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# NATIVE AMERICAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

## HOW NATIVE AMERICANS ARE USING DECOLONIALIZATION METHODS AFTER DECADES OF TRAUMA IN BOARDING SCHOOLS

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Native American boarding schools, also known as **Indian Residential Schools**, were established under the principle of "**kill the Indian, save the man**" (Dennison 2020) in the United States during the late 19th century with the primary objective of erasing Native culture and assimilating Indigenous children into white American culture (Cote 2020).



PICTURE OF A NATIVE AMERICAN BOY BEFORE AND AFTER ATTENDING BOARDING SCHOOL

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## ABUSE NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN ENDURED AT BOARDING SCHOOLS:

- **Physical abuse**
  - Native children were beaten as their main form of punishment.
  - Young girl had mouth washed out with soap for speaking in her Native tongue (Mazo 2018).
  - Children "were fed cheap, poor-quality foods like porridge, powdered milk, hard tac biscuits, and the odd piece of fruit or glass of milk, barely enough food to stay nourished or healthy" (Cote 2020).
- **Spiritual and Psychological abuse**
  - Native children were told that they "had Indian blood so the abuse [was] justified" (Mazo 2018).
  - Young girl told that "no one on the reservation wanted her" (Mazo 2018).
- **Sexual abuse**
  - Nuns, Priests, and teachers sexually abused the young boys and girls (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).
  - Girls got pregnant and had to leave school (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).

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### COLONIALISM THAT OCCURED IN BOARDING SCHOOLS

Native children were not allowed to speak their Native language (Workman 2019).

Native American children were not allowed to even "think culturally" because the teachers would know and beat them (Cote 2020).

Tseshah children were abused and starved at a boarding school in Canada (Cote 2020).

### HOW NATIVE AMERICANS ARE UNSETTLING COLONIALISM

Classes are taught to children to preserve Native language. Even now with the COVID-19 pandemic, different tribes are hosting virtual classes and powwows to continue decolonization methods (Child 2020).

Today, young artists and poets are putting their culture, feelings, and experiences into songs and poetry as method of healing from the legacy of boarding schools (Pico and Waln 2020).

Promoting healing by building "Thunderbird" sculpture where the school once stood and started a community garden to grow their own healthy food (Cote 2020).

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# TRIBES THAT ARE ACTIVELY RESISTING COLONIALISM:

- **The Tseshaht nation**
  - Working to develop their own practices to combat the poor diet and treatment that children endured at boarding schools (Cote 2020).
  - 3 part "Thunderbird" sculpture to depict their trauma, healing, and survival (Cote 2020).
  - "[The sculpture] will serve as a constant reminder for all of the horrors that occurred at AIRS over the decades, to honor all who didn't return to their families, and pay tribute to the resiliency of all those who survived their time there" (Cote 2020).
- **The Lakota Tribe**
  - Re-walking the Trail of Tears to "reconnect with their ancestors" and "their vision of life and love" (Walters 2018).
  - Practicing healthier eating habits to "fulfill their original instructions" (Walters 2018).
- **The Muckleshoot Tribe**
  - Working towards "food sovereignty" by growing their own groceries and fighting for access to all of the game, fish, roots, and berries in the community (Segrest 2014).



Artist Connie Watts stands in front of her Thunderbird sculpture where the Alberni Indian School once stood



Professor Karina Walters and Lakota Tribe members re-walking the Trail of Tears in order to reconnect with their ancestors goals of life and love.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Even after decades of colonialism, **Native Americans are still working towards sovereignty** (Walters 2018).
- Indigenous peoples work in solidarity to continue to find unique methods of decolonialization and healing (Hostetter 2020).
- Native Americans **are still present and continuing to fight for their sovereignty** which signifies their resilience and strength (Child 2020).
- It is important to learn about these boarding schools because they have **present day effects on Native Americans**, if the memory of boarding schools is erased, than the real life consequences that occur today are also erased (Walters 2020).

## How you can help: Focus on Decolonization

- **Center Native voices and knowledge** (Dennison 2020).
- **Repatriation** (give land back and help Indigenous peoples achieve sovereignty) (Sepulveda 2018).
- Acknowledge that **decolonization is a process with no end point** (Sepulveda 2018).
- **Advocate for Native representation** in school and communities (Sepulveda 2018).
- Build relationships and solidarity with Natives (Sepulveda 2018).



Professor Karina Walters gives a presentation on how everyone can make small changes in their lives to ensure that Native American voices are present and listened to