TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND HEALING: INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS & THEIR IMPACT

Deidre Whiteman
Director of Research and Education
NABS VISION:
Indigenous cultural sovereignty.

NABS MISSION:
To lead in the pursuit of understanding and addressing the ongoing trauma created by the US Indian Boarding School policy.
• Formed after a national symposium in 2011. Leaders from the U.S. and Canada came together to discuss the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the need for such a process in the U.S.

• Created to increase public awareness and cultivate healing for the trauma experienced by individuals, families, communities, of American Indian and Alaska Native Nations resulting from the U.S. Indian Boarding School Policy of 1869.

• NABS was fiscally sponsored by the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) until it became financially independent in 2015.
“When we begin to cry, that’s part of the healing process. Our tears are meant to cleanse us; they’re meant to cleanse our spirit, our mind, and our body. When we cried as children, no one was there. We were left to cry alone. But today, we have each other.”

Sandy White Hawk, Sicangu Lakota
Board President, NABS
Setting the Context:
Indian Boarding Schools in the US

• 1879-1970s
• 497+ U.S. Indian Boarding schools
  • 408 Government-funded/supported
  • 87 Financially independent
• Assimilation and genocide
• Indian children were:
  • Forcibly abducted
  • Sent hundreds of miles away
  • Stripped of clothes, hair cut, often given a number rather than name
  • Neglected, malnourished, beaten, starved, or abused
Doctrine of Discovery & Manifest Destiny
Federal Policy:
Stripping of Rights and Assets

- Contact (1492)
- Invasion/Removal (1637-1851)
- Reservations/Indian Wars (1851-1887)
- Assimilation (1868-1934)
- Reorganization/Termination/Relocation/Changes in Boarding Schools (1934-1975)
- Self Determination (1975-Present)
Timeline of U.S. Indian Policy—Layers of Historical Trauma

From Contact to Present Day

1492 Columbus discovers "Indians" on the "New World" that he claimed to be the "Territorial" of the Indians.

1585 The U.S. establishes the "Indian Territory" as a "reservation.

1871 Indian Appropriations Act provides for the education of Indian children.

1879 First Indian boarding school opened in the U.S.

1875 Meriam Report states that the federal government is responsible for the education of Indian children.

1928 Indian Child Welfare Act provides for the education of Indian children.

1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act gives Indian tribes the authority to control their education.


Present Day

Native American tribes have the right to self-determination, human rights, land retention, and the survival of their cultures and languages.

Boarding School Healing Coalition

The National Native American
Indian Boarding Schools: The First U.S. Indian Child Welfare Policy

- The issue is systemic
- 1958, as the Indian Boarding Schools were starting to wane, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) created the Indian Adoption Project.
- Both the U.S. Indian Boarding School and the Indian Adoption Policies were intentionally designed to force assimilation and eradicate Native cultures and family systems.
- By the 1960s about one in four Native children were living apart from their families. During this era, social workers found more dubious ways of taking children from their mothers.
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) 1978

Native children are still placed at higher rates per capita than any other ethnic group and these placements often still lead to adoption with non-Native families despite ICWA.
Structural Colonialism and Epistemological Colonialism

“Invasion is a structure, not an event”
(Patrick Wolfe, 2006)

• Impacts of Structural Colonialism
  • Stolen Land
  • Stolen Lives
  • Sovereignty Denied

• Impacts of Epistemological Colonialism
  • Language, Culture, and Knowledge Denied and Punished
  • Delegitimization of Indigenous ways of living, knowing, and being
  • Indigenous Erasure

US Exceptionalism
Manifest Destiny
Doctrine of Discovery
A Human Rights Issue: Cultural Genocide = Genocide

Article 8, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

“Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture”

American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World

An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe
2014 White House Report on Native Youth

Finds major disparities in health, education, as well as a state of emergency regarding Native youth suicide and PTSD rates three times the general public—the same rate as Iraqi war veterans.

• More than one in three American Indian and Alaska Native children live in poverty

• The American Indian/Alaskan Native high school graduation rate is 67 percent, the lowest of any racial/ethnic demographic group across all schools. And the most recent Department of Education data indicate that the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools fare even worse, with a graduation rate of 53 percent, compared to a national average of 80 percent.

• Suicide is the second leading cause of death—2.5 times the national rate—for Native youth in the 15 to 24 year old age group.
Historical Trauma

Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, describes historical trauma as:

“...the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over one’s lifetime and from generation to generation following loss of lives, land and vital aspects of culture.”

The Legacy of Boarding Schools:
Intergenerational Trauma

EPIGENETICS

Study finds trauma effects may linger in body chemistry of next generation:

“children of Holocaust survivors...could be more likely to develop stress or anxiety disorders.”

Study by RACHEL YEHUDA,
ICAHN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT MT. SINAI
Transcending Historical Trauma

Dr. Brave Heart talks about the process of moving forward from historical grief:

1. Confront the historical trauma
2. Understand the trauma
3. Release the pain
4. Transcend the trauma

If we carry intergenerational trauma (and we do), then we also carry intergenerational wisdom. It’s in our genes and in our DNA.

– Kazu Haga
Four Steps for Working Through Trauma

1. Learn Self-Regulation
2. Take Steps Toward Self-Empowerment
3. Learn to Express Your Experience
4. Integrate the Senses Through Rhythm & Movement

Adapted from Bessel van der Kolk, MD and Ruth Buczynski, PhD

Balanced Self-Care

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<th>PHYSICAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise for endorphins to “get out of your head”</td>
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<td>Eat healthy food with Omega-3 and Vitamin B for brain function</td>
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<td>Drink lots of water for proper hydration</td>
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<td>Rest and get adequate sleep</td>
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<td>Try a salt bath or a hot shower to detox and relieve stress</td>
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<td>Go for a walk</td>
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<th>MENTAL</th>
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<td>Spend time alone for mindful reflection</td>
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<td>Do arts and crafts, or find other creative outlets</td>
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<td>Read a book</td>
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<tr>
<td>Try a guided meditation or yoga practice</td>
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<td>Turn off your phone, even if it’s for a short amount of time</td>
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<tr>
<th>EMOTIONAL</th>
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<td>Journal to help process</td>
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<td>Talk with a friend or loved one</td>
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<td>Make a list of things you feel grateful for or that make you happy</td>
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<td>Allow yourself to cry</td>
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<th>SPIRITUAL</th>
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<td>Attend a ceremony, church, or other spiritual gathering</td>
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<td>Spend time outside with nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spend time in prayer to a higher power</td>
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<td>Smudge with sage or cedar</td>
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Source: boardingschoolhealing.org
The work we are doing today...
Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative
Investigative Report

May 2022

Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
Bryan Newland
Truth and Healing Commission (S. 2907, H.R. 5444)

5-year commission
• Examines the location of children
• Documents ongoing impacts from boarding schools
• Locates church and government records
• Holds culturally-appropriate public hearings to collect testimony from survivors and descendants.
• Institutional knowledge gathering from subject matter experts
• Shares findings publicly
• Provides a final report with a list of recommendations for justice and healing

“It’s taken a long time to be able to share our stories and we’ve reached a point where the dam of awareness is bursting. The time for healing is now.”
- James LaBelle Sr. (Inupiaq), Boarding School Survivor

Find out how to support the commission
boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission
Support for “Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act” (S. 2907, H.R. 5444)

• NABS is seeking activation from our allies to support the passing of the bill:
  • Tribes
  • Inter-Tribal Organizations
  • Non-governmental organizations (NGO’s)
  • Museums
  • State-operated archives
  • Colleges and Universities with archival collections
  • Private Collections
Support for “Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act” (S. 2907, H.R. 5444)

• NABS is asking for each person to reach out to your Senator and House Representative to request:


  2. Request Your Senators support holding a hearing on this bill

  3. Write a resolution of support for this legislation

  • Draft language can be found here:

    www.boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission
Gendered Violence Research and Healing Programs:
• Male and Female violence in boarding schools

Ongoing Research on Each Boarding School:
• 10 years of NABS research merging with DOI truth initiative

Boarding School Curriculum:
• Free Truth and Healing Curriculum (Grades K-12)
• Partnership with NIEA and Professional Development/Curriculum
• Recommended Reading Lists
National Indian Boarding School Digital Archive

To collect, preserve, and make accessible in a digital repository the historical record of Indian boarding schools in the U.S. and their legacy in order to illuminate consequences of historical institutional abuses and long-standing repercussions on Native communities.

NIBSDA stands as a monument to the persistent Native American spirit of survival despite deliberate systematic attempts to eliminate us.
Virtual Healing Series

- **February:** Medicine for Self Love Virtual Healing Event
- **April:** Healing from Child Removal: Boarding Schools, Adoption, and Foster Care
- **May:** Self-Care in a Time of Truth and Healing: Healing Our Spirit, Creating Safety within
- **Upcoming- June:** Two Spirit Resilience: The Impact and Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools
Membership Coalition

Purpose and Vision for Membership

• We are a coalition who support the healing of boarding school survivors and descendants.

• We use our coalition voice to educate others about the truth of the Boarding School Policies, experiences, and legacy.

• We call for action towards justice and healing.

• We use our network to share research, healing resources, and advocacy.

• We learn from one another, and we grow and heal together.
This first of its kind study, Child Removal in Native Communities: An Anonymous Survey, aims to learn more about:

• The correlation between Indian boarding schools, adoption, and foster care in later generations,

• The intergenerational impacts of child removal on behavioral, mental, and physical health, as well as parenting and child welfare, and

• How American Indian and Alaskan Native people are healing from historical and intergenerational trauma related to child removal.

If you are a boarding school survivor, have boarding school history in your family, or have you ever been adopted or placed in foster care, we need your help! You can take the survey now at: z.umn.edu/child-removal-study
Grounded in ceremony

• In honor of those who are answering this survey the research team had a pipe ceremony to ask for guidance and healing. Our intent is to honor these experiences in a way that will benefit boarding school survivors, their families and those yet to come.
937 Respondents to Date

- 216 Boarding School Survivors
  - 49
  - 125
  - 23
- 823 Descendants of boarding school survivors
- 320 Fostered or Adopted
  - 19
  - 72
  - 469
  - 180
How often have you felt or experienced any of the following regarding the history of boarding schools, child removal, or adoption/foster care within Native communities?

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<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Sadness</th>
<th>Anger</th>
<th>Anxiety or Nervousness</th>
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<td>Uncomfortable Around White People When You Think of This History</td>
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<td>Shame When You Think of This History</td>
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<td>Feeling Isolated or Distant When You Think of This History</td>
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<td>Fearful or Distrust the Intentions of White People</td>
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Healing

81% of respondents believe they need to heal from their experiences

73% have sought therapy or counseling
If we carry intergenerational trauma (and we do), then we also carry intergenerational wisdom. It’s in our genes and in our DNA.

–Kazu Haga
Join us in the Truth and Healing Movement!

Follow us and Share!

boardingschoolhealing.org