

DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE UNIT: LESSON 3: HANDOUT 5**UNSPOKEN: AMERICA'S NATIVE AMERICAN BOARDING SCHOOLS¹**

Page | 1

The text below is a transcript from a 2017 documentary produced by PBS Utah. The documentary has secondary source narration, and primary source interviews with people who attended the boarding schools.

Narrator: The 1868 treaty with the Navajo contained the provision that their children must attend school. Native American boarding schools had been started much earlier by Christian missionaries. The 1887 Dawes Act reinforced the reservation system and encouraged assimilation.

Richard Henry Pratt was superintendent of Pennsylvania's Carlisle Indian School. Pratt previously experimented with Native American education, practicing on captives in Florida. Pratt felt they could be assimilated into society if they were given vocational and religious training.

Richard Henry Pratt wrote in 1892, "A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: of all the Indian there is in the race shall be dead, kill the Indian in him, and save the man."

[The following excerpts are from students that attended the boarding schools]

Forrest S. Cuch (Ute): With us, there was immediate declaration of war on our culture. We were forbidden to speak our language and practice our religion. It's just like our war was prolonged, and the assimilation policies were how they implemented it, how they carried it out. It was very destructive. And it caused historic trauma among most of our people, including myself, to this day.

Harry Walters (Navajo): And I remember at the church, being told that what my parents practiced would send them to hell, where they would burn forever. And when you're seven years old and you hear that, that was really the most devastating, terrifying experience for me.

Joseph Abeyta (Pueblo): But some of the isolation, or separation from parents was very difficult. But that was part of the agenda. If they're going to, as they say in the past, to separate you from the blanket, we need to have full control of everything you do and everything you learn.

¹ Retrieved from: <https://www.pbs.org/video/unspoken-americas-native-american-boarding-schools-oobt1r/>

Lorena Charles (Hopi): Sometimes a teacher would get a ruler and hit us on our hand, or on our leg. And then they'd tell the principal, and we'd get another [chore] to do, like washing the dishes, or washing the dishtowels.

Roy Smith (Navajo): They all looked at me when they were giving me my haircut. That clipper going through that, and my long hair falling off. And I was really hurt, that was the teaching from my grandfather, that your long hair is your strength, your long hair is your wisdom, your knowledge.

Page | 2

Forrest S. Cuch (Ute): My mother was taken away when she was nine years old, and was not allowed to return until she was 18...and she did not pass that down to me, she was told not to teach me Ute because it would interfere in my mastery of English, which we have found is not true at all. And so that has caused harm to me. It's affected me emotionally, physically, culturally, it's been very disruptive in my life.