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A History of Indians in the Public School System

In its ideal form, the institution of education is a potent liberating force, the highway to autonomy, a means by which individuals actualize and shape a productive and financially secure future. Another, Machiavellian model not easily discerned is one in which legitimate educational goals are submerged to accommodate political ends. In this model, the classroom becomes a battle ground not to actualize but to minimize potential, to inculcate and preserve subservience or a contemporary style of colonialism.

Historically, it is the Machiavellian model most Indians have encountered. Indians were defeated not by military force (although this is widely believed) but by politically restructuring the institution of education to mold a colonial ethos. Colonialism that imprisons young minds with the concept of 'racial/ethnic inferiority' is by far more tyrannical than brute force. Labeled as "pacification," the education developed by missions and the Indian service encouraged young Indian people to lose confidence in their own leaders and their own people and view their history and culture as second-rate. Ultimately, this form of colonialism chipped away at Indian culture, making it more and more difficult for each succeeding generation to lead autonomous and pro-active lives.

The early settlers were the first to encourage Indians to enter their schools. Their motives were not altruistic. Colonists perceived education as a means of separating individual Indians from tribal life and ultimately from tribal lands which the colonists coveted. A few examples of early colonial efforts follow.

In 1617 Moore's Charity School (renamed "Dartmouth") was opened in New Hampshire to educate the children of missionaries and American Indians. In 1723, William and Mary College set aside a separate house for Indian students enrolled in the college. John Harvard established scholarship funds for the education of Indian youth. These attempts were not universally accepted by the Indians themselves because even at this early juncture of Indian-white relations, the tribes perceived education as a back door to colonialism. In his essay "Two Tracts," Benjamin Franklin recorded the reaction of some chiefs in Virginia to the offer of educating six Indian youngsters at a college in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1744:

. . . Several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the Northern Provinces. They were instructed in all of your sciences, but when they came back to us they were bad runners; ignorant of every means of living in the woods; unable to bare either cold or hunger; know neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy; spoke our language imperfectly; were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are however, not the less obligated by your kind offer, though we must decline it; and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take care of their education, instruct them in all we know and make men of them.¹

The chiefs' rejection of Virginia's offer came from experience that Indian graduates were poorly trained to contribute to tribal development. This tug of war is the one consistent link throughout the history of Indian education policy. The prevailing wisdom of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson was that by funding missions to educate Indians, tribalism would be eradicated within a few generations. As long as tribalism existed, the Indians would fight to maintain their traditional lands, to which even the earliest settlers admitted they had a legal claim. America was going to wipe out the Indian in the Indian but do it legally, through the education system.

Within a decade after George Washington signed treaties with the Iroquois to fund federal (albeit mission) schools on the reservation, the Eastern tribes began to develop their own education system. The tribally controlled education movement begun in 1802 steadily grew, particularly among the Cherokee and the Choctaw who built and operated tribal schools managed by Indian graduates of Eastern

colleges. The Cherokee took umbrage with the curriculum offered Indian students compared to that offered white students. For instance, in 1828 the Cherokee Council wrote a letter to the Mission Board in Boston who were in charge of the Brainerd school on the Cherokee reservation. They warned the board that unless the faculty at Brainerd taught more rigorous academics and less Christian bible, they would close the school down. This was not an idle threat. There were many Cherokee who could teach in a tribal school, and Sequoyah had developed a written Cherokee syllabary in 1820.

A written Cherokee language opened the possibility of developing bilingual textbooks, especially since they now had a cadre of educated Cherokees. A few years later, the Cherokee embarked on an ambitious kindergarten-through-college educational system in English and Cherokee. It was the first bilingual and bicultural school system in the nation. Judging by today's standards, the system was amazing, with evidence that it produced a 90 percent literate population within a decade. Even today, that record cannot be matched by most states. In spite of Indian removal in 1830 the schools continued to develop and grow in Indian Territory. By the end of the nineteenth century, most Cherokee were literate, better educated than their white neighbors, and in control of their destiny.²

This control was short-lived, however. The federal government, opposed the concept of 'cultural pluralism' as a threat to nationhood. Assimilating immigrants through the public school system, was (to their mind) the key factor in producing national and individual social and economic progress. They saw cultural pluralism as a barrier to assimilation. Comparing the success of immigrants to the failure of Indians to assimilate had an obvious logical flaw. The immigrants chose to come to this country and chose to integrate, while the Indians were in their own country and chose to remain Indian.

One advocate of Americanizing Indians was Colonel Henry Pratt. He had fought both in the Civil and in the Indian wars. In 1879 Pratt petitioned Washington for old army barracks used during the Civil War in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and turned this site into the first off-reservation boarding school for Indian youth. His plea in Congress was to "immerse the Indians in waters of our civilization and when we get them under water, hold them there until they are thoroughly soaked" which he admitted would "eradicate the Indian but make the man." He had strong support in Congress.³

From then on, Congress, impatient to Americanize Indians, appropriated money to build 106 off-reservation boarding schools between 1879 and the early 1900s. In 1892, Congress authorized

the BIA to withhold rations from any Indian family unwilling to have their child sent away to school. Education, Congress agreed, should inculcate Indian assimilation into mainstream society. Coercion was used to remove children from the home and keep them in boarding schools from the ages of six to sixteen. Indians no longer had the option, as the Virginia chiefs once had, to refuse to send their children to non-Indian schools.

In 1906, Congress abolished the Oklahoma Cherokee tribal school system. Dissolving the system led to social, economic, and political devastation for this tribe. From a 90 percent literacy rate in the nineteenth century, tribe members plummeted to an average of 5.3 years of schooling in 1968, meaning more than half of the tribe was functionally illiterate within seven decades of federal/state control of Cherokee education.⁴

A tribe that once produced the manpower necessary to operate its own social, economic, and political institutions, was reduced to colonial supervision by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The foreboding of the old chiefs in Virginia bore fruit. The students in these boarding schools were ill-equipped to contribute to Indian or non-Indian society. They were in fact "good for nothing." To solidify white domination completely, even Cherokee leadership was selected by the president of the United States and not by general election of the Cherokee. In the 1970s, for the first time in this century, the Cherokee were allowed to run their own elections for tribal leaders.

This tribe, one of many who experienced similar patterns of social policy, is an example of how the institution of education was designed to perpetuate the colonial ethic. At the same time, the Cherokee example provides insight into reasons Indians have been less than enthusiastic about non-Indian education.

There are other reasons as well, which have to do with the concept of 'racial inferiority.' There was a widely held belief that the size of the head was a measurement of the brain, and, consequently, the capacity to think. In any effort to prove his theory, after the Indian wars, a doctor from the Smithsonian Institution wrote letters to army personnel in the field requesting skeletons of Indians so he could measure their skulls. More than 18,500 skeletons were collected by that museum alone. These remains are still in the basement of the Smithsonian. Not to be outdone, Harvard collected about 5,000 specimens, and the National Park Service has about 20,000 stashed away at various sites.

The concept of Indian racial inferiority attained credence with a publication by Lewis Terman (Stanford University) in 1916 that stated that certain racial types would benefit from education mini-

mally at best. Terman was one half of the team that created the Stanford Binet (IQ) test. He wrote:

Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stock from which they come. The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew . . . there will be discovered enormously significant racial differences . . . which cannot be wiped out of any schemes of mental culture.

Children of this group should be segregated in special classes . . . they cannot master abstractions, but they can often be made efficient workers.⁵

Indians were reputed to be racially inferior. This presumption of inferiority was widely held by the public and concomitantly, in the public school systems. Some states even enacted ordinances forbidding enrollment of minorities, including Indians. An example of this attitude was California's Political Code Section 662 (1924): "The governing body of the school districts shall have power to exclude children of filthy or vicious habits, or children suffering from contagious or infectious diseases, and also to establish separate schools for Indian children, and for children of Chinese, Japanese or Mongolian parentage"

Congress thought the assimilation process could be speeded up by enrolling Indian children in the public schools. They knew there was public resistance to this move, and to overcome objections, passed the Snyder Act in 1921.

This act authorized the Bureau of Indian Affairs to establish and fund educational programs that benefit Indians. Included in Snyder was a provision to subsidize public schools that enrolled Indian students.

The western states especially, with large Indian populations, took the position that Indian education was a federal responsibility. Tribal lands could not be taxed, and Indians were not citizens of the United States. Congress attacked the citizenship barrier with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924. Proponents of public education pointed out that public schools enroll children whose parents do not own property, or who are unemployed.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs was under attack from all sides. Reports from the philanthropic Committee of One Hundred, followed by the Brookings Institution Meriam Report and congress-

sional field studies led to the inescapable conclusion that Indian education administered by the BIA was a failure.

The first to openly attack the Bureau of Indian Affairs education system was the Committee of One Hundred in 1923. The Committee of One Hundred was a select group of reputable intellectuals and philanthropists dedicated to Indian affairs. Because of the influence of its members, the publication of the committee's report produced public clamor for profound changes in Indian education policy. Although widely circulated, the bureau largely ignored this report. The impact, however, led to a congressional investigation in 1928, which was conducted on reservations throughout the country.

The thirty-volume 1928 congressional report, *Survey of the Conditions of the Indians of the United States*, concluded that the Indian service education system was disastrous and there was evidence of corruption within the BIA. Under siege from all directions, Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work requested the Brookings Institution to conduct a thorough study of the BIA. Heading up this study was Dr. Lewis Meriam. If Work had hoped that an independent nongovernmental report would be less vitriolic than the report given by the Committee of One Hundred and/or the 1928 congressional hearings, he must have been sadly disappointed.

The Meriam Report

Meriam contracted with Dr. W. Carson Ryan of Swarthmore to conduct the education segment of the report. Ryan's credentials to conduct this study were outstanding. As Margaret Szasz observed:

Ryan was a nationally known educator. He had worked for the U.S. Bureau of Education from 1912 to 1920. In 1918 he had received his doctorate from George Washington University. Shortly thereafter he had served for a year as educational editor for the *New York Evening Post*. Although he had been appointed professor of education at Swarthmore in 1921, this had not curtailed a broad use of his talents. By the time Ryan began work on the Meriam Report he was already recognized as an expert in educational surveys. Between 1917 and 1929 he conducted seven studies of education systems from Saskatchewan, Canada, to the Virgin Islands, including American Indian education (1926–27). At the same time he had served as American delegate to several international education meetings.⁶

Ryan was a proponent of a new concept in education, known as "progressive education," whose guru was John Dewey. The basic belief of progressive education was to integrate education with experience. The home, the neighborhood, and the student's culture were all to be used in the process of education. To be sure, Dewey had in mind the swarms of immigrant children living in city slums when he wrote:

Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lessons in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning. If impetus in this direction is weakened instead of being intensified, sometimes much more than mere lack of preparation takes place. The pupil is actually robbed of native capacities which otherwise would enable him to cope with the circumstances that he meets in the course of his life. We often see persons who have had little schooling and in whose case the absence of set schooling proves to be a positive asset. They have at least retained their native common sense and power of judgment, and their exercise in the actual conditions of living has given them the precious gift of ability to learn from the experiences they have. *What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he had learned, and above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?* (my emphasis)⁷

Ryan's personal philosophy of education was influenced by Dewey but also evolved because of his own observation that public education systems were two-tiered, one for the children of the elite and middle class, the other for the poor and off-spring of immigrants.

He observed that education for the poor and/or immigrant youngster had as its main objective the obliteration of immigrant native language, custom, and culture and integration of the "Ameri-

can" language, holidays, heroes, culture and values. They were taught by rote learning. Ryan observed the objective of public education for the masses (albeit poor and/or first-generation immigrants) was to produce efficient workers for a rapidly expanding industrial economy. Success was measured by the numbers of students who entered the work force in factories and positions of manual labor.

However, he observed, the children of the middle class/wealthy attended public/private schools where critical thinking provided the necessary training for college and professional preparation. The standard by which these schools were evaluated was the number of graduates who later became professionals in the nation's political, social, and economic institutions.

Ryan concluded that Indian education followed the same pattern Dewey had found in the city slum schools for immigrant children:

The most fundamental need in Indian education is a change in point of view. Whatever may have been the official governmental attitude, education for the Indian in the past has proceeded largely on the theory that it is necessary to remove the Indian child as far as possible from his home environment; whereas the modern point of view in education and social work lays stress on upbringing in the natural setting of home and family life.⁸

Ryan was particularly critical of the teaching staff in the Indian schools.

After all is said that can be said, about the skill and devotion of some employees, the fact remains that the government of the United States regularly takes into the instructional staff of its Indian schools teachers whose credentials would not be accepted in good public school systems, and into the institutional side of these schools key employees—matrons and the like—who could not meet the standards set up by modern social agencies.⁹

Distasteful to Ryan was the federal policy of uprooting Indian children from their homes and sending them to schools far away from home. He found that they had no opportunity to see their families for years at a time. If they ran away, the army or Indian service picked them up and took them back to school. If families

hid their children from these officials, family rations were withheld until the child was delivered to a BIA official.

Ryan was especially outraged by the inhumane conditions the children were subjected to in the Indian schools. He found that the children "were being fed on 11 cents a day," which was seriously undermining their health. He found tuberculosis to be widespread and malnutrition endemic in the Indian schools.

The most serious charge Ryan leveled at the BIA was that learning played a secondary role throughout the system. Of primary importance was the child labor force which was used to a large extent to support the school. Half of the day was spent working in the school, and the other half in class time. Ryan argued that children need to experience full-time education. What was worse, he observed:

If the labor of the boarding school is to be done by the pupils, it is essential that the pupils be old enough and strong enough to do institutional work. In nearly every boarding school one will find children of 10, 11, and 12 spending four hours a day in more or less heavy industrial work—dairying, kitchen work, laundry and shop. The work is bad for children of this age, especially children not physically well-nourished; most of it in no sense educational, since the operations are large scale and bear little relation to either home or industrial life outside.¹⁰

As the expression goes, "If you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." Ryan set out to become part of the solution. After writing his report, he accepted the position of director of education for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In spite of his own criticism of off-reservation boarding schools, as director of education, Ryan held onto them as a less odious alternative to bussing students hours daily to the nearest school. (Some roads were impassable during inclement weather, and many reservations had rudimentary and often hazardous dirt roads.)

The crux of Ryan's reform policy was the development of cross-cultural curriculum within the off-reservation boarding schools. At the same time, he aggressively sought appropriations for the building and maintenance of day schools. Ryan saw day and/or boarding schools as intermediate solutions to Indian education. He was confident that public education was the ultimate solution to the Indian problem. He believed assimilation was a necessary societal objective, but it could and should be accomplished in more humane ways.

Fortunately for Ryan, in 1933 John Collier replaced Charles J. Rhoads as the new "reform" commissioner of Indian affairs. Collier not only became his staunch ally, but was, like Ryan, a passionate and idealistic champion of Indian rights.

Collier was a young social worker from New York who became interested in Indian affairs after visiting New Mexico. In New Mexico, he learned about the Bursam Bill proposed by Senator Bursum of New Mexico in 1928. This bill proposed to make available for homesteading unclaimed land, that is, land not backed up by a deed or grant. Some anthropologists claim that the present pueblos were built at least one thousand years ago, so the concept of having a "deed" or land grant was ludicrous. Collier's fight against the Bursam Bill united Indian Country in support of his appointment as the new commissioner of Indian affairs.

In the reform fever of the era, Collier was able to get the Indian Reorganization Act and the Johnson O'Malley Act (JOM) passed through Congress in 1934. JOM authorized contractual agreements with states (among other entities) to pay for the education of Indian children in the public school system. Federal education policy shifted from sending Indian children to off-reservation boarding schools to public schools.

The Johnson O'Malley Act

The Meriam report recommended education of Indian children in public schools was the ultimate solution to the Indian education problem. Ryan knew that some reservations were too large and too far removed from public schools. However, where it was feasible, he pushed for Indian children to attend public schools as a means of providing better education. He personally believed children were naturally flexible and better adjusted to American society when they attended integrated schools. Collier agreed and lobbied Congress for the JOM Act.

Initially, the BIA attempted to monitor the use of JOM funds to ensure that Indian children were receiving the education and the services necessary for successful integration into the public system. But when schools balked at federal intrusion upon what they considered their domain, rather than withdraw funds or change policy, the BIA relied upon the states to monitor and local communities to adhere to, the intent and spirit of the law. In fact, two years later, the JOM Act was amended to provide federal subsidies not only to states, but also to "political subdivisions, or with any State univer-

sity, college or school, or with any appropriate state or private corporation, agency or institution for the education, medical attention, agricultural assistance and social welfare, including relief of distress of Indians in such state or Territory, through the agencies of the state or Territory.¹¹

Collier and Ryan were an interesting combination of pragmatists and idealists. Politically both understood that state (particularly western states) opposition to federal monitoring would eventuate in political lobbying in Congress, with the high probability that the JOM Act would be amended. As pragmatists, they permitted (and hoped) each state receiving JOM funding would assume responsibility for monitoring these funds. Their idealism was a blind spot, because they could not perceive of public school districts misusing federal Indian education funds. This problem came to light decades later, when evaluations were conducted on the use of federal Indian education funds in public schools.

Collier and Ryan felt their energy could best be used by concentrating on developing school curriculum and cross-cultural teacher training in Indian service schools.

The blind faith Collier and Ryan had in the integrity of public education was not shared by Indian communities. It took a little more than three decades for their complaints to be heard, but finally, in 1971, a national study was conducted on JOM and Indian education.

That year, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Funds and the Center for Law and Education at Harvard University combined efforts to study the effects of public education on Indian children. *An Even Chance* remains to this day the most systematic analysis of public education for Indian children. Comprehensive in scope, the report field evaluated ten school districts in Arizona with an Indian enrollment of 14,431; eight school districts in Montana with an Indian enrollment of 5,015; eleven school districts in North Dakota with an Indian enrollment of 1,523; eight school districts in New Mexico with an Indian enrollment of 19,742; one school district in New York with an Indian enrollment of 5,710; six school districts in Oklahoma with an Indian enrollment of 24,003; two school districts in Oregon with an Indian enrollment of 3,601; sixteen school districts in South Dakota with an Indian enrollment of 16,533.¹²

An Even Chance reported that JOM funds amounted to 19.6 million in 1971. They traced the funds from the federal government to the different states and, ultimately, to local school districts. They found that the states did not monitor the use of JOM funds: "In

almost every district, even if the state did not use JOM for general support, school superintendents told us that JOM funds were combined with the school system's general fund and they could not account for how the money was spent."¹³

School districts used JOM funds to reduce local taxes for education. "As a result Federal funds received by school systems based on Indian enrollment and intended to benefit Indian children, are used, at least in part, to maintain a reduced financial effort on the part of local property owners."¹⁴

JOM was intended to help Indian parents meet the cost of education by providing funds for school lunches, athletic equipment, books, school supplies and graduation fees: "School districts in Arizona, the report said, "do not use JOM funds for parental costs . . . Our interviewers in the Navajo Nation reported that many Indian students simply dropout of school because they cannot pay their fees or buy supplies. No school officials bothered to tell them they are entitled to federal dollars to meet these needs."¹⁵ They documented the Grants, New Mexico, school district federal reimbursement for physical education equipment for Indian children, course fees, and gym shoes, none of which the students received. Worse yet, Indian students were told if they did not pay their school fees, they would not receive their grades.

Federal support under JOM provided for school lunches because many Indian families were living at or below poverty level. The report observed that in school district after school district, the children were made to feel the stigma of accepting a free lunch. Some districts, such as Tuba City, required a daily assertion of poverty in order to get lunch. In Page, Arizona, Indian parents had to sign a statement each month indicating that they did not have money for their children's lunch bills. In Madras, Oregon, Indian children were charged for their lunches and had to pay in advance. In Parshall, North Dakota, JOM students were separated in the lunch line.

Another provision of JOM provided funds for "special projects" which was to meet the special education needs of Indian children. *An Even Chance* reported school districts used the funds to benefit all children, not just Indian children. For instance, the study found that the

Dupree Independent School District in South Dakota received funds for the purchase of mobiles. They argued that this purchase was necessary in order to be able to handle its present enrollment of 257 students but the district only had 89 Indian children enrolled. . . . In Los Lunas School District in New Mex-

ico a kindergarten was financed out of JOM funds, but only a handful of Indian children were enrolled. In another school district, Indian children were using torn and tattered school books even though funds were allocated for school books and materials.¹⁶

Virtually all Indian communities wanted tribal history, language, and culture taught in the schools, but the survey found school officials "did not recognize this as a need,": "Curricula and materials used in the public schools do not include Indian culture studies. Neither are they provided as a general policy by special federal programs for Indian children in the public schools. Yet, ethnic studies were given a high priority by all the parents we interviewed."

The report confirmed what Indian communities knew all along: school districts were using JOM funds illegally and circumventing the spirit and intent of the law. That in itself would not have mobilized their anger. The hue and cry came as a result of the Coleman Report and the Kennedy hearings that confirmed calamitous drop-out rates of Indian children even in grammar school. A study conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in 1968 reported that Indian students were dropping out of high schools in some districts at rates as low as 50 percent and as high as 85 percent. *An Even Chance* conducted a study of another public-school entitlement funding, generally referred to as "Impact Aid."

Impact Aid

Impact Aid (P.L. 81-874 and P.L.81-815) was enacted with the start of the Korean War in 1950. Because of the military build-up and troop movements from state to state, Congress sought to relieve local school districts from the financial burden of educating children of armed-service personnel. Increasingly aware of the need for social programs and a department to administer these programs, Congress created the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (DHEW) in 1953. This agency administered Impact Aid to the nation's school districts.

By 1958, Impact Aid entitlements to local school districts was amended to include Indian children living on or near federal (albeit reservation) lands. In addition to JOM, local public schools with Indian enrollments had dual sources of federal funding; one admin-

istered by the BIA, the other by the DHEW. Congress was aware of dual funding but felt that JOM might fund the services Indian students required, while Impact Aid would support normal operating services as a result of increased student population. Impact Aid, or 81-874, to support school expenses accompanied 81-815 to support the cost of new buildings and equipment necessary to accommodate larger student populations. Construction expenditures are awarded on a competitive basis, and even when projects are approved, it takes years and sometimes as long as a decade for funding to be approved. The law was amended in 1970 to give Indian schools equal priority with other requests.

The Even Chance research team set out to study whether this new bureaucracy (DHEW) was any better than the Bureau of Indian Affairs at monitoring Indian education entitlements to public schools. In 1969, the year of the Impact Aid study, \$27.9 million was earmarked for school districts with Indian student enrollment. The funding formula is based upon the expenditures each district allocates for students from local taxes and the average daily attendance of Indian students.

The report of the Gallup, New Mexico, county public school found that

the inferior and substandard education which Indian children receive in districts such as Gallup is especially galling because Indian children bring in more money per child than non-Indians. DHEW, sent the average of \$306.70 per Indian child for the year 1970, \$153.35 for the child of a federal employee to local school districts. This contrasted sharply with an average of \$127.00 the local school district provided for their own children through property taxes. Of all the districts we surveyed, the GALLUP-McKINLEY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT in New Mexico (a predominantly Indian district with a total enrollment of 12,000) provides the clearest example of inequalities between schools. The difference between predominantly Indian schools and predominantly non-Indian schools is great. For example, the Indian Hills Elementary School which has an enrollment of 294 of which only one-third is Indian is located in a middle-income area of the town of Gallup. The school has a split level, carpeted music room, a carpeted library; uncrowded and well-equipped classroom, a gymnasium and a separate cafeteria. There are plenty of showers, toilets and drinking fountains. There is a paved courtyard. The school has closed-

circuit TV. Although Indian Hills Elementary is not a title I target school, our interviewers found Title I equipment there. Five miles away from Indian Hills School is the Church Rock Elementary School with a 97% Navajo enrollment. The school is a barrack-like structure, surrounded by mounds of sand that drift in through cracks in doors and windows. The "all purpose" assembly hall serves as cafeteria, gymnasium and assembly hall. There are four temporary classrooms which have no extra sanitary facilities. The classrooms are dark and crowded, the furniture worn and old.¹⁷

In addition to the above sources of funding, public schools apply for and receive funding under Title 1 (for educationally disadvantaged children) and Title 5 (formerly Title 4), the Indian Education Act, part A (formula) and part B (discretionary). All of the above are currently administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

Since the Collier regime, more Indian children have attended public schools than Indian schools. It was touted as the solution to achieving educational equity with white children in the public systems. The truth is that we shall never know whether this policy might have been the solution. We know that without diligent monitoring, school systems simply took the money and ran.

An Even Chance reported:

The Office of Education which administers the Impact Aid legislation takes the position that the Federal government is not in the business of investigating the "suitability" of public education, which is considered the responsibility of the state and local government. Nor does the Federal government determine whether Impact Aid pupils, including Indians, are receiving their fair share of the congressional appropriations.¹⁸

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the famous *Brown vs. Topeka* case. The federal government found itself in the uncomfortable role of monitoring state and local education agencies to guarantee equal educational opportunities for black children. The obligation to monitor educational equity with respect to black children made it untenable to continue a laissez faire policy regarding Indian students. By the sixties, Indians found strong and vocal support from social scientists and educators. The Coleman report in 1966 took direct aim at the public school system and was particularly instrumental in the creation of the Kennedy hearings of 1968.

The Coleman Report

In 1966, James Coleman conducted a national study on the effectiveness of public-school education for minorities entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. The target population of this study coming on the heels of the civil rights movement and *Brown vs. Topeka*, was black students, but Coleman also examined the effects of public education on American Indian children. He reported Indian children were achieving less than black children in the public-school systems. His findings are even more compelling when measured against the federal funds available to public schools for the education of Indian children, not otherwise available for the education of other minorities: "Of all the different minority groups, Coleman reported, it is the American Indian whose verbal and national average reading scores show a large decrease in relative standing over the grades, which shows the training they receive does not allow them to maintain the relative standing among other groups with which they began school."¹⁹

In other words, the longer an Indian child stayed in school, the greater the age/grade gap widened. Coleman's study found that Indian high-school seniors were performing on an age/grade level of first-year high-school students. Federal Indian education subsidies motivated public schools to retain Indian children (although there was a high drop-out rate) but not necessarily to educate them effectively.

The Kennedy Report

In 1968 Robert Kennedy, and later his brother Edward, chaired congressional hearings on Indian education. Much of the same criticism leveled at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Meriam report forty years earlier was repeated in the Kennedy report. The only difference was the focus of public rather than Indian service education. The report found that despite substantial federal funding, the highest dropout rate of any group in the country was by the American Indian.

At Kennedy's encouragement Indians from all over the country testified before Congress. Many Indians had to pay their own way since few tribal councils could afford to help them. Yet they came, and they stayed in the cheapest hotel rooms our nation's capital has to offer. Nothing deterred them from having their say before

Congress. Tribe after tribe aired complaints before a shocked and bewildered congressional committee.

The anecdotal Indian testimony during the Kennedy hearings was substantially corroborated by the National Regional Educational Laboratory comprehensive study *The American Indian High School Dropout—The Magnitude of the Problem*. This study was compelling because it was longitudinal, following the same Indian students over years and from school to school. As they explained: "This study has differed from other dropout studies in that the students registered in the same grade on a specific date who constituted the target population were each identified by name. The progress through school of each student was then traced to high school graduate or another specific date almost five years later unless death or dropout from school occurred prior to that time."²⁰

The study of students in grades eight through twelve concentrated on the Indian student populations in public schools (and some BIA-operated schools) in the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and North and South Dakota. The study revealed the average dropout rate of Indian students at grade 8 was about 50 percent. South Dakota had the highest drop-out rate of 85 percent. The school districts studied by the National Regional Educational Laboratory received federal Indian education entitlements to provide basic and special-education needs. The BIA-operated schools were funded through congressional appropriations. In spite of the money that went into solving the problem, the problems not only persisted, but were more severe than when Ryan conducted the Meriam report study.

In essence, the reforms of Collier and Ryan and the attempts to integrate Indians into public education had failed. The failure is directly attributable to placing Indian education funds outside of the scrutiny of the Indian communities, rendering Indians powerless to direct effective education for their young. Collier and Ryan, both idealists and innovative educators, could not conceive Indians as the solution to creating an educational milieu to achieve excellence. At the same time, they failed to incorporate reasonable federal monitoring procedures within the funding process. The schools were not held accountable either by the Indians or by the federal agencies. In effect, the lack of provisions to hold public schools accountable undermined the intent and spirit of Indian education funding.

Tribal aspirations to operate their own schools as they had in the last century came alive again through Johnson's War on Poverty. President Johnson created a new agency for social change, the Office of Economic Opportunity, (OEO). The OEO was an agency that took

risks with an uncompromising understanding that poor people, if given opportunity, could make positive and productive changes in their lives. In Indian Country, OEO developed guidelines providing the possibility of Indian-controlled schools. OEO's first experiment in 1966 was Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo reservation.

The funding of Indian programs by OEO challenged the exclusive autonomy once held by the Department of Education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Both these agencies took their complaints to Congress during the Kennedy hearings. They testified that OEO-funded schools were being administered by Indian amateurs and had a deleterious effect on Indian education.

Madison Coombs was deputy director of education when Rough Rock, financed by OEO, began operations. During the Kennedy hearings, he openly criticized Rough Rock and Navajo methodology. He concluded that they "have furnished clear evidence that control and not the quality of education is the significant goal of the sponsors."²¹

In her book, *Education and the American Indian*, Margaret Szasz cites an article written by Coombs, "The Indian Child Goes to School," in which he claims that a comparative study showed that Indian children tested higher in public schools than those who attended federal and mission schools. His statements contradicted the study published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1968) which found an extraordinarily high dropout rate of Indians in public schools (50 to 85 percent) and the findings of *An Even Chance* in 1971.

Those (federal Indian money) dollars have been used for every conceivable school system need except the need that Congress had in mind. Impact Aid and Johnson O'Malley dollars support general operating expenses of local school districts and thus make it possible for those districts to reduce taxes for non-Indian property owners. Special programs, which should serve Indian needs, in fact serve the total school population. Title I and Johnson O'Malley dollars purchase system-wide services. Those dollars pay for teachers' aids who serve all the children, not the educationally deprived Indian children. They buy fancy equipment for every child, not just the eligible Indian children. They provide kindergarten classes for all children, not just the eligible children. They buy mobile classrooms which become permanent facilities for all students. In sum, Indians

do not get the educational benefits that they are, by law, entitled to receive.²²

In spite of the self-serving testimony of administrators from the BIA and the Department of Education, the overwhelming evidence produced during the Kennedy hearings supported the contention that both agencies had failed to produce an educated Indian population. Congress was in no mood for excuses and once again, went back to the drawing board.

If the Indian service failed to educate the Indian child, if the public schools performed equally miserably, then the solution to Indian educational achievement must lie somewhere else. One inescapable solution was to legislate vigorous parental input as a requisite for states and public schools to receive Indian education funds.

Change in the abysmal educational attainment of Indian children logically demanded that Indian parents and tribes would have to be a part of the solution. Recognizing that which had escaped Collier and so many before and after him, Congress passed the Indian Education Act in 1972, with provisions for Indian parents/and/or tribal participation within the school systems. This was followed by the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 (93-638). Under provisions of both these acts, tribes and tribal Indian organizations can operate their own schools and programs formerly operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It has since been amended to give even greater strength to tribal autonomy.

Tribal autonomy conflicts sharply with the ideas of melting-pot theorists and policy makers. The greater the independence, tribal education asserts, the wider the chasm between the goals of assimilationists and the goals of tribal self-determination. It should be a surprise to no one that Indian control has many critics among government policy makers. They had envisioned that the goals of tribes would correspond or at least harmonize with the national educational goals.

But, as pointed out earlier, education is a political act, an institution that is designed for nation-building. The best interests of tribal nations are not necessarily the best interests of the United States, and to measure tribal education in terms of public or BIA education, which is essentially an assimilationist or colonial model, is to deny the right of tribes to design education to meet their national goals.

Just as public education is a political act, the process of evaluation is equally political. By definition, evaluations measure the intent of education using content (a commonly agreed-upon body of

knowledge) as its yardstick. For instance, when the chiefs of various tribes in Virginia (mentioned earlier) assessed the education of some of their young Indians at a colonial college, they used the yardstick of how competent the graduates were in terms of living in the woods, hunt successfully, speak Indian fluently, and contribute to the tribe. However, the elite of Virginia assessed success in terms of how well the Indian students spoke English, learned the Christian Bible, dressed similarly with their colonial colleagues, and were able to integrate into colonial society. While the former did not mind that their students learned English and colonial ways, they were dismayed that these were to the exclusion of tribal education. They were in fact embracing a multicultural model, but the latter assumed an assimilationist (or later what would be termed "melting-pot") model.

Little has changed from those early days. There is no disagreement that the assimilationist and cultural pluralistic models are interested in assessing Indian student achievement in reading, comprehension, math, and science. After that, the two models of evaluative inquiry diverge sharply. Assimilationist evaluations focus exclusively on the acquisition of knowledge while the cultural pluralistic model goes beyond the statistics with an investigation of the fit between culture and education. This is the model usually endorsed by Indian educators because, unlike European immigrants who permitted the institution of education to trade their cultural/historical past for an economically mobile future for their children, the Indian race sought a future without relinquishing their past or their culture for their children.

One other aspect needs discussion. It is highly unlikely that those early eighteenth-century Indian students graduating from the college in Virginia were integrated into either tribal or colonial society because of endemic racism in even early American society. Those early experiments in education became what sociologists term, "marginal men" existing on the periphery of American and/or tribal society. This problem exists even today, in the twentieth century. Statistics on Indian student achievement disregard the historic documentation of the effects of racism on Indian student retention, the social, political, and economic impact of Indian drop-out rates on tribal development and individual self-esteem.

This book examines two studies, the ABT study, using the colonial or melting-pot measurement of Indian student achievement, and the Madison study, measuring the cultural pluralist model.

The ABT study was commissioned to compare Indian student

achievement in tribal, BIA, and public schools in terms of cost-benefit analysis.

Evaluation of the Madison public-schools was designed from a multicultural perspective. The community in this Madison study is comparable to other communities where there are sizable Indian populations close-by or what is termed "border towns" to reservations. There are always individual differences, but on the whole, this town is similar to others in Indian Country.

To get at the heart of the Indian student-achievement enigma, one needs to understand the educational environment of these communities. The Madison illustration is a microcosm, not exact, but sufficiently extensive for the reader to understand the sociology of rural life where Indian and non-Indian meet, work, live, and die. There are no heroes. There are no villains. There are two distinct cultures who are still fighting the wars of the 1800s. It is not open warfare. No guns are used. No one openly challenges and insults another, but it is war, nonetheless. The battleground is the classroom, and the war is about the minds and the hearts of children.

As a nation, we profess belief in cultural pluralism and respect for differences. At the same time, we call ourselves the "melting pot." These two concepts are contradictory and are at the source of conflict in Indian education. Pluralism generates the John Colliers and the Indian Education and Self Determination Act. The melting pot creates the Dawes allotment and termination policies. If Indian country is confused, it is because they operate on the principle of cultural pluralism, while the educational bureaucracy fosters the melting pot.

The reality is that this nation organizes its time, money, ambitions, and classrooms to legitimize only one language, culture, religion, history, and ideal. In this tug of war, no one wins. The losers are children, all children.