

DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE UNIT: RESOURCE SET 3: INTRODUCTION**BOARDING SCHOOLS INTRODUCTION**

Left: Albuquerque School Baseball Team. Right: Science class at Carlisle School.

In the 1600s, the English colonized the New England region of North America. During this time, White European people believed that their culture was superior to all others. Most White people believed that it was their responsibility to “save” American Indian people from their “primitive” culture and religion.

Christian missionaries had a plan to assimilate American Indians into White American society by teaching them about English and Christianity.¹ They began teaching American Indian children about the same topics that were taught in schools for White children. The missionaries used the Bible to teach reading and writing. By the early 1700s, White people and American Indian people in New England had similar literacy rates of about 30%.²

In 1879, Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, a government-backed school that forcibly separated American Indian children from their families in order to “civilize” them. The Carlisle School resembled a military training camp. Students lived in barracks, and they were forced to practice Christianity, speak English, cut their hair short, and wear European-style clothing.³

If the students did not follow these rules, they could be beaten or put into solitary confinement. Living so closely together, the students were also susceptible to deadly diseases like influenza and tuberculosis. Between 1879 and 1918, nearly 200 American

¹ Kelderman, F. (2018). Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations; Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.

² Martin, J. W., & Nicholas, M. A. (Eds.). (2010). *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*. Univ of North Carolina Press.

³ Adams, *Education for Extinction*; <https://americanindian.si.edu/education/codetalkers/html/chapter3.html>.

Indian children died at the Carlisle School.⁴ Nonetheless, White Americans considered the Carlisle School to be a success, and they built more military-style boarding schools in the years ahead. At these schools, many students suffered and died from disease, abuse, and neglect.⁵ The U.S. government passed several laws that punished American Indian families if they did not send their children to boarding schools.⁶ This created a scary situation for parents, because they knew about the abuse and neglect at the schools.

When students graduated from the boarding schools, they usually returned to their reservations. It was common for American Indian teenagers to have low self-esteem and other mental health issues. The job training that the students received did not always match with the jobs that were available on the reservations. American Indian boarding schools were responsible for many long-lasting problems in the reservation communities.⁷

⁴ Becky Little, "Government Boarding Schools Force Separated Native American Children from their Families," History, <https://www.history.com/news/government-boarding-schools-separated-native-american-children-families>.

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/03/traumatic-legacy-indian-boarding-schools/584293/>

⁶ <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title25-section283&num=0&edition=prelim>

⁷ Adams, *Education for Extinction*