

## **Four Hundred Years of Failure: A history of Indian education**

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### *Preamble*

For the reader to fully appreciate the extent of the accomplishments of successful Indian educational institutions, such as most tribal colleges, this study has to describe in great detail the dysfunction, both historical and present, that exists on Indian Reservations. Fellow Native Americans may believe this is disrespectful to Native Americans and reservations in general. Nothing could be further from the truth. This study is meant to bring hope to Native Americans who desire positive change by documenting the factors responsible for the success of one type of tribal organization – the Tribal College. It is the writer’s hope that by identifying factors responsible for Native American difficulties in achievement and identifying factors that have helped Native Americans overcome their difficulties in achieving, all Americans both Native and non-Native will have a better, more objective understanding of the plight of people living on Indian Reservations.

Finally, having been born and raised on an Indian Reservation, as a former tribal college student, tribal college board member, tribal college Adult Basic Education instructor, tribal college Academic Dean, and tribal college President, this researcher may have a unique perspective and may distinctively interpret data gathered in this study in a manner different than other Native Americans and non-Native Americans.

### **The importance of history**

When Native Americans talk about historical wrongs, this researcher has observed non-Indians respond with this complaint, “Why are you holding me responsible

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for something that happened 100 years ago?” What these individuals do not realize is that many of those wrongs are still practiced today, hundreds of years later, hence the need to bring up the past.

*“Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”*

– George Santayana

*“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”* - Maya Angelou

### **Historical Perspective – Four Hundred Years of Failure**

The question may be raised, “what makes the success of Tribally Controlled Community Colleges (TCCC) different than historically Black Colleges, or Hispanic serving institutions, Land Grant Institutions, or for that matter the founding of the current higher education system?” This is a very good question. What makes the struggles of TCCC unique?

The researcher will attempt to answer this question by examining the historical relationship, in the patterns of inter-relationships or interactions, between European immigrants and the Native Americans. In an effort to answer this question, the researcher will focus on one area, the differences in the philosophy, spirituality, values, and life styles of Native Americans and the colonists, who immigrated to their lands. The researcher will explore how, through the centuries, these profound differences prevented the two races from coexisting in a peaceful, non-destructive relationship, a key to the reasons behind why Native Americans rejected the educational systems in the United States. These differences contributed to the founding of Tribal Colleges.

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In his book, *Custer Died For Your Sins*, Vine Deloria Jr. (1969) talks about the great military might of the United States. He points out that the United States has never lost a war, but could never win peace. Deloria believes that the United States is incapable of winning peace because it refuses to engage in exchanging ideas, concepts, and thoughts, with other countries and recognizing the fact that two distinct societies can exist together without conflict (Deloria, 1969). To emphasize this point regarding Native Americans he says:

As Indians we will never have the efficient organization that gains great concessions from society in the marketplace. We will never have a powerful lobby or be a smashing political force. But we will have the intangible unity which has carried us through four centuries of persecution. We are a people unified by our humanity – not a pressure group unified for conquest. And from our greater strength we shall wear down the white man and finally outlast him . . . . We shall endure (Deloria, 1969, Page 81).

If all Americans understood this sentiment, there would be no need for this paper. However, for Native Americans born and raised on an Indian Reservation during the fifties, sixties and early seventies, this profound point of view was the furthest thing from their minds. This was a time when extreme poverty was the norm and jobs were virtually non-existent; there was no hope for a better way of life. Those individuals, Indians and non-Indians, who attempted to bring positive change to the reservation inevitably failed. Thus, the speculation stood clear, why would a tribal college be any different? It would suffer the same fate every other initiative had, whether it was economic, social, or educational – failure. It did not matter who initiated them; the government, the tribe, private individuals, or religious organizations. They all failed. Besides, no Indian ever went to college, nor wanted to. It just wasn't done. As far as opening a college on a reservation, the reservations simply lacked the basic infrastructure to support an

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institution of higher learning. No facilities existed to house a college; no public library, to support basic research. Very few people had dependable transportation and most reservation residents had a negative attitude and/or they were suspicious of education because of bad experiences they had while attending schools both on and off the reservation (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 1987).

In addition to the stark poverty that prevented Indians from being enthusiastic about starting a college, most tribal members did not see the relevance of a “white man’s” education in their daily life. This mainly was due to a huge chasm that existed between the two societies’ belief systems, their values and customs were as different as night is from day (Szasz, 1999). The chasm between the two cultures may have been (and possibly still is) so great that 400 years of interaction has not bridged it. In *Behind a Trail of Broken Treaties*, Deloria (2000) relates this story: In 1966, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) wanted to give an award to Sergeant Shriver, who was then the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. This meritorious award was for service to the Indian people. The NCAI had printed a special form that noted Shriver’s contributions to the Native Americans. At the bottom of the form were several blanks; one had the word, President, printed beneath it. As the NCAI officials filled out the form, they came to the blank for the president’s name and they stopped. One officer inquired, “Is this our president who is to sign here, or theirs?” After a long and careful debate, the Indians decided, “the Great White Father is not ‘our’ president but ‘theirs’” (Deloria, 2000). Deloria goes on, explains their decision, this way:

Behind this attitude, which may appear curious to the non-Indian, is more than a racial distinction. For the most part, Indians have not accepted the mythology of the American past, which interprets American history as a sanitized merging of diverse people to form a homogeneous union. The

ties to tribal heritage are too strong, the abuse of the past and present too vivid, and the memory of freedom too lasting for many Indians. A substantial number of reservation Indians see the white man as little more than a passing episode in tribal history which spans millennia. The white man may be the most destructive influence, which the tribes have encountered, but he is still not regarded as a permanent fixture on the continent (Deloria, 2000, p. 2).

This attitude, which rejects the mainstream society and its education system, is not new. It goes back to the very first contact between the colonists and Native Americans and continues right up to this century, as evidenced by the following three speeches, each from a different time period, by Native Americans.

In July 1777, Old Tassel, of the Cherokee tribe, met at Long Island with U.S. Commissioners to negotiate a treaty. After listening intently to what was said, he replied:

Much has been said of the want of what you term “Civilization” among the Indians. Many proposals have been made to us to adopt your laws, your religion, your manners, and your customs. We do not see the propriety of such a reformation. We should be better pleased with beholding the good effects of these doctrines in your own practices than with hearing you talk about them, or of reading your newspapers on such subjects. You say, “Why do not the Indians till the ground and live as we do?” May we not ask with equal propriety, “Why do not the white people hunt and live as we do?” (Armstrong & Turner, 1971, Page 30).

Fifty-two years later, in 1829, Daykauray, a Winnebago chief, made a similar reply to Indian agent John H. Kinzie, at a council fire at Prairie du Chien in response to a proposed plan to educate a group of Indian children in the language and habits of civilization:

Father: The Great Spirit made the white man and the Indian. He did not make them alike. He gave the white man a heart to love peace, and the arts of a quiet life. He taught him to live in towns, to build houses, to make books, to learn all the things that would make him happy and prosperous in the way of life appointed him. To the red man the Great Spirit gave a different character. He gave him love of the woods, of a free life of hunting and fishing, of making war with his enemies . . . . The white man does not like to live like the Indian – it is not his nature.

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Neither does the Indian love to live like the white man – the Great Spirit did not make him so.

We do not wish to do anything contrary to the will of the Great Spirit. If he had made us with white skins and characters like the white man, then we would send our children to this school to be taught like white children.

We think if the Great Spirit had wished us to be like the whites, he would have made us so. We believe he would be displeased with us to try and make ourselves different from what he thought good.

I have nothing more to say. This is what we think. If we change our minds we will let you know. (Armstrong & Turner, 1971, Page 56)

Almost 100 years later, the on-going clash of cultures between the races was reflected in a speech at the 1927 Grand Council of American Indians:

The white people, who are trying to make us over into their image, they want us to be what they call "assimilated," bringing the Indians into the mainstream and destroying our own way of life and our own cultural patterns. They believe we should be contented like those whose concept of happiness is materialistic and greedy, which is very different from our way.

We want freedom from the white man rather than to be integrated. We don't want any part of the establishment. We want to be free to raise our children in our religion, in our ways, to be able to hunt and fish and live in peace. We don't want power. We don't want to be congressmen or bankers.... we want to be ourselves. We want to have our heritage, because we are the owners of this land and because we belong here.

The white man says, there is freedom and justice for all. We have had "freedom and justice," and that is why we have been almost exterminated. We shall not forget this. (Retrieved June 25, 2005 from <http://www.geocities.com/Baja/Dunes/2319/quote.html>.)

The desire to remain separate was not one-sided; many colonists, settlers, frontiersmen, and politicians felt exactly the same way about the Indians as the Indians felt about the immigrants. Most of the English colonists did not want to coexist with the Indians. If these Savages could not be tamed, then they had to be removed from the land, either by extermination, or by force (Mintz, 2003).

However, some early settlers realized that by educating and converting Native Americans there would be advantages both economically and politically, so they decided

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to educate them (Wright, 1985). These were the primary reasons the settlers at Jamestown, Virginia founded the first plans to educate Native Americans in the “New World” (Wright, 1988).

### *Native Americans and Colonial Colleges*

“The history of Native American higher education over the last three hundred years was one of compulsory Western methods of learning, recurring attempts to eradicate tribal cultures, and high dropout rates by Native Americans at mainstream institutions” (Boyer, 1997). This was certainly true of higher education in the colonial era and it was also true at the time of this study in 2005. In her book, *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607-1783*, Margaret Szasz writes:

Varied experiments in Indian education were widespread throughout colonial America. The diversity of the individual colonies, as well as the different settlement patterns and governments of colonial regions, mirrored efforts to educate non-Indian children in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, in New England where a strong tradition of formal education developed, the greatest number of Indian schools operated; conversely, in the Deep South where the fewest number of schools operated and illiteracy rates were highest, there were few attempts to organize Indian schools (Szasz, 1988, p. 5).

In a 1985 dissertation, *Piety, Politics, and Profit: American Indian Missions in the Colonial Colleges*, Irvin Lee Wright reveals the little known fact that early colonial colleges were founded with the express purpose of the propagation of Christianity among the American Indians (Wright, 1985). Wright goes on to say, “Throughout the colonial period, the English viewed education as a primary means to accomplish this pious mission.” The purpose of Wright’s study was to, “...investigate, detail, and interpret the higher education of American Indians during the colonial period” (Wright, 1985, p. 11). Wright critically examined the educational Indian mission in four colonial colleges. He

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examined “institutional experiments” at Henrico College, Harvard College, the College of William and Mary, and Dartmouth College.

Wright’s study found that while the colonial educators professed their own piety as if this were their singular motivation, they capitalized on the charitable impulses of the pious English and on the opportunities the charity presented in furthering other political and economic interests (Wright, 1985).

This section will convey Wright and other researchers’ assertions that mixed motives existed in the founding of colonial institutions. Their research reveals how funds that had been collected for conducting early experiments in educating Native Americans were diverted from the intended purpose to fund other projects. This was a primary cause for the ultimate failure of these early experiments in Indian education. Wright’s study offers a fresh insight into the origins of higher education in America.

The colonists’ plans for formal Indian schooling centered around two beliefs: (a) any schooling endeavor must Christianize and civilize native peoples, thus, the primary teachers and promoters of Indian education were to be missionaries and pious laypersons; and (b) Indians must be persuaded to send their children to school (Szasz, 1988).

These two beliefs formed the foundations for many Indian education experiments. Some of the best-known include Harvard College, opened in 1636 partly for “the education of English and Indian youth ... in knowledge and godliness; “William and Mary College, founded in 1693 in part so “that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians;” and Dartmouth opened in 1769 to offer “all parts of learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing and Christianizing children of pagans.” Clearly, the colonists sought to use education to destroy the

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“Indianness” of the Native Peoples. That they largely failed is evident upon examining the colonial enrollment records at all three institutions. Indeed, few Indians attended and even fewer graduated; only one Indian received a degree from Harvard, while an average of 8-10 Indian students were enrolled at William and Mary each year (Szasz, 1988).

Most Native Americans resisted sending their children to school; however, missionaries did manage to persuade a few families into believing the key to Indian survival in an increasingly hostile colonial environment was attending a white man’s school. These Indians reluctantly surrendered their children in the hopes that a Euro-American education would help them survive in a world becoming increasingly hostile to Native Americans (Szasz, 1988).

Early colonial attempts to educate Native Americans failed for the same reasons educational attempts failed throughout the history of Indian Education, up until the present. Missionaries had no comprehension of the complexity and sophistication of traditional Native educational, social, and cultural systems, and they harbored deep prejudices against the Indians (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969).

“Religious zeal to Christianize and ethnocentric attitudes prohibited the missionaries from understanding why their goals were stymied and why Indian students held onto their cultural and spiritual values with such tenacity” (Wright, 1985). Rather than live with such scorn, early Native American students often returned to their own people without completing their education (Szasz, 1988). Although early colonial schools educated a very small percentage of Native American children, their supporters had successfully created the foundation upon which the future of Indian education would rest. Thereafter,

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the majority of Native Americans would view education as an effort to stamp out their religion and culture by Christianizing and civilizing their children (Szasz, 1988).

### *Henrico College*

The first proposal for organized education of any kind in the American colonies was Henrico College. As the settlement in Virginia grew, and as more contact with the Natives occurred, the education of the Native American became a company goal. Edwin Sandy's ultimate plan was to institute a systematic scheme of education for Virginia, leading up from free school to college, and in further time, a university (McCabe, 1922). In the early days of the settlement, an Englishman, Reverend Alexander Whitaker, succeeded in converting a number of Natives to the Christian faith. Buoyed by his success, he urged the entire English nation to come to the salvation of the "naked slaves of the devil" (Vacik & Miller, 1995, p. 8). In addition to saving their souls, Whitaker also envisioned cultural salvation for the Natives as well.

Therefore, the mission of the college at Henrico was primarily to educate and evangelize the Native Americans (McCabe, 1922). In turn, these educated Native Americans would return home and convert their fellow tribesmen to Christianity (Chitwood, 1948). Henrico College may have been the first example of vocational education that, "was to have been somewhat like an industrial school with the purpose of making Indians useful members of society" (Land, 1938, p. 487).

Though the plans for the proposed college in Henrico were officially endorsed both by the Virginia Company in 1618 and King James, the goal of establishing an

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institution to educate the "Children of the Infidels" (Wright, 1985) was to be ultimately frustrated by fraudulent money management. Sir Edwin Sandys, the venerable treasurer of the Virginia Company, collected a net £2,043 for the express purpose of an Indian college at Henrico, but used the funds to ship indentured tenants to the colonies (Wright, 1985).

With the establishment of a college for Native Americans at Henrico, a pattern emerged, fraudulent use of funds earmarked for Native American education. This pattern was to persist throughout the colonial era. "Dartmouth, like Harvard and the College of William and Mary, survived its first years by fraudulent use of moneys earmarked for Indian education" (Wright, 1985). Administrators at those first colonial colleges opportunistically capitalized on English fears of Native American uprisings to appeal to the charitable Britons' sense of pious duty to socialize the heathen races of North America.

### *Harvard College*

Shortly after its founding, Harvard's president, Henry Dunster, professed an interest in converting Indians into Christians in order to gain access to the free-flowing charitable funds that were available for that purpose. Dunster's requests for funding coincided with the uneasy end of Connecticut's Pequot War. Dunster's efforts were successful and by 1653, an Indian college was built on Harvard's premises. Dunster deceptively reported on the progress of his Indian students to benefactors in England; however, no Indian students entered Harvard until 1660, seven years after the college was founded.

In the four decades of the Indian college's existence, it housed only four known Indian students out of its total capacity of forty. Instead,

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administrators used the Indian school building to accommodate twenty English students capable of providing Harvard with sorely needed revenue (Wright, 1985, p 7).

### *William and Mary*

Just prior to the movement to found the Anglican school of William and Mary, Nathaniel Bacon, a wealthy frontier planter and relative of the governor, organized a group of exploited laborers (indentured servants under contract to work for wealthy planters) and they attacked some peaceful Indians. Bacon and his followers felt the Indians were being coddled by the government. When the governor of Virginia tried to stop Bacon from attacking the Indians, Bacon and his followers attacked and burned Jamestown, a colony in Virginia. After Bacon's rebellion, the colonists had an understandably difficult time making peace with the Indians (Stuckey & Salvucci, 2003). The government recognized that there was a serious need to create a mechanism for socialization of the Native Americans in order to co-opt the constant threat they posed on the frontier.

In a direct response to the troubles on the frontier, the Commissary of Virginia, James Blair, solicited funds from England for a college, arguing that the purpose of the college was so that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians (Wright, 1988, p. 8). In 1693, Blair obtained a royal charter for the establishment of the College of William and Mary. "To gather the funds he procured in England for the Indian college, Blair contrived other, more expedient, outlets; there was no known Native American enrollment in William and Mary prior to 1705 or after 1720" (Wright, 1985). J. E. Morpurgo, William and Mary's historian, criticized Blair's enterprise as, "an entry in the ledgers through which charitable funds could be funneled to extraneous activities"

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(Wright, 1985). “Partly due to the reluctance of Native American students to abandon their own social matrix, and partly because most of William and Mary’s funding was diverted into reviving the financially strapped college, the scheme to create, through education, a class of Europeanized Native Americans to act as diplomats between Europeans and native tribes failed” (Retrieved April 20, 2005 from <http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/students/his3464y/straus/HIGHLRN.html>)

### *Dartmouth College*

The case of Dartmouth represents yet another appeal to pious English benefactors for Indian educational funds, rendered all the more powerful this time by British insecurities concerning Native Americans in the aftermath of the French and Indian War (1754-1763). The French and Indian War was fought between the French and the British over the right to settle North America. Britain won the right to settle North America, then took over French forts in North America when the French withdrew. British settlers refused to give supplies to Native Americans as the French had. British colonists also moved across the Appalachian Mountains onto Native American land. Native Americans retaliated by attacking settlers and destroying almost every British fort west of the Appalachians. The British reacted with equal violence killing even Indians who had not attacked them (Garcia, Ogle, Risinger, Stevos & Jordan, 2002, p. 135).

The founder of Dartmouth College, Congregationalist Eleazar Wheelock, capitalized on this tension between the British and Native Americans by requesting funds to educate the Indians. By educating Native Americans, Eleazar Wheelock hoped to keep them from starting wars with the colonists. Wheelock sent a former Indian student to England to solicit funds for his project. The student, Samson Occum, raised £12,000 “in

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the mistaken belief that the funds were to be employed towards building and endowing an Indian academy...” (Wright, 1985). Yet, following a then familiar pattern, Wheelock had no intention of using the funds to build the said Indian academy. Instead, during the next 15 years, Wheelock exhausted all of Occum’s collections educating 160 students, a mere 40 of whom were Native American (Wright, 1985, p. 10).

### *The Indian Wars*

Time and time again Native American tribes chose to go to war rather than give up their land and way of life. In 1642, Miantunnomoh, a Narragansett Indian, sought out an old enemy, Waindance, to ask for his help in fighting the colonists (Armstrong & Turner, 1971, p. 3).

Brothers, we must be one as the English are, or we shall all be destroyed. You know our fathers had plenty of deer and skins and our plains were full of game and turkeys, and our coves and rivers were full of fish.

But, brothers, since these Englishmen have seized our country, they have cut down the grass with scythes, and the trees with axes. Their cows and horses eat up the grass, and their hogs spoil our bed of clams; and finally we shall starve to death; therefore, stand not in your own light, I ask you, but resolve to act like men. All the sachems both to the east and the west have joined with us, and we are resolved to fall upon them, at a day appointed, and therefore I come secretly to you, because you can persuade your Indians to do what you will (Armstrong & Turner, 1971, p. 3).

Unfortunately for them, defeat was inevitable from the very first moment that settlers landed on their shores. At first, Native Americans were unaware of the danger the settlers posed, so they welcomed and assisted the first settlers. It did not take long for Native Americans to realize the danger the colonists posed to their way of life, indeed, to their very existence. Once Native Americans realized the danger the settlers posed, their attitudes towards the settlers changed from friendly to antagonistic. Native Americans were unable to comprehend the concept of individuals owning land and as a result Native

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American leaders constantly underestimated colonists in all their interactions with them. Conversely, the first colonists saw a land of enormous riches inhabited by a race of people who were little advanced from the Stone Age, who needed to be conquered, civilized, Christianized, and placed on small tracts of land where they could become farmers. Inevitably, this led to armed conflicts between the two races that would span four centuries (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969).

One of the very first conflicts was between Colonial Virginia and the Powhatan Confederacy. The colonists believed that the Indians would welcome them and willingly supply them with food. From the colonists' perspective, it seemed that exchanging European tools and Christianity for sustenance would make a mutually beneficial arrangement. That bargain made little sense to the natives, however. Most tribes hunted and gathered little more than their immediate needs required and to trade food in exchange for sermons did not make sense. The Powhatan Confederacy was a loose confederation of about 30 Algonquian tribes led by Wahunsonacook, known to the settlers as Powhatan. Powhatan's Algonquin Confederacy covered tidewater Virginia from the Potomac south to Albemarle Sound. (Retrieved June 7, 2005, from <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1155.html>.) Powhatan preferred peace with the settlers rather than war. John Smith, an early explorer, documented a speech given in 1609 at Werowocomoco (Gloucester County) by Powhatan.

Why will you take by force what you may obtain by love? Why will you destroy us who supply you with food? What can you get by war? . . . We are unarmed, and willing to give you what you ask, if you come in a friendly manner . . . .

I am not so simple as not to know it is better to eat good meat, sleep comfortably, live quietly with my women and children, laugh and be merry with the English, and being their friend, trade for their copper and hatchets, than to run away from them . . . . Take away your guns and

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swords, the cause of all our jealousy, or you may die in the same manner (Armstrong & Turner, 1971, p. 1).

Relations between the settlers and Native Americans improved, when John Rolfe married Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas. The two sides co-existed peacefully until her death in 1617. When Powhatan died a year later, a new chief, Opechancanough, pretended to become Christianized and allowed more colonists to settle on native lands. He lulled them into thinking they were safe; then in March 1622, he launched a surprise attack on the settlers, killing 350 colonists - nearly one-third of the population. Warfare between the races continued for another decade, with the settlers giving up any pretense of coexisting with the Indians and embarking upon a policy of extermination.

Starting with this 12-year conflict (1622-34) between the Powhatan Confederacy and the Virginia colonists, to the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890, literally thousands of armed conflicts, skirmishes, battles, and wars would be fought between the United States and Indian tribes across the continent (Adams, 1995). The following is a representative *sample* of the great many conflicts in chronological order between Native Americans and Europeans, Native Americans and colonists, and Native Americans and early U. S. citizens over a span of three centuries.

1637 – The Pequot War took place in present day Connecticut and Rhode Island.

1675-78 – King Philip's War took place in present day Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

1689-1763 – The French and Indian War where most Algonquian tribes allied with the French; the Iroquois, with the British.

1711 – The Tuscarora War took place in present day Northern Carolina.

1763 – Pontiac's Conspiracy took place in the present day Ohio River Valley.

1790-94 – Old Northwest Warfare took place in present day Ohio and Indiana.

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1814 – The Creek War took place in present day Georgia and Alabama.

1816-18 – The First Seminole War took place in present day Florida.

1832 – The Black Hawk War took place in present day Northern Illinois and Southwestern Wisconsin.

1849-63 – The Navajo Conflicts took place in present day Arizona and New Mexico.

1854-90 – The Sioux Wars took place in present day Wyoming, Minnesota and South Dakota.

1855-58 – The Third Seminole War took place in the present day Florida Everglades.

1865-68 & 1879 – The Ute Wars took place in present day Utah.

1874-75 – The Red River War took place in present day Northwestern Texas.

1876 – The Battle of the Little Bighorn took place in present-day southern Montana.

1877 – The Nez Percé War took place in present day Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.

1890 – The Wounded Knee Massacre took place in present day South Dakota.

All the conflicts, skirmishes, raids, uprisings, battles, and wars, were fought for one reason only: “Indians possess the land, and the whites wanted the land” (Adams, 1995).

### **Mission Period, Treaties, and Reservations**

“ (A) full understanding of the historical roots of our present failure is essential, if problems are to be resolved and a more enlightened policy effective” (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969, p. 10). The committee was referring to the Federal Indian Policy on Indian Education. The committee was correct in the need to understand the past so the same mistakes would not be repeated in the present.

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Before the treaties and Federal Indian Policy, formal education of Indians was dominated by the church for almost 300 years. The goal of the missionaries was not so much to educate the Indian as to change him. Jesuits and Franciscans were the first missionaries to attempt to mold the Indian into a white man and when Protestants gained a foothold on the northeast coast, they vigorously attempted to Christianize the Indian. Education was seen as the best means to accomplish this goal, so in 1617 King James I requested funds to educate “children of these Barbarians in Virginia.” Other schools for Indians were started, but none were successful in civilizing the Indian. Although Indians understood the concept of Christianity and learned to read and write, they immediately relapsed into infidelity and barbarism upon returning to their tribe (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969).

### *Treaties*

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, all Native American Tribes were autonomous from each other. They conducted their own affairs and depended upon no other source of power to uphold their acts of government (Canby, 1988). The colonies and Native American tribes were often equal in military strength. Therefore, the early colonial governments viewed the tribes as sovereign nations and treated them as such. In order to gain title to Indian land, colonial governments primarily used treaties. “The Supreme Court has expressly held that an Indian treaty is ‘not a grant of rights to the Indians, but a grant of right from them’” (Pevar, 1995, p. 37). Following the War of Independence, the young United States made treaties with hundreds of indigenous American Nations, exchanging lands for payments and access rights (Cooper, 1990; Canby, 1988). “The signing of the treaty between the United States and the Delaware

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Tribe in 1778 established treaties as the primary legal basis for Federal Policy in regards to American Indian” (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969, p. 11).

Between 1778 and 1871 when the last treaty was signed, Indian tribes ceded almost a billion acres to the United States. In return, Indians generally retained inalienable and tax-exempt lands for themselves, and Government pledged to provide such public services as education, medical care and technical and agricultural training (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969, p. 10).

What the government pledged to do in the treaties is still at heart of much controversy today. Because of an oral culture the Indians believed in, the word was to be inviolable, sacred, meant to last forever, (...as long as the grass grows and the rivers flow...). Conversely, most Americans viewed treaties as documents only good until the next one was written.

### *Reservations*

Reservations emerged as a result of the treaties. The first Indian reservation was created in 1651. Once proud, self-sufficient, independent people, Native Americans became totally dependent on the United States Federal Government for their very survival, when they signed treaties that meant giving up huge tracts of land. During this time period, Native Americans found their land base diminished, their hereditary chiefs gone, and their lives controlled by an external governance system (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 1977). Because signing treaties meant giving up land, most tribes did not want to sign treaties. Chief Ouray of the Ute tribe put it this way:

*“Agreements that Indians make with the government are like the agreement a buffalo makes with the hunter after it has been pierced by arrows.*

*All it can do is lie there and give in” (Hill, 1994, p. 34).*

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### *Allotments and Assimilation, 1871-1928*

Once tribal nations were defeated and placed on reservations, some people would argue they developed an unhealthy dependence on the federal government for subsistence, housing, and all legal affairs. This dependence along with the difficulty of assimilating into “the white society” by accepting “white man’s” values and culture, soon led to extreme poverty and hopelessness on most Indian Reservations. Faced with staggering poverty and the loss of their traditional ways to obtain subsistence, many Native Americans developed a victim mentality. This victim mentality continued with the federal government’s view that given their own piece of land, Native Americans would become farmers and therefore end their dependence on the federal Indian government. However, the government’s intentions of giving individual Indians their own land was not based solely on assisting them to assimilate into mainstream society. It was also motivated by greed for land and guided by the misconception that Native Americans would be better off if they were forced to assimilate into mainstream society.

#### *The Dawes Act*

In 1881, Senator Henry M. Teller said, “...the real aim of [the Dawes Act] is to get at the Indians land and open it up for resettlement” (Kamins, 1992).

The Dawes Act was another attempt to assimilate Native Americans. The Act required Native Americans to “anglicize” their names. Rolling Thunder thus became Ron Thomas and so forth. However, some government agents administering the Act managed to slip the names of their relatives and friends onto the Dawes rolls and thus reap millions of acres of land for their friends and cronies. The Meriam Report of 1928 found in one state alone Indian held land totaled 138 million acres in 1887, at the time the

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Dawes Act was signed into law. This had been reduced to 47 million acres of land by 1934 when the Act was repealed.

### *The Boarding School Era*

A decade before the passage of the Dawes Act, the U. S. government had enacted a policy where Native American children were taken away from their parents and placed in boarding schools (Adams, 1995).

Cultural interaction and conflict are always subtle and complex but they are not always as one-sided as in the case of Indian and whites. As the Iroquois, the Shawnee, and the Arapaho would eventually all discover, the white man's superior technology, hunger for land, and ethnocentrism seemingly knew no bounds. The white threat to Indians came in many forms: smallpox, missionaries, Conestoga wagons, barbed wire, and smoking locomotives. In the end, it came in the form of school. (Adams, 1995, p. 5).

There were two different models of boarding schools, on the reservation boarding schools and off the reservation boarding schools, often hundreds, even thousands of miles away from the reservation (Adams, 1995).

While Native Americans generally abhorred this boarding school policy, the general public and the U. S. government viewed the practice as a quick way to civilize the Native American. "By means of the common school, Indians could, in effect, be catapulted directly from savagism to civilization, skipping all the intervening stages of social evolution in between" (Adam, 1995, p.19). This is a good example of the on-going chasm that existed between Native Americans and non-Natives. Many reformers believed that Indians were, in fact, not intellectually inferior, but lived and organized their lives in an inferior manner. Because of this way of thinking, it was deemed that, indeed, Indians were worth "saving" (Szasz, 1977).

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In the 1880s, the government agreed that the only way to educate Indian children was to take them away from their homes, forcibly if necessary, for at least four years. Therefore, the purpose of federal government boarding schools was to remove Native Americans from their homes and cultures in order to change their identities and lifestyles, to be like the European American or the “white man.” Native American children were forced to think and act like the dominant “white culture” and were not allowed to practice their traditional ways. Not only were languages and beliefs changed, but appearances as well. Hair styles, clothing, even names and body languages were changed. The intention was to completely erase the Indian way of life (Adams, 1995).

The first Indian boarding school was founded by Captain R. H. Pratt in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879. In the latter 1800s, the United States government instituted an educational policy designed to culturally transform Native Americans into the mainstream of white society, due to continual conflicts between the two cultures. It was believed by the government that by forcing Native Americans to learn English, and by preventing them from practicing their own languages and customs, they would believe in and practice “white” values. Furthermore, it was felt that the best way to implement this policy would be through boarding schools. Indian children were removed from their families and homes at a very early age. In this way, it was hoped by the government that Native Americans would then become “white,” and that their traditional languages and cultures would die (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969).

Charles Lummis, a Native American, was a believer in that approach. He agreed with Carlisle School's “kill the Indian, save the child” theory of Indian education when he toured the school during a trip across the country in 1884. In 1888, Lummis moved to

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Isleta, New Mexico, where he had the chance to observe grief-stricken parents whose children were being held against their will at the Albuquerque Indian School. Lummis learned from the parents how the children were prevented from returning home, even during summer vacations. As a result of this experience, Lummis came to regard the U.S. government's Indian education policies as an abomination (Thompson, 2001).

Native American children did not receive a warm welcome at boarding schools. For the most part, the boarding school experience was a deeply traumatic one. Native languages were forbidden to be spoken. Native clothing was replaced with uniforms. Children's hair was cut short. Indian names were replaced with Christian ones. Harsh punishments were given to those who broke rules. But most devastating, children lost contact with their families and their traditional ways of life, and were taught that their previous lives were inferior (Adams, 1995).

From the very beginning, pioneers and the government saw the education of Indians as a convenient, and at the time, attractive adjunct to the efforts to "settle" this land. According to historical accounts, it is obvious that Native people were very little more than a "problem" to be solved by the colonizers. To white society, they were heathens and behaved like savages. They had no written language, their children were unschooled, and for the most part they didn't know how to stay in one place, many moved their villages according to the seasons. If these people, these natives, were ever going to amount to anything in this United States of America, they had to be taught the proper and acceptable way to live. All aspects of Native American culture or the Native American way of life were unacceptable to the European mind (Adams, 1995).

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Government Indian policy was coming increasingly under fire from Congress as well as many well meaning voices from the Christian pulpits. These organizations vowed to make amends by seeing to it that Indians would receive the education that would ultimately make them productive members of American society. Many whites saw the “social evolution” of the Indian as a progressive process that could be accelerated by education. Education also promised to relieve the government of the cost of feeding and clothing native people by encouraging and providing the tools for economic self-sufficiency. Waging war on Indians and protecting frontier communities was also costly, and it was thought that in this area, too, education could save money. And then there was the question of land: “A wild Indian requires a thousand acres to roam over, while an intelligent man will find a comfortable support for his family on a very small tract.... Barbarism is costly, wasteful and extravagant. Intelligence promotes thrift and increases prosperity” (Adams, 1995, p. 20).

### *Day Schools*

The reservation day school was the first part of this venture into Indian education. The children lived in the village with their families and attended school nearby, during the day. “Attendance at these mission schools was made mandatory by regulation on many reservations for all native children aged six through sixteen” (Jaimes, 1992, p.380). In a relatively short time, it was decided that as a tool for assimilation these day schools were not and would never be successful. The children were too close to their homes, families, and cultures to be fully and successfully indoctrinated with white society’s language and values. Therefore, the next step was to establish reservation boarding schools that were located near the agency headquarters (Trennert, 1998).

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### *Boarding Schools on Reservations*

Children attending these schools were only permitted to go home during the summer months and perhaps for a short period at Christmas time. Even with the children removed from the daily influence of home and family, the assimilation process was not proceeding at an acceptable pace as far as the government was concerned. One of the reasons was that parents often came to visit their children, thus allowing the children the opportunity to speak their language and stay in contact with their tribal ways. This was distinctly counter-productive in the eyes of the government officials who wanted to suppress all Native American culture (Meriam et al., 1928).

### *Boarding Schools off Reservations*

The third and final plan to be adopted was the off-reservation boarding school. This was finally to be the way to rid native children of their language and culture. What started as an experiment, with Indian prisoners, soon became the model upon which this latest educational effort was patterned. In St. Augustine, Florida, with volunteer teachers, Lt. Richard Henry Pratt, the officer in charge of a group of Indian prisoners at Fort Marion, began to teach the Native prisoners the white man's beliefs (Oppelt, 1990).

It was in 1875 that Pratt arrived in Florida with the Indian prisoners. By the end of 1878, he was given permission to continue the education of the Indians being released from prison. After spending one year at the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, Pratt was permitted to take his students to an unused military barrack in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This was the beginning of one of the most significant residential Indian schools (Adams, 1995). Using Lieutenant Pratt's experiment as a model, Indian children were sent, in many cases, hundreds of miles away from family, language and Native

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American ways. Upon arriving at their school, the students were required to have their hair cut short, an act that produced much resentment among the Indian children. Tribal dress or clothing was not permitted, as school uniforms were provided and required to be worn. Children's names were another connection to home and the Indian culture, so they too were changed and new "pronounceable" names were assigned to each. No effort was spared when it came to breaking the Native cultural ties (Adams, 1995).

For tribal elders who had witnessed the catastrophic developments of the nineteenth century - the bloody warfare, the near extinction of the bison, the scourge of disease and starvation, the shrinking of the tribal base, the indignities of reservation life, the invasion of missionaries and white settlers - there seemed to be no end to the cruelties perpetrated by whites. And after all this, the schools. After all this, the white man had concluded that the only way to save Indians was to destroy them, that the last great Indian war should be waged against children. They were coming for the children. (Adams, 1995, p.337)

During the 1920's, investigations of Indian boarding schools found inhumane conditions - poor diets, hard labor for children, military conditions, high mortality rates, overcrowded conditions, and the spreading of numerous diseases. Eventually, changes in Indian education, due to this discovery, included an end to the traditional boarding schools and a reintroduction to Indian history and culture, as slight as it was. However, to this day, the boarding school era has left its scars on Native American people (Trennert, 1988).

Fortunately, Tribal Colleges are reversing some of the damage caused to tribes during the boarding school era by following a philosophy completely opposite that of the Boarding school philosophy. Kevin Gover, former Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the Department of the Interior summarized it best in a speech on September 8, 2000, at the ceremony acknowledging the 175th Anniversary of the

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establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The following is an excerpt from his speech:

This agency forbade the speaking of Indian languages, prohibited the conduct of traditional religious activities, outlawed traditional government, and made Indian people ashamed of who they were. Worst of all, the Bureau of Indian Affairs committed these acts against the children entrusted to its boarding schools, brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually. Even in this era of self-determination, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs is at long last serving as an advocate for Indian people in an atmosphere of mutual respect, the legacy of these misdeeds haunts us. The trauma of shame, fear and anger has passed from one generation to the next, and manifests itself in the rampant alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence that plague Indian country. Many of our people live lives of unrelenting tragedy as Indian families suffer the ruin of lives by alcoholism, suicides made of shame and despair, and violent death at the hands of one another. So many of the maladies suffered today in Indian country result from the failures of this agency. Poverty, ignorance, and disease have been the product of this agency's work.

And so today I stand before you as the leader of an institution that in the past has committed acts so terrible that they infect, diminish, and destroy the lives of Indian people decades later, generations later. These things occurred despite the efforts of many good people with good hearts who sought to prevent them. These wrongs must be acknowledged if the healing is to begin. (Gover, 2000)

*The Problem of Indian Administration (The Meriam Report)*

This entire section is devoted to a report of a survey titled, The Problem of Indian Administration, more commonly known as the Meriam Report. The report recognized the diversity and complexity of Indian affairs and was highly critical of the governmental Indian policy with regard to education. The poor quality of personnel, inadequate salaries, unqualified teachers and almost non-existent health care were some of the criticisms leveled by the report. It is this researcher's opinion that the reading of this report is a must for any person conducting a thorough study on the history of Native Americans or the history of Native American education.

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The report's recommendations regarding Indian Education were so far-sighted that they were not taken seriously until the establishment of tribal colleges. For example, the report talks about the recognition of the Indian as an individual and recommends that education methods must be adapted to the Indian's individual abilities, interests, and needs. It also recognized that Indian tribes and individual Indians within the tribes vary so much that a standard content and method of education, no matter how carefully they might be prepared, would be worse than futile (Meriam et al., 1928). The content of this statement is at the core of most tribal colleges' mission statements.

The report begins with a general summary of findings and recommendations on the conditions among the Indians. "An overwhelming majority of the Indians are poor, even extremely poor, and they are not adjusted to the economic and social system of the dominant white civilization" In regards to the health and wellness of the Indian population, the report said, "The health of the Indians as compared with that of the general population is bad. ...the general death rate and the infant mortality rate are high. Tuberculosis is extremely prevalent. Trachoma, a communicable disease which produces blindness, is a major problem because of its great prevalence..." It notes that with comparatively few exceptions, "...the diet of the Indians is bad, it is insufficient in quantity, lacking in variety, and poorly prepared. 'The two great preventive elements in diet, milk, and fruits and green vegetables, are notably absent.'" (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 3). It went on to say that the use of milk on reservations at the time of the report was rare, and it was generally not available even for infants. "Babies, when weaned, are ordinarily put on substantially the same diet as older children and adults, a diet consisting mainly of meats and starches (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 3)."

According to the Report, “From the standpoint of the white man, the typical Indian is not industrious, nor is he an effective worker when he does work” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 4). However, the report balanced that statement with this observation, “Many of them are living on lands from which a trained and experienced white man could scarcely wrest a reasonable living” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 5). The report explained that most reservations were located on land that had little value for agricultural operations other than grazing. When the land was excellent, however, the Indians did not appreciate its value. “Due this ignorance of the value of land, Indians often chose for themselves the poorer parts, because those parts were near a domestic water supply or a source of firewood, or because they furnished some native product important to the Indians in their primitive life” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 5). The Indian, the report said, “generally ekes out an existence from leases of his land, the sale of land, per capita payments from tribal funds, or in exceptional cases through rations given him by the government” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 5). In that day, Indians were no longer able to make a living as they did in the past by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild products. The social system that evolved from their past economic life was ill-suited to the conditions that confronted them on reservations. Basically, as a people who led a nomadic lifestyle, they had a difficult time adjusting to a sedentary life on reservations.

According to the report, the chronic poverty on the reservation led some people to assert that the “Indians prefer to live as they do; that they are happier in their idleness and irresponsibility” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 6). The report addressed this false assertion with the observation that the Indian’s seemingly happiness and contentment was really an almost oriental fatalism and resignation with the suffering and discontent in their daily

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lives. Furthermore, the report asserted that, “The amount of serious illness and poverty is too great to permit of real contentment. The Indian is like the white man in his affection for his children, and he feels keenly the sickness and the loss of his offspring” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 6).

The report’s primary recommendation for addressing the social ills on reservations was that the Indian Service’s overall responsibility should be primarily educational, in the broadest sense of that word, and that it be made an efficient agency. To carry out this recommendation, the report advised that scrupulous care must be exercised to respect the rights of the Indian. This phrase “rights of the Indian” was often used solely to apply to his property rights. The report wanted it to be used in a much broader sense so as to cover his rights as a human being, living in a free country. “Indians are entitled to unfailing courtesy and consideration from all government employees. They should not be subjected to arbitrary action” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 22). The report noted the need to recognize not only the good in the social life of the Indians, but the good in their religion and ethics as well. The report suggested the Indian Service seek to develop those values and build on them rather than to crush out all that is Indian. The recommendations for this section concluded with this statement.

*“The Indians have much to contribute to the dominant civilization, and the effort should be made to secure this contribution, in part because of the good it will do the Indians in stimulating a proper race pride and self respect”* (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 22).

The section on education in the Meriam report begins with this statement, *“The most fundamental need in Indian education is a change in point of view”* (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 32). The government’s “point of view” was largely based on the theory that it

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was necessary to remove the Indian child as far as possible from his home environment (Meriam et al., 1928). The Meriam report disagreed with this point of view. Listed below are some of the more profound observations, for its era, of the report.

Better Personnel. The Meriam report states, “Indian schools teachers credentials would not be accepted in good public school systems. Standards for teachers and school principals in government schools should be raised to the level of at least the better public school systems...”

More Than Mere Schooling is Necessary. “What has to be worked out is a home and school relation whereby the parents will be enlisted in having their children go to school regularly and the home in return will be directly affected by the school.” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 347)

Can the Indian be Educated. The report answers the question, can the Indian be educated? “Is it really worth while to do anything for Indians, or are they an ‘inferior’ race? Can the Indian be educated?” The answer can be given unequivocally, yes. “The Indian is essentially capable of education.” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 352).

The Meriam report’s consensus on a course of study at Indian schools was, “The Indian school course of study is clearly not adaptable to different tribes and different individuals; it is built mainly in imitation of a somewhat older type of public school curricula now recognized as unsatisfactory” . The report mentioned how no libraries, worthy of the name, exist in the Indian Service. In a few rare instances, the library, where there is one, consists mainly of sets of old textbooks, a few books for teachers, and some miscellaneous volumes, usually kept under lock and key in the principal's office.

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The industrial training provided often has very little to do with the future work of the boys who are taking it.

In an effort to raise the standards of education, the Indian Service adopted a uniform curriculum for all Indian schools. This was a dismal failure because it did not relate teaching to the needs of particular Indian children being taught.

It requires the same work for Indian children who are the first generation to attend school and who do not speak English as it does for those who are of the third generation of school children, who have long been in contact with the whites, and speak English in the home” (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 13).

At the time of the Meriam report, curricula did not take into account the kind of personality problems that are basic in the education of Indian children.

The typical classroom of an Indian school is a throw back to an early time: the nailed-down desks, in rows; the old-type ‘recitation’; the unnatural formality between teacher and pupil, the use of mechanistic words and devices as ‘class rise!’ ‘class pass!’; the lack of enriching materials, such as reading books and out-of-doors material, all suggesting a type of school-keeping that still exists (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 379).

Nearly all school personnel failed to understand the underlying principles of human behavior, much less Native Americans. Punishments of the most harmful nature were bestowed through sheer ignorance, and many may have construed these punishments as sincere attempts to help discipline the Indian, but in reality, punishment is arbitrary and cruel. Teaching methods in Indian schools need to be modernized, less formal and take into account the student home environment (Meriam et al., 1928).

Routinization is the one method used for everything; though all that we know indicates its weakness as a method in education. If there were any real knowledge of how human beings are developed through their behavior, we should not have in the Indian boarding schools the mass movements from dormitory to dining room, from dining room to classroom, from classroom back again, all completely controlled by external authority; we should hardly have children from the smallest to the

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largest of both sexes lined up in military formation; and we would certainly find a better way of handling boys and girls than to lock the door to the fire-escape of the girls' dormitory (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 382).

The Meriam report found deplorable health conditions at most of the schools they visited. Buildings were old, over crowded, and unsanitary, with condemned, out-of-date boilers and machinery. The nutritional values of the meals were extremely poor. There was not enough milk sufficient to give children anything like the official "standard" of a quart per child per day, and almost no fresh fruits. This diet resulted in serious malnutrition. The schoolrooms had poor lighting and ventilation, no recreational opportunities, and abnormally long days, which cuts to a dangerous point, the normal allowance for sleep and rest, especially for small children (Meriam, 1928). Finally...

The generally routinized nature of the institutional life with its formalism in classrooms, its marching and dress parades, its annihilation of initiative, its lack of beauty, its almost complete negation of normal family life, all of which have disastrous effects upon mental health and the development of wholesome personality: These are some of the conditions that make even the best classroom teaching of health ineffective. (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 383)

It went on to say, "For the nation as a nation to depend upon weak little denominational schools to bear the burden of elementary schooling for Indian children is inexcusable." The report indicated that some mission schools were decidedly worse than government schools and should be as quickly as possible abolished or merged with stronger and more promising institutions.

The Meriam report says, "The boarding schools demand special consideration" (Meriam et al., 1928, p. 33). The boarding school policy was one of the most destructive and inhumane acts committed by the U. S. government against Native Americans; therefore, many studies were conducted on this topic. One study found this disturbing

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statement from the boarding school era, “Let all that is Indian within you die! ... You cannot become truly American citizens, industrious, intelligent, cultured, civilized until the INDIAN within you is DEAD” (Adams, 1995, p.274).

#### *Indian Citizenship Act*

In 1884 when John Elk, an Indian, filed a lawsuit charging the state of Nebraska with violating his Fourteenth Amendment rights by refusing him the right to vote. Elk argued that, as an Indian born in the United States, he was a U.S. citizen and therefore, a state citizen. The Supreme Court ruled that Nebraska was correct in denying John Elk the right to vote. Indians, the Court ruled, were not American citizens, but members of a distinct and alien nation. Their allegiance was not to the United States, but to their tribe (O’Brien, 1989).

Indians’ right to vote in elections did not come about until after World War I, and only after many Indian men served in active duty for the war effort even though they were not considered U. S. citizens. In 1924, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act which provided that, tribal members did not lose their tribal citizenship or rights when they became American citizens. Instead, Indians are citizens of three sovereigns – the United States, the state in which they are residents, and their tribe – and they have the rights and privileges of each. When the Indian Citizenship Act was voted into law in 1924, many Indian tribes were still operating under their traditional form of government. The modern tribal government, for most tribes, did not come about until after 1934.

#### *Indian Reorganization Act*

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 had three main advantages for Indians: (a) it stopped the allotment process (allotting of tracts of land to Indian families living off

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reservations); (b) it ended the loss of Indian lands; and (c) it re-established tribal governments (O'Brien, 1989). It is this third advantage that provided the tribes with their current form of government.

According to McDonald (2001), Section 16 of the Indian Reorganization Act authorized constitution-making, stating that any tribe (or tribes) "residing on the same reservation" has the right to ...

... organize for its common welfare and may adopt an appropriate constitution and bylaws, which shall become effective when ratified by a majority vote of all adult members of the tribe, or of the adult Indians residing on such reservation, as the case may be, at a special election authorized and called by the Secretary of the Interior under such rules and regulations as he may prescribe." (Rusco, 2000)

The restored self-government of the "Indian Reorganization Act tribes" was not full-blown. Restraints of time and funds resulted in the expedient adoption of tribal constitutions patterned closely on a model document prepared by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Lopach, 1989). With the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, tribal governments were formed and tribal elections were being held. When the tribes were given the right to establish tribal governments, it also gave them the right to determine how these governments would operate, including, but not limited to, electoral mechanisms for tribal members (McDonald, 2001).

Prior to the coming of the Europeans, government among traditional Indian cultures made little distinction between the religious and political world. Political decisions were made with spiritual guidance and served to fulfill both political and spiritual needs (O'Brien, 1989). Harmony among all elements: the land, the people, and plant life, was/is an important value among Native Americans. People were/are not considered superior to other living beings; most tribes believed (and many still believe)

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everything in the universe was related and had a soul, a spirit. In traditional tribal governments, the authority resided in the people; the leaders only lead when the people wanted to follow. In this classless society, government was highly decentralized and democratic (Meyer, 1993).

The typical tribal government is modeled after large city governments but they have much more authority (Gagnon, 2003). Most reservation governments have tribal councils or tribal business councils elected by the tribal members. The make up of tribal councils varies from reservation to reservation, but the majority of them have a tribal Chairperson overseeing the rest of the council. Tribal governments often grant educational institutions more autonomy than other tribal entities. Through tribal governments, tribal colleges are granted charters to operate (McDonald, 2002). Decisions made by tribal college governing boards are not usually overturned by tribal governments.

#### *Study on Immigrants and Involuntary Minorities*

Until now, research has been focused on the cultural differences between Native Americans, the U. S. Government, and the general public, and how these differences prevented Native Americans from succeeding in the mainstream school system. Native Americans are not the only minority in the United States. The largest minority groups: Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, as well as a host of other smaller groups, all face similar barriers as Native Americans. Gibson and Ogbu (1991) compiled a volume of papers on the subject and titled it, *Minority Status and Schooling: A Comparative Study of Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities*.

...this volume addresses the central question of why some minority groups do relatively well in school, in spite of facing substantial barriers related to

such factors as their different cultures and languages, the prejudiced attitudes of the dominant group toward minority and unequal access to jobs, while other minorities confronting similar barriers do far less well in school. (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. ix)

In a nutshell, Gibson and Ogbu (1991) asserted that there were two types of minorities in the United States, immigrant minorities and involuntary minorities. Immigrant minorities are those that came to this country voluntarily, looking for a better life. They accepted hardships, barriers, and prejudice because they wanted to become part of the mainstream. They came to this country because they believed that the move would lead to economic well being, better overall opportunities, and/or greater political freedom. These immigrants appeared to interpret the economic, political and social barriers against them as temporary problems that they would or could overcome with the passage of time, hard work, and/or more education. Such immigrants accepted marginal jobs because they felt that they were still better off than they would have been in their own country. Therefore, they tended to explore economic resources and niches not wanted by members of the dominant group or other members of their host society (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

The immigrants appear to rationalize and to acquiesce to the prejudice and discrimination against them by saying, for example, that they are strangers in a foreign land and have no choice but to tolerate prejudice and discrimination as a price worth paying in order to achieve the goals of their emigration (Gibson & Suarez-Orozco, 1991, p. 13).

Involuntary minorities are those who were forced to become part of the American society through slavery, conquest or colonization. They usually resented the loss of their former freedom, and they perceived the social, political and economic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). This “undeserved oppression” led involuntary minorities to differ from the immigrant minorities in their

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perceptions of chances for success in mainstream society. They interpreted the economic, social and political barriers against them differently than immigrant minorities. The biggest difference was they did not see their situation as temporary; on the contrary, they interpreted the discrimination against them as permanent and institutionalized, which led them to them to develop what Gibson and Ogbu called “oppositional identity.” They believed they could not expect to be treated like members of the dominant group regardless of their individual differences in ability, training or education, regardless of differences in place of origin or residence, and regardless of differences in economic status or physical appearance (Green, 1981). Furthermore, involuntary minorities knew they could not easily escape from their birth-ascribed membership in a subordinate and disparaged group by “passing” or by returning to a “homeland” (De Vos, 1967; Ogbu, 1984). Finally, involuntary minorities distrusted members of the dominant group and the societal institutions controlled by the latter. This was especially true of Native Americans. Native Americans did not trust schools to provide their children with a good education. Unlike the immigrants, Native Americans find no justification for the prejudice or discrimination that they experience against them in school and society other than the fact that they are “Indian.” Furthermore, Native Americans, unlike the immigrants, see the prejudice and discrimination against them as institutionalized and enduring. Beginning with the earliest attempts to educate them, Native Americans believed discrimination against them was institutionalized, and that it was not going to be eliminated entirely by getting an education (Ogbu, 1982). Unlike the immigrants, Native American students did not interpret the cultural and language differences they

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encountered in school as barriers they had to overcome and did not, apparently, make concerted efforts to overcome them.

Rather, they interpret the cultural and language differences as markers of identity to be maintained. Moreover, they do not appear to make a clear distinction, as the immigrants do, between what they have to learn or do in order to succeed in school (such as learning the standard language and the standard behavior practices of the school) and the dominant-group's cultural frame of reference (which may be seen as the cultural frame of reference of their "oppressors"). (*Refr*, p. 26)

This attitude, on the part of involuntary minorities, often leads to a dilemma, they have to choose between academic success or maintaining their minority cultural frame of reference and identity – a choice that does not arise for the immigrants.

Involuntary minorities have a deep distrust for members of the dominant group in society and a distrust for the schools that this dominant group controls more than immigrant minorities do because the former lack the advantage of the dual frame of reference that allows the immigrants to compare the schools they now attend with the schools they knew back home. Instead, involuntary minorities compare their schools with those of the dominant group and conclude that theirs are inferior because they are minorities (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

Having concluded that their schools and education are inferior, they divert their emotion and efforts in a continual quest for 'better schools and better education.' The message is also communicated to children quite early that the schools they attend and the education they are receiving are inferior, a message that contributes to the development of distrust for the system (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 28).

Gibson and Ogbu's (1991) book contained a section solely dedicated to the Ute Tribe of Utah. As with most tribes, Utes have been exposed to the American educational system through private, church-run, schools or federally funded schools located on the reservation, boarding schools and the state public school system. The free public

Longie

educational system of Utah has served Utes since 1952, but has produced relatively few Ute high school graduates. Utes perceive the school district and the schools as generally hostile to their children and as a system, nearly unassailable. This perception is based on a history of long-standing grievances between Utes and neighboring non-Indians, on the racist attitudes of many non-Indians, and on the differing values and expectations held by Utes and the public schools (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 287). The Utes also view the schools as agents of assimilation. They are viewed, therefore, as a threatening rather than a beneficial force in the lives of Ute children. Fred A. Conetah (1982, p. 130), the Ute tribe historian, noted, "one issue that was particularly troublesome for the People was the efforts of federal officials to educate Ute children." Utes opposed and resented the notion of their children being taught "white ways," and most refused to send their children to school until the second decade of this century (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). Teachers' negative attitudes have often dominated the Indian child's school experience and hindered academic achievement (Berry, 1969, p. 34). James Coleman et al. (1966) found, for example, that in the mid-1960s one quarter of all public school teachers preferred not to teach American Indian children.

Cultural differences between Utes and the people who operated the schools were a frequent cause of friction between the groups. This was most noticeable in the manner each group viewed awards. For example, the school recognized students who "came in first" whether it was grades, or athletics. "Ute parents could not comprehend this; they believed that awards were deserved by those who tried the hardest in every class or in every game, regardless of the final grade or score" (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 297).

400 years of failure

Clearly, the dominant group's values that promoted production and competition were at odds with tribal values that encouraged process and personal commitment.

According to Gibson & Ogbu (1991), American Indian tribes cannot be compared to other ethnic minorities because American Indians stand to lose their culture by integration into the larger society. Christensen and Demmert (1978) urged tribes to take legal and moral responsibility for their children's education by exercising control over school boards, approval of curricula, and if necessary, by establishing separate schools.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Right reinforces Christensen and Demmert's advice:

Politically, other minorities started with nothing and attempted to obtain a voice in the existing economic and political structure. Indians started with everything and have gradually lost much of what they had to advancing alien civilization. ... Indian tribes have always been separate political entities interested in maintaining their own institutions and beliefs.... So while other minorities have sought integration into the larger society, much of Indian society is motivated to retain its political and cultural separateness. (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1981, pp. 32-33)

Unknowingly, Tribal Colleges leaders may have been familiar with Gibson & Ogbu's (1991) concepts of involuntary minorities and immigrants. They expect their students to perpetuate their respective Indian societies, not the American society at large, and they promote that the most viable political and economic position for Indian tribes is to co-exist with American society, not enter into it (AIHEC, 1999).