

DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE UNIT: LESSON 2: HANDOUT 4

“LONG HAIR” LETTER, 1902.¹

William Arthur Jones, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote this letter in 1902. He is giving orders to the superintendent of a reservation in California.

Page | 1

Department of Interior
Office of Indian Affairs
Washington
January 11, 1902

The Superintendent,

Round Valley, California,

Sir:

This Office desires to call your attention to a few customs among the Indians, which, it is believed, should be modified or discontinued.

The wearing of long hair by the male population of your agency is not in keeping with the advancement they are making, or will soon be expected to make, in civilization. The wearing of short hair by the males will be a great step in advance and will certainly hasten their progress towards civilization. The returned male student far too frequently goes back to the reservation and falls into the old customs of letting his hair grow long. He also paints profusely and adopts all the old habits and customs which his education in our industrial schools has tried to eradicate.

The fault does not lie so much with the schools as with the conditions found on the reservation. These conditions are often due to the policy of the Government toward the Indian and are often perpetuated by the Superintendent's not caring to take the initiative in fastening any new policy on his administration of the affairs of the agency.

¹ <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/296220>

The Commissioner is saying that male American Indians should not have long hair. He thinks it is uncivilized.

He says that Indian boarding schools are doing a good job of destroying American Indian culture, but when the students return home they go back to their traditional ways.

Body paint is a traditional cultural practice among American Indians. Paint can cause eye infections, and it should be outlawed immediately.

The Commissioner believes that American Indians need to change certain parts of their culture.

The adults on the reservations are the source of the problem. The Government should be stricter with its rules on the reservations.

On many reservations the Indians of both sexes paint, claiming that it keeps the skin warm in winter and cool in summer; but instead, this paint melts when the Indian perspires and runs down into his eyes. The use of this paint leads to many diseases of the eyes among those Indians who paint. Persons who have given considerable thought and investigation to the subject are satisfied that this custom causes the majority of the cases of blindness among the Indians of the United States.

Page | 2

The Superintendent has been ordered to force all male Indians to cut their hair short, and for men and women to stop using body paint.

The Superintendent has been ordered to withhold food rations if a person does not follow the new rules.

You are therefore directed to induce your male Indians to cut their hair, and both sexes to stop painting. With some of the Indians this will be an easy matter, with others, it will require considerable tact and perseverance on the part of yourself and your employees to successfully carry out these instructions. With your Indian employees and those Indians who draw rations and supplies it should be an easy matter, as a non-compliance with this order may be a reason for discharge or for withholding rations and supplies.

Many may be induced to comply with the order voluntarily, especially the returned students. The returned students who do not comply voluntarily should be dealt with summarily. Employment, supplies, etc., should be withdrawn until they do comply and if they become obstreperous about the matter a short confinement in the guard-house at hard labor, with shorn hair, should furnish a cure. Certainly all the younger men should wear short hair and it is believed that by tact, perseverance, firmness, and withdrawal of supplies the Agent can induce all to comply with this order.

If a man refuses to cut their hair, the first punishment is the loss of food rations.

If they still refuse to cut their hair, they will be sent to jail, where their hair will be cut by force.

Traditional dances and feasts are also now banned on reservations.

In six months, the Superintendent has to show proof that he has carried out these orders.

The wearing of citizens clothing, instead of the Indian costume and blanket, should be encouraged, Indian dances and so-called Indian feasts should be prohibited. In many cases these dances and feasts are simply subterfuges to cover degrading acts and to disguise immoral purposes. You are directed to use your best efforts in the suppression of these evils. On or before June 30, 1902, you will report to this Office the progress you have made in carrying out the above orders and instructions.

Very respectfully,

William Arthur Jones, Commissioner.