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American Indian Boarding schools

One of the key elements in the assimilation of the natives between 1860 and 1920 by the U.S government was the use of boarding schools. The boarding schools were preferred to military action since they were cheaper to initiate. The day schools, on the other hand, were perceived to be ineffective since the educators only got to spend time with the students during some parts of the day. This post gives a brief discussion on how the boarding school system worked, whether it was successful in assimilating the Native Americans, the unintended consequences and the modern legacy of these schools.

The Native American boarding schools were created with an aim to assimilate the youth and the native children into the Euro-American way of life. The children were taken through changes that were coercive and whose main objective was to get rid of the indigenous culture. Once the natives were enrolled in these schools, they were given new names, forced to have new haircuts and restricted from speaking their native language (AIRC). The students were also forced into Christianity and taught new tasks and a few subjects which aimed at making them self-reliable. However, the individuals also underwent disciplinary practices that were abusive, fear and intimidation in order to coerce them into embracing the new ways of life.

In the end, this program of assimilation managed to assimilate some of the participants. Some were completely absorbed in the new way of life and were entirely disconnected from their native language and culture. It was also noted that some of the individuals that passed through the institution maintained orderly households, the American modes of dressing, Christianity and work habits that were industrious (AIRC). However, although there were a few cases of assimilation that were successful, this program was not a success in the end. The few changes that were observed were out of coercion which implies that they were not genuine. In addition, after graduation most students did not abide by the white way of life. However, the effect of this program on the lives and the way of life of the Natives in the U.S cannot be underestimated.

However, there were unintended consequences that arose from this program. One is that some individuals experienced trauma due to the experience they got from the schools. Others experienced isolation from the rest of the community and their family once they underwent the assimilation. Today, these boarding schools hold a horrifying as well as an entirely bad legacy among the Americans particularly the natives. The truth that known to many people is that the program was used to oppress the natives rather than uplift them which was the initial intention. The program is linked with practices such as forced labor, coercion, rape and other practices that were evil. This creates a legacy that is horrifying and acts as a symbol of historical trauma. The question that I derive from the readings is; how would the modern American society look like or the way of life that people would adopt if the assimilation policies such as the Indian boarding schools were not put in place?

Works Cited

AIRC. "Native American History and Culture: Boarding Schools - American Indian Relief Council is Now Northern Plains Reservation Aid." *Helping Native American People Improve the Quality of Life - Partnership With Native Americans*,
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