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Indigenous Boarding Schools in the United States: Why Would Such Institutions Exist?

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Indigenous Boarding Schools in the United States: Why Would Such Institutions Exist?

By:

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Abstract

Native Americans have a complex relationship with the United States government. Ever since the first European settlers arrived in the Americas, Native American lifestyle and culture began to dissipate. Native Americans have had their culture, identity, traditions and language disrespected by the U.S. government. Every treaty Native Americans ever entered with the U.S. government has been broken by the U.S. government. One of the most momentous periods in the relationship between Native Americans and the federal government involves the creation of residential boarding schools. These schools were developed to “civilize” Native American children. Prior research has examined the consequences of the creation of these boarding schools, as well as what students experienced throughout this era of assimilation. What hasn’t been thoroughly examined are the factors that contributed to the creation of residential boarding schools and the assimilation era by the U.S. government in the 19th century. Using historical methodology this thesis explores the factors that contributed to the establishment of these boarding schools in order to gain a more complete understanding of this time period and why the federal government undertook these actions. I have found that political, economic, cultural and religious factors contributed to the establishment of government funded residential boarding schools.

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I. Introduction

Native Americans have a complex relationship with the United States government. Ever since the first European settlers arrived in the Americas, Native American lifestyle and culture began to dissolve. To try and understand the complex relationship and history between the Native Americans and the United States government, we must acknowledge a momentous period in which the government created and implemented residential boarding schools. During the 19th century the beliefs and feelings about what was wanted for a common American culture, and the belief of the Indigenous peoples by the White man led to the U.S. government funding residential boarding schools. The government funded residential boarding school system in the United States was created to civilize the Indigenous peoples who were perceived as savages. The U.S. government did this by removing Native children from their reservations to educate them, to be assimilated into the dominant white culture of the United States. Most scholarship about the residential boarding school system focuses on the psychological impact on the children who attended these schools as well as on the overall experience children had while at these institutions. This thesis asks, what factors led to the creation of government funded residential boarding schools in the United States in the 19th century? Using historical methodology to examine primary and secondary sources this thesis analyzes what factors led to the creation of government funded boarding schools, as well as how these findings can raise new questions for scholars to explore in further research. This paper includes a background section, a review of the scholarly literature, a theoretical framework, data collection and methodology, findings and analysis, and a conclusion.

II. Background

In the United States there were around 350 government funded residential boarding schools between the late 1860s and the 1960s; the majority being off-reservation institutions and others were on reservations. Government funded residential boarding schools were not the first institution to experiment with “civilizing” Indigenous tribes but were an extension of boarding schools that were funded by Christian Missionaries and denominations in hopes of not only civilizing Indigenous people, but also converting them to Christianity. There were also boarding schools that were funded by the U.S. government, while being run by churches and Christian Missionaries. For both sets of institutions, whether they were funded by the U.S. government or by Christian Missionaries, the end goal was to rid Native Americans of their indigenous identity. The church run boarding schools were targeted towards Native Americans of all ages, as opposed to government funded residential boarding schools which targeted Native children and youth, as it would be easier to shape and mold their minds into assimilating to the dominant culture of the United States. One of the reasons for doing this was to solve “the Indian problem and question.”¹ The Indian question and problem began once settlers and European immigrants began to emigrate to the United States, the increase of colonization and conflict was a result of the demand and need for land for and by the white settlers. However, the land was Indigenous territory, thus this led to the Indian problem. Native Americans were perceived as primitives, savages, and a threat to United States, being that the Indigenous peoples’ identity, culture, and traditions conflicted with American individualism and nationalism.

¹ David Adams Wallace, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 7.

One of the first government funded residential boarding schools was created by Captain Richard Henry Pratt. Pratt can be remembered for his infamous quote, “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”² Before the commencement of the residential boarding schools, Captain Pratt took it upon himself to experiment with Native American prisoners in the Fort Marion Prison in St. Augustine, Florida in 1875.³ Seventy-two Native Americans were taken as prisoners following the Southern Plains Indian Wars; they were seen as the “worst” prisoners in Fort Still, Oklahoma.⁴ It is important to note they were viewed as the “worst prisoners” because they murdered Western settlers, however, one could view this as defending their land from invaders. Pratt believed that if he could educate and civilize these prisoners, he could do the same with all Indigenous peoples. “Captain Pratt’s approach was one of the beginnings of a systematic effort to educate the Indians.”⁵ Pratt cut their hair, surveilled them, dressed them in uniforms, as well as gave them books to draw, write, and taught them how to read, write and speak in English, with the help of the sisters of St. Joseph who volunteered to educate the Native prisoners. But the question to also keep in mind is, do the ends justify the means? To have killed off the Indian in them to save the man, what is left? Three years later in 1878, the prisoners were released. Following the “success” in this experiment, Captain Pratt proposed to the Secretary of the Interior to re-make the Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania to be solely an Indian boarding school. In 1887,

² *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), 46–59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–271.

³ Sarah Kathryn Pitcher Hayes, “The Experiment at Fort Marion: Richard Henry Pratt’s Recreation of Penitential Regimes at the Old Fort and Its Influence on American Indian Education,” *Journal of Florida Studies* 1, no. 7 (2018): 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Congress enacted a bill to put the Carlisle Indian Industrial School into effect. Government funded residential boarding schools were placed throughout the United States. The boarding schools were in Arizona, California, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Washington, North Carolina, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and other states.⁶ It is estimated that over sixty thousand Native youth from different tribes were sent to residential boarding schools. The end goal of these schools was to assimilate all Indigenous peoples, but the main targets were the children, as it would be easier to rid them of their identity, culture, and heritage.

III. Review of the Literature

Though current and past scholars agree that the driving force in the European colonization of Native Americans was a superior based ideology, there has been a broadening debate on the factors that contributed to the Native American colonization. Much of the scholarship available has explored the idea of superiority and keeping control and power of the United States but has not explicitly shown other factors which contributed to the creation of residential boarding schools. The literature available does not combine the political, economic, cultural, and religious factors to explain why the government funded residential boarding schools were initially created.

In 1983 Robert A. Trewnert published a journal article entitled “From Carlisle to Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of the Indian Outing System, 1878-1930,” in which he examines the first goal of the “Indian Outing System” created by Captain Richard Henry Pratt, and what the actual outcome was. The Outing System was a program created to expose the Native children and youth to

⁶ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1887* Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., [1887] v.: fold. maps; 23 cm.

'civilized' Americans, to show them what it meant to be an American citizen, and what these ideas meant. However, the Indian Outing system became a reform policy and was seen as a 'humane' way of solving the Indian problem. Trennert then details a group of people named "The Friends of the Indian," who showed the white savior complex, as they passionately believed that Americans were the superior race and had an obligation to civilize the Natives. To justify their beliefs, the Friends of the Indians believed the only way to save the Native Americans was to get them one by one and Americanize them completely; they saw this as justice for the first nations. The white savior complex can be noted as the modernized version of the White Man's Burden that Rudyard Kipling wrote about in 1899. Throughout the scholarship there are common themes recognized by different authors that include the white man's burden, the white savior complex, as well as assimilation and the psychological impacts of the students that attended government funded residential boarding schools. The major theme within this text implies that the Indian Outing System was diverted from its original purpose and became used as a method to dominate whatever independence native youth had left. The Indian Outing System was implemented to Americanize the native youth by being sent to the homes of white families during the summer to work, promote individualism, and to rid them of their egalitarian and communal approaches that were common features of their native culture and heritage.⁷

Similarly, Lomawaima K. Tsianina wrote "Domesticity in the Federal Indian Schools: The Power of Authority over Mind and Body," in 1993, and the focus of this work explained the federal education policy, the ways the native students would resist and undermine these policies, and

⁷ Robert A. Trennert, "From Carlisle to Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of the Indian Outing System, 1878-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 3 (1983): 267-8.

how the federal policy was implemented throughout the courses of these institutions. Lomawaima details the federal policies that were explicitly aimed towards the girls and explains how both sexes experienced different challenges due to such policies. The main emphasis of this work was to illustrate how the students resisted this domestic training that was created to show the power the federal government held within residential boarding schools. Regardless of the challenges these students faced, we can see that they resisted being stripped of their native identity and culture. The students faced consequences by showing resistance, as this was considered intolerable in the eyes of the administrators. This can be regarded as another theme throughout the literature, holding power and authority over the native students. One cannot say the administrators of such institutions expected this type of civil disobedience from the students, as they were either seen as incapable of being civilized or seen as capable of being assimilated by using education as a method to do so. Robert A. Trenergert and Lomawaima K. Tsianina share one common topic which is the government and administrators of the residential boarding schools exuded the white savior complex as well as holding power over the students to make them feel inferior. Likewise, Tsianina explains the same concept of the native students being domesticated during their time in the boarding schools which held power over their whole being. The Indigenous students were forced to lose their native tongue, culture, traditions, and appearances; for this to be carried out, it meant having a tight grip on the students' minds and bodies. In addition to making the students feel inferior, it was not a coincidence that the boarding schools were off reservations. The off-reservation government funded boarding schools were purposely created to not only civilize and educate Native American youth, but to also keep them separated from their families, from their tribes, and their reservations. The Indian Outing System was never intended

to be a fun way to get the native students to work for themselves, but it was a ploy to get them to be subservient. To be domesticated is to be tamed, to listen without questioning authority, by taking away the power from the students, the government would also be solving their Indian problem, and would carry out their goals of civilizing the students by making them feel inferior.⁸

In “Boarding School Abuses, Human Rights, and Reparations,” Andrea Smith explores the origins of the off-reservation residential boarding schools that were first created by Christian missionaries to 'civilize' the Indigenous tribes. These schools were more geared towards all native peoples as opposed to when the United States government began their boarding schools, which targeted native children. The reason behind this was that the government believed that it would be easier to shape the children's lives and minds, as well as it would be easier to rid of their indigenous heritage as opposed to the adults who were already set in their ways of life.⁹ Again, we can see a clear connection between the previous literature written in the early 1980s and in the early 1990s. Smith inevitably describes why native children were targeted; this is to maintain power over what the children learned while at these institutions. Being secluded from their reservations and tribes meant promoting individualism as well as conforming to the dominant white society of the United States. Through the repetitive cycle and pattern of controlling the narrative of the native children's lives meant that there would be no room for their indigenous identity and culture.

⁸ Tsianina K. Lomawaima, "Domesticity in the Federal Indian Schools: The Power of Authority over Mind and Body," *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 2 (1993): 227.

⁹ Andrea, Smith, "Boarding School Abuses, Human Rights, and Reparations," *Social Justice* 31, no. 4 (98) (2004): 89-90.

The article “Art, Craft, and Assimilation: Curriculum for Native Students during the Boarding School Era,” written by Kevin Slivka in 2011 explores the intentions of the United States government about the creation of residential boarding schools. Slivka explores the intricate deculturization systems of Native American boarding schools, arguing that through art education, the United States government was able to normalize their unjustifiable presence on the continent and their actions. Slivka furthers his points through a historical tracing on how using art as a means of assimilation for young Native children became a staple of the colonizer's agenda which tried to normalize Native subordination. These tactics were strategically placed to control their minds, actions, and future, as they were said to become American patriots, regardless of this ploy, the students were being used as laborers and farmers.¹⁰ Smith and Slivka both argue the successful oppressive model led to boarding schools eventually developing a monopolization on forced Native manual labor which bolstered a booming American market.¹¹

In 2013 Lesley Keck and Susan Jans-Thomas published a journal article entitled “Federal Off-Reservation Boarding School: Political Economy, ID, and Practical Challenges of Educating the American Indian,” in which they explore the significance of the American way and ideology. This article covers the crossing over between 19th century political economy and the pervasive American ideology of white supremacy, and how together they created an environment that promoted deculturization and increased structural barriers for Native Americans. The authors detail the significant cultural differences between the Native Americans and the United States political

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kevin, Slivka, "Art, Craft, and Assimilation: Curriculum for Native Students during the Boarding School Era," *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 3 (2011): 236.

agenda.¹² Also, there is a brief yet substantial look at the goal of the reeducation centers with a detailed focus on the boarding schools' curriculum, enforced dress code, and cultural reprogramming. This literature argues that a culture of white supremacy that justified its actions with Anglo European Protestantism and a globally developing market for American goods drove the United States to tighten its policy on Native American communities.

Despite these structural barriers purposely placed for the purpose of deculturizing the Native student's life, there came resistance as noted in Lomawaima's journal article in 1993. There are also similarities in "A Landscape of Assimilation and Resistance: The Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School," written by Sarah Surface-Evans in 2016. Surface-Evans details the native students' resistance towards the United States government's method of forced assimilation. Surface-Evans states that one of the main goals of these institutions was to produce Native American young adults into working in mainstream society as farm and domestic laborers. Surface-Evans examines the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School using oral and archaeological history to describe the methods used at this boarding school, and how the students challenged the administrators and staff. Surface-Evans then goes on to explain the three ways in which internal colonization was prevalent in the Indigenous people's education. These ways are patriarchal, domestic, and gender/sexual colonialism.¹³ The internal colonization not only repressed Native youth from their culture and identity, but it also created a power dynamic that began from the Fort Marion Prison experiment led by Captain Richard Henry Pratt in 1875.

¹² Lesley Keck and Susan Jans-Thomas, "Federal Off-Reservation Boarding School: Political Economy, ID, and Practical Challenges of Educating the American Indian," University of West Florida, (2013): 438-39.

¹³ Sarah L. Surface Evans, "A Landscape of Assimilation and Resistance: The Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 20, no. 3 (2016): 575.

Sarah Kathryn Pitcher Hayes wrote “The Experiment at Fort Marion: Richard Henry Pratt’s Recreation of Penitential Regimes at the Old Fort and Its Influence on American Indian Education,” in 2018 in which she explores what occurred throughout the experiment on seventy-two Native prisoners from 1875 through 1878. A reoccurring theme throughout all the literature reviewed is the Indian problem and question that was meant to be solved using education and civilization. Pitcher details the consequences following the experiment Captain Richard Henry Pratt conducted on seventy-two Indigenous prisoners at Fort Marion. Hayes explains this experiment was conducted to determine whether or not Indigenous peoples could be civilized and educated, as they were considered to be ‘savages’ and primitive peoples by the United States government. Pitcher details that even though this was a makeshift prison with Indigenous captives, the captives were being constantly surveilled to show the power they held. Captain Richard Henry Pratt believed that through manual labor and using the English language, this would in turn help the indigenous captives become civilized and would solve the ‘Indian problem.’ The Indian problem began during the western expansion period, because the White man believed that the Indigenous peoples were interfering with their ‘right’ to land and resources.¹⁴

While the earlier literature examines the consequences of these boarding schools and what challenges the Native children faced, author David Wallace Adams examines the boarding school era in his book, *American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. Adams. He illustrates the reforms, models, and Native American education system that was created to strip Indigenous children of their identity. Not only does he use Native and non-native scholar's per-

¹⁴ Sarah Kathryn, Pitcher Hayes, "The Experiment at Fort Marion: Richard Henry Pratt’s Recreation of Penitential Regimes at the Old Fort and Its Influence on American Indian Education,” *Journal of Florida Studies* 1, no. 7 (2018): 2-3.

spectives, but he also explains what the boarding school experience entailed. Adams explains the aggressive approach to Americanize native children and explores Captain Richard Henry Pratt's mindset that any person could be educated and civilized, but the way this was done reflected racist ideologies.¹⁵ Adams also details the psychological imprint these institutions left on the children who attended these residential boarding schools.

Reviewing the literature dating back to 1983 through 2020 has given similar insights about what the boarding school experience involved, as well as has given further knowledge on the historical background on how government residential boarding schools began. However, the scholarship does not explain what led to the creation of such boarding schools in the United States. The gap in the literature is that the scholarship has not explained what factors led to the creation of residential boarding schools. There is extensive literature that explores the boarding school experience as well as the multifaceted relationship between the United States government and Native Americans. However, the literature does not comprehensively examine the political, cultural, economic, and religious factors that led to the creation of residential boarding schools. Only through an analysis of these factors can a more thorough understanding of why the United States government created and funded residential boarding schools be accomplished.

IV. Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses critical race theory to examine the factors that led to the creation of government-funded residential boarding schools in the United States in the 19th century. Critical race theory is used to understand the structures of settler colonialism. Critical race theory studies

¹⁵ David Adams Wallace, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 2.

and questions the dynamics of racism, race, and power.¹⁶ Critical race theory examines how social structures, cultural factors, and ideologies create certain social problems and addresses how to liberate and dismantle power structures that have historically oppressed certain groups of people. This social theory tries to enact change through its theoretical perspective, it is a “...decades-long response from people who have been historically shut out in all corners of American society.”¹⁷ I use critical race theory to show how government-funded residential boarding schools were purposely created and used to oppress Indigenous children and youth in the 19th century. The most prominent scholars of critical race theory are Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Alan Freeman.¹⁸ Critical race theory is useful for examining this thesis’s question because it will show that the United States government has not only oppressed Indigenous peoples but also internally colonized them for their gain. Government-funded residential boarding schools were created to assimilate and ‘kill the Indian’ by any means necessary, through this oppression and colonization Indigenous youth and children were forced to rid of their culture. This form of colonization was used to assimilate Indigenous children to the dominant white culture of the United States in the 19th century. Indigenous children were shut out and marginalized from taking part in their own culture and traditions by the United States government as they forced the children to attend residential boarding institutions to assimilate them.

¹⁶ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 3.

¹⁷ Fabiola Cineas, “Critical Race Theory, and Trump's War on It, Explained,” *Vox*, September 24, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/9/24/21451220/critical-race-theory-diversity-training-trump>.

¹⁸ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 4.

By using this theoretical framework, one can begin to understand how government-funded institutions were inherently racist and classist towards the indigenous peoples of the United States,¹⁹ Even though critical race theory focuses on the systemic oppression of minorities, this theory can demonstrate that the nature of government-funded residential boarding schools oppressed indigenous peoples by ridding them of their native culture and life.

The separation between the Indigenous children and their culture is the oppression that was created and perpetuated by the United States government through residential boarding schools. Delgado et al state that critical writers “.... have drawn attention to the ways the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labor market.”²⁰ This correlates with the notion that native youth were expected to become laborers and farmers after completing their education in residential boarding schools. In the 19th century, Indigenous peoples were viewed as savages and uncivilized; due to this common mindset and belief, Indigenous peoples were set to be assimilated into the white culture. In addition to this belief, there was another conflicting mindset about Indigenous peoples; some believed they were too savage to become citizens and patriots of the United States while others believed they could be saved from their ‘savage ways.’ Despite having different mindsets, the consequences were still the same as they harmed Indigenous peoples so poorly that it caused a hidden genocide in the United States.

¹⁹ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 87.

²⁰ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 10.

A theme of critical race theory is the idea “that race and races are products of social thought and relations...races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.”²¹ The increase of white settlers and colonizers in the United States is linked with the decrease in the Native American population. Due to this increase of white settlers, there was a need and demand for land and resources by the settlers, however, the land belonged to the Native peoples.²² This is where the ‘Indian problem’ and ‘Indian question’ arose. What was the United States government do with the natives when the settlers demanded their land? For this research, one can distinguish two main actors: The United States government and the Indigenous peoples. The United States government and society regarded Indigenous peoples as dirty, savages, uncivilized, and more. They categorized all the Indigenous peoples as one ‘race’ and determined they were all unfit and were to be expecting their demise and extinction at any time. The United States government and white society exuded the white savior complex and in their own accord decided they had the moral responsibility and obligation to ‘save’ the natives from themselves.

The United States government exercised its control by creating residential boarding schools. They were created for a plethora of reasons; one was to make Indigenous children feel inferior for merely being Indigenous. The power dynamics of these institutions relied on the subordination of the native children, while the government was the dominating actor that instilled internal colonialism through residential boarding schools. So, the United States government has

²¹ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 9.

²² David Adams Wallace, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 7-10.

always had power over the land, resources, and even the peoples of the United States. From this superiority comes the racial hierarchy of America; the white people will stay at the top of the ladder and falling underneath them would be every other person of color and minority.²³ Critical race theory has established that there is ongoing and systemic racism engrained within the United States government. This thesis argues that the U.S. government funded residential boarding schools to establish dominance over Indigenous children, which led them to become assimilated into the dominant white culture of the 19th century, by removing them from their culture, traditions, and lifestyle.

V. Methodology and Data Collection

Upon researching the history of government-funded residential boarding schools, I came across two primary sources to aid in this research. The primary sources used include: The Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1891 and the Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections at the Nineteenth Annual Session Held in Denver, Colorado from June 23-29, 1892. The secondary sources include peer reviewed journal articles and books.

The historical method uses the themes of change over time, context, causality, contingency, and complexity to understand historical events. Collectively these themes are known as the 5 C's of history.²⁴ Each concept of the historical methodology is used to understand momentous events of the past. Using historical methodology, this thesis examines factors that led to residential boarding schools being created and funded by the United States government. Change

²³ Roy L. Brooks, "Critical Race Theory," in *Racial Justice in the Age of Obama*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2009), 95.

²⁴ Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?," *AHA Perspectives*, (January 2007): 1-3.

overtime is examines the selective process in terms of historical events, referring to not being taught important historical events that may challenge the power structures of the United States government. Change over time also refers to exploring and teaching the changes that have occurred in the past, this can be “...represented in different ways as political power, economic structures, and cultural influences,”²⁵ which can show individuals in understanding “...the differences that time makes.”²⁶ Supplying context is to set the stage before answering what factors led to the creation of government-funded residential boarding schools in the United States in the 19th century. To answer this research question, the narrative in terms of past events in history that influenced the United States government to create these institutions needs to be established. Causality involves arguing the causes of historical events and why they occurred. Based on the same process of causality, I show correlations between these four factors and their linkage to the creation of residential boarding institutions. In historical methodology, contingency “... is to claim that every historical outcome depends upon a number of prior conditions; that each of these prior conditions depends, in turn, upon still other conditions; and so on.” Complexity in historical methodology is, “...understanding of how past worlds functioned and blind us to how myths of rosy pasts do political and cultural work in the present.” Complexity is used to understand the multifaceted history of government funded residential boarding schools, and to make sense of these events as they occurred.²⁷

VI. Findings and Analysis

²⁵ Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, “What Does It Mean to Think Historically?,” *AHA Perspectives*, (January 2007): 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The U.S. government created and perpetuated the oppression of Native American culture through residential boarding schools. Government-funded residential boarding schools were created to assimilate and 'kill the Indian' by any means necessary. Through this oppression and colonization Indigenous youth and children were forced to abandon their culture. This form of colonization was used to assimilate Indigenous children to the dominant white culture of the United States in the 19th century. Indigenous children were shut out and marginalized from taking part in their own culture and traditions by the United States government as they forced the children to attend residential boarding institutions. These residential boarding schools were an attempt to assimilate them into white society, culture, and customs. Using primary and secondary sources this thesis examines the political, economic, cultural, and religious factors that contributed to the adoption this policy by the government of the United States in the 19th century. To begin this analysis, it is important to define what is meant by political, economic, cultural, and religious factors.

Political factors include the United States being a hegemony and asserting their dominance over the Indigenous populations in the 19th century. In addition to the political factors, the United States government implemented these institutions for economic gain. The Native American way of life directly conflicted with American individualism and the free market as the natives valued communal ownership of property and were egalitarian in their lifestyle. The assimilation of Indigenous peoples meant a boost for the economy as the native children were also trained and expected to become laborers and farmers after their time at the boarding schools. The final two factors I have examined are religious and cultural factors. Despite the fact that there is separation of church and state in the U.S., the U.S. government gave Christian missionaries money to educate

Native American children. The first residential boarding schools were created by Christian missionaries. These schools were led by Christian missionaries and were funded by the United States government. There were also government established and funded residential boarding schools. Regardless of which actor led these institutions, it was the same end goal to rid the natives of their identity and culture, to preserve the American way of life. The cultural factors include the concepts of the white man's burden, the white savior complex, as well as the Western Expansion movement that was an aggressive approach in removing the natives from their land.

The United States gained power by dominating the native populations. Residential boarding schools were one way the United States was able to dominate. Other political factors include the use of the military to remove and move native peoples out of their reservations, treaties and bills written and passed to “educate” and “civilize” the natives, to assimilate them into the dominant white culture of the United States. “Living a Stone Age existence, Indians could never withstand the never-ending onslaught of white settlement. Furthermore, the tide of progress could not be stopped.”²⁸ The only options left for Natives were to either be assimilated, or to go extinct, as the forces of the United States had increased each time a white settler came to the United States. Chris Mato Nunpa also found that “...by the mid-19th century, U.S. policy makers and military commanders were stating—openly, frequently, and in plain English—that their objective was no less than the ‘complete extermination’ of any Native People who resisted being dispossessed of their lands, subordinated to federal authority, and assimilated into the colonizing culture.”²⁹ To

²⁸ David Adams Wallace, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 2.

²⁹ Chris Mato Nunpa, “Historical Amnesia: The “Hidden Genocide” and Destruction of the Indigenous Peoples of the United States,” In *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, edited by Hinton Alexander Laban, La Point Thomas, and Irvin-Erickson Douglas (Rutgers University Press, 2014): 96.

have dispossessed and displaced the indigenous peoples from their land and to assimilate them into the white culture of the United States demonstrates the political power the U.S. government had; not only did every treaty they signed with the natives get broken, but scholars also argue this was a hidden genocide of indigenous peoples.³⁰ The United States government also adopted official policies that furthered their power.

The United States government created the Bureau of Indian Affairs within the Department of the Interior in 1824. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was created to better the quality of life of the Indigenous peoples. “The BIA appointed agents, paid annuities, distributed supplies, and administered relations with Indians.”³¹ As per the BIA, one of their roles is to create reports based on residential boarding schools. One of the primary sources that best shows the reasons for why residential boarding schools were created was the Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1891. This document presents detailed insights and knowledge on the Indian policies placed and why they were placed. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs also reports back on findings from government funded residential boarding schools. There are ten themes within the Indian policy that state:

(1) Comprehensiveness. It is important that any theory shall rest primarily upon a careful induction of all pertinent facts...They represent a great number of distinct phases of human development...Some are yet very degraded, living a mere animal life with few of the characteristics of humanity, while others have already become absorbed into our national life and are not distinguishable from their fellow citizens.

(2) Definiteness of aim. If it were the purpose of the Government to terminate the Indians by violence, or to leave them to shift for themselves under such circumstances that their

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Steven Sabol, *The Touch of Civilization: Comparing American and Russian Internal Colonization*, (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2017), 178.

destruction would be only a question of time, this purpose would necessarily determine legislation and administration.

(3) Clearness of outline. In the process of elevating a rude and barbarous people to the plane of civilization there is involved a combination of many forces- heredity, tradition, soil, climate, food supply, and the needs of surrounding civilization. There are also involved the great forces of legislation, administration, and institutions- such as industrial schools and missionary agencies- failure to comprehend the legitimate work of each of these great factors leads inevitably to gross errors in judgement. We cannot gather grapes from thistles nor figs from thorns.

(4) Adaptation of means to ends. If the Indians are expected to thrive by agriculture they should not be thrust aside onto sterile plains or into the mountains but should be allowed to occupy such portions of the country as are adapted to agricultural pursuits...If we expect the rising generation to become intelligent, we should see to it that they have ample opportunities for education. If we design that they should be industrious we should encourage among them all forms of handicraft.

(5) Justice. It certainly cannot be said that this great nation has intended to be unjust, and recent acts of legislation have shown concussive a desire not only on the part of Congress, but of the people of the country generally; to fulfill to the later all the obligations, promises, and even expectations of the Indians.

(6) Firmness. Thousands of them are yet on a stage of childhood; they are living in the twilight of civilization, weak, ignorant, superstitious, and as little prepared to take care of themselves as so many infants. It is therefore unwise, out of excessive regard for their manhood, to defer wholly to their wishes with reference to what is clearly for their good. The allotment of land, the restriction of the power of alienation, the compulsory education of their children, the destruction of the tribal organization, the bestowment of citizenship, the repression of heathenish and hurtful practices, the suppression of outbreaks, and punishment for lawlessness are among the things which belong unmistakably to the prerogatives of the National Government.

(7) Humanity. It should be borne in mind, however, that this peculiar people are our brethren, made of the same blood, and as such have claims upon us. This vast country which is now the scene and the support of our greatness once belonged to them. As a people they are poor and weak and well-nigh helpless. The vast and resistless tide of European emigration and the overflow of our aggressive population have despoiled them of their hunting grounds, robbed them of their richest fields, restricted them in their freedom, destroyed thousands of them in battle, and inflicted upon them great suffering.

(8) Radicalness. "Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well." If reservations have proven to be inadequate from the purposes for which they were designed, have shown themselves a hindrance to the progress of the Indian as well as an obstruction in the pathway of civilization, let the reservations, as speedily as wisdom dictates, be utterly destroyed and entirely swept away.../if this were done, and there could be gathered by

the end of 1893 into well-manned and suitably equipped schools nearly all of the Indian children, and they could be kept there for 10 years, the work would be substantially accomplished; for within those 10 years there would grow up a generation of English-speaking Indians, accustomed to the ways of civilized life, and sufficiently intelligent and strong to forever after be the dominant force among them.

(9) Stability. Having determined upon a policy, we should regard it as permanent until its work is accomplished. Whatever laws are to be passed should be framed with reference to the perfecting endnote the essential modification of the plan. All acts of administration should be essential modification of the plan. All acts of administration should be with reference to its success.

(10) Time. They should be fostered, strengthened, maintained, and allowed to operate. Other forces scarcely less powerful than these, namely, the progress of our civilization, which is invading the reservations and surrounding the Indians on every, the progress of Christianity through the active missionary efforts of the churches, the changed conditions which have forced upon the Indians themselves the necessity of greater efforts towards self-help and improvement, combine and cooperate with the organized efforts of the Government to bring about their uplifting.³²

The report of the Commissioner of Indian affairs clearly demonstrates the motives behind the United States creating and funding government residential boarding schools. For example, the report stated, “whatever is worth doing is worth doing well,” this indicates the mindset of the 19th century in which the government and society believed they would be saving the Native peoples by any means necessary. They intended to create policies and acts that would improve the lives of Native children, but they oppressed the Natives by keeping them from their identity and culture. Similarly, the theme of firmness within the Report of the Commissioner shows that the National Government believed it was their responsibility to help the Natives; "The allotment of land, the restriction of the power of alienation, the compulsory education of their children... the repression of heathenish and hurtful practices, are among the things which belong unmistak

³² Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, 1891, <https://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/History/History-idx?type=article&did=History.AnnRep91p1.i0003&id=History.AnnRep91p1&isize=M>.

ably to the prerogatives of the National Government.”³³ Donna L. Akers states, “The Indian Treaty system was the foundational tool of colonial empire used by the US government to obtain the enormous wealth of Native Americans, impoverishing them forever and forcing them into dependence on American ‘generosity.’”³⁴ For the United States to rid of their ‘Indian problem,’ they had to create policies and treaties that would force Native children to receive their education through residential boarding schools, which would have the intention and goal of assimilation through internal colonization. The United States Congress enacted the Civilization Fund Act in 1819 that gave funding to missionaries and church leaders to civilize and educate Native children. The Christian missionaries focused on replacing tribal values and practices with Christian practices, to remove them from their indigenous identity and culture.³⁵ In 1891 the United States implemented the Compulsory Attendance Law that allowed federal officers to use force while taking Native children away from their homes, to send them to the boarding schools. Two years later the United States government created U.S. Code § 283; Regulations for withholding rations for nonattendance at schools. This meant that the Secretary of the Interior could:

Establish such regulations as will prevent the issuing of rations or the furnishing of subsistence either in money or in kind to the head of any Indian family for or on account of any Indian child or children between the ages of eight and twenty-one years who shall not have attended school during the preceding year in accordance with such regulations.³⁶

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Donna L. Akers, "Decolonizing the Master Narrative: Treaties and Other American Myths," *Wicazo Sa Review* 29, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 1.

³⁵ U.S.C. Title 25. Education of Indians. 3 Stat. 516. Chapter 85. (1819).

³⁶ U.S.C. Title 25. Section § 283. Education of Indians, Regulations for Withholding Rations for Nonattendance at Schools. Chapter 7. (1893).

With the fear of being withheld rations, the Native children's parents were left with no other choice than to send their children to these institutions. As for the parents that resisted this law, they were jailed or sent off to be imprisoned in Alcatraz for not having their children attend residential boarding schools.³⁷ This was a result of the United States government using their political power to threaten Native parents for resisting the Compulsory Attendance Law.

The United States government also used economic factors to justify their actions and further their power. Due to the United States trying to find their place in a globally developing market, this meant implementing tighter policies on Native American communities to improve the overall economy. Native Americans valued communal ownership of property and were egalitarian in the sense that all peoples deserved equal rights and opportunities; however, this was a direct conflict with American individualism and the free market economic system in the United States. An aspect of Critical Race Theory is that dominant societies racialize minority groups for the benefit of the economy, and during the residential boarding school era, Native children were expected to supply manual labor for the betterment of the economy.³⁸ This led to the development of forced Native manual labor which bolstered the American market through monopolization.

Alexandra Harmon, Colleen O'Neill and Paul C. Rosier found that one of the goals of government funded residential boarding schools were to produce Native American young adults into working as domestic farm workers and laborers. Similarly, Kevin Slivka found that within these

³⁷ "Boarding School and Land Allotment Eras 1879-1933," Investing in Native Communities a Joint Project of Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/events/compulsory-attendance-law-for-native-boarding-school-attendance/>.

³⁸ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 9-10.

institutions, arts and crafts was used to promote gender norms regarding the type of labor the Native students would be doing once they finished their education at the residential boarding schools.³⁹ Of course, the curriculum and teaching were created to educate and assimilate native students, but one might not consider the fact that students were assimilated through their illustrations and art as well. “Pratt saw these drawings as propaganda to promote the assimilation process, inculcating the use of education as a means to civilize the uncivilized.”⁴⁰ Through different examples of artwork one can see how native students were assimilated. Slivka showed the before and after of the art of a Native student; the ‘before’ shows a Native person riding on horseback, and the ‘after’ is a simple drawing of a fruit bowl.⁴¹ Similarly, Sarah L. Surface-Evans found that “Early colonial actions in North America were primarily external colonialism, while colonizers attempted to control resources, labor, and regional economies.”⁴² However, Surface-Evans found that the labor from these institutions were rarely profitable.⁴³ Despite facing these powers of control, the Native students in residential boarding schools did what they could to resist assimilation tactics. Methods of resistance included Native student refusing to eat or ingest substances, continuing speaking their Native languages, as well as created a token system which was a type of currency to the students. The tokens collected came as clothing buttons or

³⁹ Kevin, Slivka, "Art, Craft, and Assimilation: Curriculum for Native Students during the Boarding School Era," *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 3 (2011): 226.

⁴⁰ Kevin, Slivka, "Art, Craft, and Assimilation: Curriculum for Native Students during the Boarding School Era," *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 3 (2011): 229.

⁴¹ Kevin, Slivka, "Art, Craft, and Assimilation: Curriculum for Native Students during the Boarding School Era," *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 3 (2011): 226.

⁴² Sarah L. Surface-Evans, "A Landscape of Assimilation and Resistance: The Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 20, no. 3 (2016): 574.

⁴³ Ibid.

clay marbles; these were the admission to get into student-led events such as powwows and pipe ceremonies.⁴⁴

In the 19th century the common mindset and rhetoric of the day was believing that the white man was superior to the Indigenous peoples of the United States. From this mentality came the “White Man’s Burden” as addressed by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling believed it was the white man’s moral responsibility and civic duty to save the people in the world that were ‘uncivilized,’ and, in the United States, the ones perceived to be ‘uncivilized’ were the First Nations. These common 19th century mindsets, including the White Man’s burden, the White-savior complex, killing the Indian and saving the man, as well as the Western Expansion movement that displaced and killed millions of native peoples in the United States are cultural factors that contributed to the U.S. government establishing and financing Indigenous boarding schools. The White Man’s burden and the white-savior complex are similar in terms of feeling as if the white man has the moral obligation and responsibility to save the natives, and any other brown person from their own extinction. The White Man’s burden romanticized the American imperialist image, as it encouraged the white man to “save” people of color from themselves, specifically with the natives as they were regarded as primitives.⁴⁵ The mindset of killing the Indian and saving the man stemmed from Captain Richard Henry Pratt’s speech in 1892 at the National Conference of Char

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, "Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" and Its Afterlives," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 50, no. 2 (2007): 176.

ities and Correction in Denver, Colorado.⁴⁶ This mindset of the 19th century was believing that the natives had two options: extinction or assimilation.

Cultural factors are important because they represent the mindset and beliefs of the 19th century. Cultural factors can be viewed through the theme of change over time in historical methodology. In the 19th century, there was a rise in European settlers who needed land and resources, the problem was that the natives owned the land they wanted. The influx of immigrants grew more problems about the treatment of Indigenous peoples.⁴⁷ This change can be said to have been inevitable in the sense that as time passes, the mindset of the time changes as well. The Indian Outing System is an example of the impact the cultural factors and mindset had on Indigenous students. This outing system was considered to be a ‘humane’ way of solving the Indian problem by sending Native youth to White families for them to get accustomed to being with white people; as a means of exposing them to American culture and lifestyle during the summer. The Indian Outing System was created for the Natives to work and live in Mainstream America, to get them away from their reservations. The Indian outing system originated with Captain Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the famed Carlisle Indian School. Pratt believed that Native contact with a white environment was the "supreme Americanizer," and his program sent Indian children to live with white families over the summers to get the children accustomed to being with American people.⁴⁸ Both Robert A. Trennert and Louellyn White found that The Indian Out

⁴⁶ *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), 46–59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973): 34.

⁴⁷ David Adams Wallace, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 11.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Trennert, "From Carlisle to Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of the Indian Outing System, 1878-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 3 (1983): 267-8.

ing System was created to occupy native students throughout the summer, which would keep them away from their reservations. In addition, they also found that the Indian Outing System would "...benefit local non-Indigenous families and businesses through exploitation in the form of cheap child labor."⁴⁹ The United States government wanted to shape the minds and lives of Native students by converting them into American patriots. They did this by implementing the Indian Outing System that separated the students from their families. "We are coming to recognize the great truth that if we would do justice to the Indians, we must get them, one by one, with American ideals, American schools, American laws, the privileges and the pressures of American rights and duties."⁵⁰ Not only was this to Americanize and assimilate the Native children, but this also helped the local economy through the use of child labor.

Religious factors contributed to the creation of government-funded residential boarding schools. Christian missionaries and denominations were the first to create schools that aimed at civilizing all Indigenous peoples. David Adams Wallace found that Christian denominations' main goal was to convert Natives into Christians. "Furthermore, while representing a number of religious denominations, they were almost universally guided by the tenets of evangelical Protestantism, never doubting for a moment that their effort to uplift Indians was a fulfillment of their Christian obligation to extend their blessings of Christianity to all peoples of the world."⁵¹ Government-funded residential boarding schools were an extension of the Christian missionaries and

⁴⁹ Louellyn White, "White Power and the Performance of Assimilation: Lincoln Institute and Carlisle Indian School," in *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, edited by Fear-Segal Jacqueline and Susan D. Rose, (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 109.

⁵⁰ Robert A. Trennert, "From Carlisle to Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of the Indian Outing System, 1878-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 3 (1983): 268.

⁵¹ David Adams Wallace, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 14.

were aimed at native children rather than the full population. Regardless, both sets of institutions had the same end goal of civilizing and educating the natives, and to transform them from “savages,” to patriots and protestants of the United States. Andrea Smith also found that in the 19th century, Native children were forced to attend Christian and government funded boarding schools, as it was policy to do so. The targeting of Native children was purposeful as the government and colonist believed that the “...adults were too set in their ways to become Christianized.”⁵² Instilling Christian values and elements into the Native children's lives was essential to the United States government being able to assimilate and educate the natives, as most Americans were Christians themselves. This connects to the mindset of the 19th century regarding cultural values, and what the typical American was like, i.e., civilized, educated, Christian and a patriot of the United States. To the white man and the government, Natives were the opposite of educated and civilized, furthermore came the Indian problem and question; what is to do with the Natives? Assimilate them into the dominant white culture, which would, in turn, help the United States economy, and political matters for having control over the Indigenous peoples lives and land.

Through this research we can understand four factors that contributed to the creation of government funded residential boarding schools. Political, economic, cultural, and religious factors played crucial roles in the development and funding of residential boarding schools in the 19th century. These schools fundamentally altered the lives of Indigenous children in the United States. These schools were created and funded by the United States government to assimilate,

⁵² Andrea Smith, "Boarding School Abuses, Human Rights, and Reparations," *Social Justice* 31, no. 4 (98) (2004): 89.

civilize, and educate Indigenous children. The United States government benefited from the erasure of Native culture, and the oppression of Native children, as these institutions helped the government gain power, aided in the economy, and preserved American life and culture.

Using historical methodology to examine these four factors was useful because this method relies on thinking about historical context, complexity, and contingency. By looking at these factors together, we get a deeper meaning as to why the government created residential boarding schools. Residential boarding schools were a result of these factors because of the way the United States functioned, as they poorly treated Native Americans. Critical Race Theory is useful for understanding the creation and financing of residential boarding schools because its main theme is about challenging the power structures of the United States. This theory not only questions the actions of the United States government, but it also analyzes them through historical context and why certain events played out the way they did. The mindset of the 19th century led to certain policies being enacted that extended the oppression of Indigenous peoples by assimilating and colonizing them into the dominant white culture. This thesis used historical methodology to learn more about why the government created and financed these institutions. Historical methodology was useful because it allowed for the examination of multiple factors that were contingent upon one another, these four factors were the cause of residential boarding schools. Earlier literature only examined single factors, but this thesis examined political, economic, cultural, and religious factors all together.

VII. Conclusion

What factors led to the creation of government funded residential boarding schools in the United States in the 19th century? Political, economic, cultural, and religious factors contributed to the United States financing and creating Indigenous boarding schools. The mission of these institutions was to educate and civilize Indigenous children and to rid them of their culture and identity. This was done by forcefully removing the children from their homes, or by threatening to send the children's parents to jail if they did not follow the Compulsory Attendance Law. Indigenous children were stripped of their identity, culture, and life because of these institutions which were geared towards making the children into American patriots, as they were regarded as uncivilized savages. Not only did residential boarding schools oppress the children of their culture, but they also traumatized them. Critical race theory was used to examine this research question as it challenges the power structures of the United States. Historical methodology has allowed for the examination of political, economic, cultural, and religious factors, which have showed the complex history of the United States government and the Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, this research only examines the United States' behavior and relationship with the Native Americans. For further research, scholars might focus on other factors that led to the United States financing and creating residential boarding schools. A flaw in this research is the possibility that there are more than just political, economic, cultural, and religious factors. Another flaw is the unavailability of more primary sources about government funded residential boarding schools. Overall, the United States government created these institutions to get rid of their "Indian problem," which meant assimilation, or extinction, of Indigenous peoples in the United States in the 19th century.

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