of the well-known is “Plenty Kill”, a native who was also known by the name “Luther Standing Bear.” He was arrested, taken from his home, and thrown into Carlisle. Initially, he resisted the change, much like the other kids who were in there with him, but slowly and gradually, he started to reform his views. He became proficient in English and some other classes as well (Adams 1995). Luther’s performance was much greater than what his teachers had initially anticipated of him. His example is a true representation of Beecher’s quote, “*When a lion eats an ox, the lion does not become an ox, but the ox becomes a lion.*” Luther Standing Bear absorbed all of the knowledge he could from his classes at Carlisle Boarding School and was able to apply it towards becoming an exemplary person, contributing largely towards the National League of Justice for American Indians, displaying his qualities of being a profound Native (Archuleta, Brenda, and Tsianina 2000). However, he kept his pride as an Oglala Identity, no matter how hard times got for him or the changes that were around him.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it can be said that the Indian Boarding Schools had both a positive and a negative impact on the children. However, the boarding school concept was not enough to outweigh the losses faced by the native Indians. The present concept of boarding schools is that of a luxury, but for the Natives, it was more of a different experience for each individual back then. The main objective of these schools was to re-educate the natives, help them learn English and adopt the cultural values of the American Society. These boarding schools left the native children to feel like outcasts after they went back home. They couldn’t adjust to life back at home; their birthplace and life in school were harsh for these native Indian children as well. They weren’t accepted by the English children since they still saw them as “savages.” The quotes of Sitting Bull and Henry Ward Beecher are of great importance and convey a good lesson towards this strife. Although even after all of the changes the Natives had gone through, they still weren’t accepted in the end.

Works Cited

Adams, David Wallace. Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928. University Press of Kansas, 2501 W. 15th St., Lawrence, KS 66049, 1995.

Archuleta, Margaret, Brenda J. Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima. “Away from home: American Indian

boarding school experiences, 1879-2000." (2000).

Trennert Jr, Robert A. The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935. University of Oklahoma Press, PO Box 787, Norman, OK 73070-0787, 1988.

Lynerd, Benjamin T. "The Purpose-Driven Darwinist: Henry Ward Beecher And The Theology Of Progress." Political Theology (2015): 160212123525002. Web.

Kidwell, C. S. "To Remain An Indian: Lessons In Democracy From A Century Of Native American Education; Learning To Write "Indian": The Boarding-School Experience And American Indian Literature; Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences." Ethnohistory 54.4 (2007): 757-759. Web.