Sinister Schooling: Modern-Day Implications of Hampton Model Industrial Schools and American Indian Boarding Schools

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Abstract: Throughout American history, the government has taken various systemic measures to monitor, surveil and control its burgeoning minority populations. In the postbellum era, these aims were primarily focused on assimilation and cultural genocide modeled, beginning with the creation of schools like the Hampton Model Schools for Black students and American Indian boarding schools for Indigenous students. Though neither remain in operation, their spirit lives, particularly as we see Native and Black students being funneled into occupational tracks in high school, having disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsion, and being subjected to a whitewashed curriculum that positions them as victims, criminals, or non-existent. This work seeks to explore the linkages between these historical institutions and the current status of Native and Black students in modern-day schools.

Keywords: historical schooling, disproportionate discipline, tracking, American Indian students, Black students

Introduction

In October 2018, a teacher in New Mexico approached a Native American female student in her class and cut off three inches of her long, braided hair, scattering the hair onto the student’s desk,1 and then calling another student a “bloody Indian.”2 A student in Canada cut off the braid of his First Nations classmate; after the cutting, his mother said, “I cried like there was a death.”3 In September 2019, a Black girl was handcuffed and arrested for throwing a tantrum in her classroom.4 She was six years old. These acts - forced haircutting and criminalizing children - are not new, but are rooted in history as just one element of a larger settler colonialist project aimed at controlling, assimilating, and humiliating colonial subjects. The Hampton Model Industrial Schools and American Indian boarding schools, both developed in the 19th century, are centric to school-based efforts of assimilation, cultural genocide, and establishing racial hierarchies.5 Though these institutions were closed after 1980, the sentiment remains in American schools today.6 Many American institutions are similarly bound to these White supremacist systems, including modern American policing, which grew out of the slave patrols’ goal of “maintaining White racial

1 West 2018.
2 Wright 2018.
3 Croteau 2018.
4 Mahdawi 2019.
6 Jones, Bosworth and Lonetree 2011.
dominance.” Schools were created with this exact purpose, maintaining racial, economic and gendered hierarchies, and prioritizing Whiteness, wealth, and masculinity in their various settings. Pewewardy contends that “the public schools which most Indian children attend, as institutions, represent the values and behaviors of the white middle class and are designed for children from that community.” Both American Indian and Black students, therefore, enter public schools designed in opposition to their values, and often endure racism, culturally inept teachers, and the delegitimization of their Indigenous and Black identities. They also face the most harrowing statistics of all racial demographics, with the lowest levels of educational attainment and the highest poverty levels, disproportionately high rates of expulsion and suspension as well as high rates of placement into special education programs. The policies of government-run boarding schools and Hampton model schools have paved the way for these harrowing statistics. This text will examine the intergenerational linkages of the boarding school and Hampton model school era with the modern-day challenges that American Indian and Black students face.

**Literature Review**

*Hampton model industrial schools*

The postbellum era stirred many questions and dilemmas, including educational ones as compulsory, free public education was on the rise. The Hampton Model of Normal School Industrial Education was a response to this question, and was founded in 1868 by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a former General in the Union’s army. This school was created specifically for African American pupils, but some Native American students were admitted, as well. Though the education of Black people remained a controversial concept in America, particularly given antebellum bans on Black literacy, the Hampton school became a beacon of hope for many Black students desiring a teaching degree. However, the schools were primarily agricultural institutions and its pupils were required to perform manual labor. The school’s initial schedule consisted of manual labor in the mornings and academic lessons in the afternoons; but as the demands of the farms increased, so did students’ hours tilling and toiling in them. However, this uptake in manual labor was not coincidental, as the schools were designed to maintain white supremacy in the post-slavery era while reinforcing Black inferiority. Armstrong saw this manual labor as necessary for Black readjustment to a subordinate status in the South. Additionally, Armstrong believed Black students to be both morally inferior and academically...
incapable compared to whites, both of which are reflected in the design of the Hampton School. Rather than acknowledging the manufacturers of the systemic oppression of Black people, Armstrong blamed the latter for their own socioeconomic problems, stating, “The North generally thinks that the great thing is to free the Negro from his former owners, the real thing is to save him from himself.” It is in this paternalistic, apologist spirit that the Hampton School, as well as other white-run institutions for Black pupils, were wrought.

Black students’ political rights were similarly elusive in the postbellum area; whites were fearful that the education of Black students would socially and politically mobilize them. Armstrong dissented, believing ‘education’ to be a powerful force in the inculcation and indoctrination of Black pupils towards white supremacist ideology; like many white people of the time, he opposed Black enfranchisement and participation in the public sector. He used his platform as an educator and curriculum developer to discourage the Black vote, again citing his belief in the moral and cultural deficiency of Black people.

Additionally, the school codified a strict social discipline regimen that occupied students’ entire day; Armstrong notes:

They reported for morning inspection at 5:45, had breakfast and prayer from 6:00 to 6:30, worked or studied during the day with scarcely a half hour to themselves, went to supper and evening prayers from 6:00 to 6:45 P.M., and, if in night school, retired to their dormitories thoroughly fatigued after evening study from 7:00 to 9:00. Male students were required to participate in military drill and to march to and from classes. Beret-Captain Henry Romeyn, who commanded the Hampton Cadets in 1878, stated that the military drill was “not intended to make soldiers out of our students, nor to create a warlike spirit,” but to “create ideas of neatness, order, system, obedience, and produce a better manhood.”

He also notes that “female students received less regular training and were encouraged to do little except “plain sewing, plain washing and ironing, scrubbing, mending, etc.” The students grew increasingly disgruntled at the amount of manual labor they were required to perform, wishing instead to learn a skilled trade or high-level scholarly work. Some students protested; one student likened the school to prison labor, stating “it is to be remembered that four years at a trade like ours, working from 7 A.M. to 5:50 P.M., is enough to break down the constitution of a man, much less boys in the bloom of youth.” On the ideology of the school, another alumni stated “besides, I think colored children are taught to remember, ‘You are Negroes,’ and as such, ‘your place is behind’.” Unsurprisingly, Armstrong also excluded classical studies from the Hampton model curriculum, believing it would give Black students lofty political and professional ideas rather than reinforcing the subservience Hampton sought to maintain. Additionally, embedded in both the curriculum and the religious teachings of the school was the ideology “that the position of their race [Blacks] in the South was not the result of oppression but of the natural process of cultural

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16 Croom and Alston 2009.
17 Talbot 1904.
20 Ibid: 55.
21 Ibid: 61.
22 Ibid: 64.
Similarly, and in keeping with its strict social discipline regimen, Hampton also had a zero-tolerance policy for ‘misbehavior.’ Students were expelled for infractions like failing to stand during morning prayers, laughing, absence from church, profanity, having lights on after hours, and having a disorderly room. These infractions were a part of the school’s process of weeding out students labeled as rebellious in order to house a student body they perceived as optimally docile. The Hampton Model Schools were designed primarily to subjugate Black pupils and assuage white consciousness of both slavery and of Black insurgence; the school represents a system that is palatable for whites but still oppressive to Blacks.

American Indian boarding schools

As a direct result of the Hampton Model Schools solving America’s “Negro Problem,” American Indian boarding schools were forged to solve its Indian one. When white invaders came to the land that is now known as North America, they were faced with what would later be coined as the “Indian problem,” and developed solutions aimed at eradicating the population to both promote their land-snatching agenda and bolster white supremacy. After many American Indian tribes were pushed westward, leaving their populations decimated through white violence and germ warfare, America switched its practice from physical extermination and forced removal to assimilation into white society. This assimilation was to be primarily achieved through boarding schools for American Indian youth.

Richard Henry Pratt founded these schools after conducting an experiment on 72 Plains Indian prisoners in his jurisdiction. Pratt indoctrinated these prisoners with military education and transformed their physical appearance to align with white standards. Though some of these prisoners committed suicide during the process, Pratt showed before-and-after photos of the prisoners to officials within the Department of the Interior and the War Department, both of which primarily dealt with Indian affairs, and military style schools for Native children began popping up across the country. Some of the earliest government-run Indian boarding schools were built on the outskirts of reservations. The government saw the benefit of locating these schools proximally to tribal lands due to the civilizing influence the children could have on their parents; however, it was noted that “the children still were not sufficiently removed from the degrading influence of tribal life” and many of the students were subsequently sent off of their reservations.

24 Ibid: 58.
26 Garland 1902; Zalcman 2016.
28 Tatonetti 2011.
29 Jones, Bosworth, and Lonetree 2011.
These boarding schools subjected American Indian youth to various ills and operated under the guise of “kill the Indian, save the man.” 32 Children were taken from their tribal communities at young ages and most returned only in adulthood. 33 Students were forced to dress like Europeans, take European names, and convert to Christianity. 34 Children’s hair was also cut against their will, despite the cultural importance of having long hair in many tribes, to force them into white standards of grooming and appearance. Additionally, the students were often malnourished and housed in overcrowded spaces. 35 Tribal languages were forbidden and speaking them was punishable by beating or disfigurement. 36 37 38 Teachers also sexually abused students with regularity, including in the schools run by religious organizations. 39

Students were also forced into highly regimented lives like their Black peers at Hampton. Lomawaima remarks “the degree of surveillance of Indian students dwarfed any possible requirements of straightforward education. The Indian Service demanded such minute documentation of the Indians’ personal lives and backgrounds that it is remarkable the school staff had any time to educate.” 40 Through this meticulous surveillance, the goal of the schools was “to create a new kind of Indian through the moral, spiritual, and physical training.” 41

Also like the Hampton model schools was the ideology of whiteness as superior to Indianness. One superintendent of these schools remarked:

Allowing for exceptional cases, the Indian child is of lower physical organization than the white child of corresponding age. In short, the Indian instincts and nerves and muscles and bones are adjusted one to another, and all to the habits of the race for uncounted generations, and his offspring cannot be taught like the children of the white man until they are taught to do like them. Therefore, rather than to educate, the primary function of the schools was to indoctrinate, assimilate, and manipulate Indian children towards the will of the white, settler colonial government.

Life after the boarding schools was similarly bleak for most of the pupils. Though many returned home, they often arrived feeling out of place. 42 They had often forgotten how to speak their tribal languages due to the punitive practices of the boarding schools. They were left with a loss of Indian identity, and with a new whitewashed identity intended to replace it, but soon found

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33 American Indian Boarding Schools 2008; Jones, Bosworth, and Lonetree 2011.
34 Yeboah 2005.
35 Gregg 2018.
36 Gram 2016.
37 Gregg 2018.
38 Jones, Bosworth, and Lonetree 2011.
39 American Indian Boarding Schools 2008.
40 Lomawaima 1993: 229.
41 Ibid: 230.
42 Jones, Bosworth, and Lonetree 2011.
that white society did not accept them, either. This cycle would continue for decades, with many of the schools remaining open until the 1980s, leaving us less than 40 years removed from these traumatic, culturally exterminatory institutions.  

**Modern Day Implications**

The harm done by teachers, schools and curricula to Native and Black students is not ahistorical. The Hampton Model School and Indian boarding schools and current public-school systems heavily overlap in both in both ideology and principles. Modern day schooling of Native and Black students is rooted in whiteness and Christianity and is culturally relevant only for those dually identified. Research shows that “the bulk of the US curriculum opts to privilege and incentivize settler–colonial narratives over a curriculum that advances understanding of multiculturalism and social justice.” Grande explores similar concepts and discusses the education system’s commitment to what is both mainstream and white, or “Whistream.” Indigenous and Black knowledge is constructed as deviant, illegitimate and primeval. These students often also fall victim to ability tracking, relegating them to lower-level tracks than their white peers all while facing disproportionate disciplinary practices.

**Anti-Indigenous Curricula**

Pewewardy discusses teacher complicity in Whitestream curricula, citing their ‘we vs. they’ stance in teaching Indigenous students. Teachers, therefore, exist counter to traditional Indigenous schooling’s emphasis on community and relationality, and opt instead for an arms-length approach. These teachers are often influenced by monocultural worldviews rather than multicultural ones and interact with their Native students accordingly. They are highly influenced by the media’s stereotypical representations of Native people and often incorporate these stereotypes into the classroom, including by asking Native students for their blood quantum, referring to Natives only in the past tense, and adopting a pan-Indian view of Native people rather than acknowledging the cultural, social and political distinctiveness of each tribe. Other errors include teaching the Columbus discovered America narrative and mistelling the story of Thanksgiving. Many teachers are guilty of most of these offenses and Indigenous students are forced to separate fact from fiction on their own.

In addition to teachers with colonial mindsets, textbooks are often the source of extremely problematic and whitewashed content. Native youth are typically subjected to curriculum that erases tribal narratives, supporting instead Anglo-colonialism and white supremacy. Stanton’s 2014 study of five popular history textbooks shows that Native history, when discussed, is primarily told through a white lens, avoiding discussions of their lives pre-invasion. The texts were often

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44 Stanton and Morrison 2018: 732.  
46 Pewewardy 1998.  
patriarchal or animalistic in their depictions of Native people, using language like “refused to obey” or “rounded up.” Curriculum developers often stipulate, consciously or not, that for American Indian youth to succeed, the dominant culture’s ideals and knowledge should be preeminent in the classroom. Research indicates, however, that these youth fare far better in academic settings that value their cultural backgrounds and integrate their community’s teachings.

Chaudhri and Schau analyzed Scholastic Book Club offerings for grades K-6 to determine the number of Native authors and illustrators and to examine the books’ content. They determined that Natives are often depicted as violent, wild and barbaric. The characters wore clothes that were stereotypical rather than authentic, and wore feathers, braids and fringe; in addition, throughout many of the texts, American Indian people are often compared to or placed in juxtaposition to animals, further bolstering the idea of the Native as savage or primitive. This study shows how from as early as Kindergarten, children are bombarded with stereotypical and problematic American Indian imagery, a trend which will continue throughout their lives. Without a teacher equipped to critically and responsibly teach the truth, many students, Native and non-Native, will be subjected to content that is continuously anti-Indigenous in nature. Additionally, standardization and policies like “No Child Left Behind” also deprioritize Indigenous students and knowledge; curricula and testing, therefore, delegitimize Indigenous content.

Anti-Black Curricula

Pro-Black scholarship in schools is similarly problematized or omitted. Afrocentricity is tabled in favor of perpetuating unlimited narratives of white male dominance, strength and victory; these narratives result in all students adopting Eurocentric notions of Blackness, and “allows African people to unquestionably accept and support ideas that diminish their worth” and argues that “stereotyping, marginalizing and miseducation will continue, and be accepted as factual.” Similarly, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is scorned in public schools. One example is Goodman and Buck’s study of Black AAVE speaking students and reading comprehension. The authors found that when AAVE speaking students read stories or sentences aloud, they often misinterpreted their meanings. This finding was not attributed to the students use of their dialect, but rather to their teacher’s expressed disapproval of it. The authors observed that students would willfully change their pronunciation of certain words to appease their teacher and avoid reprimand, which would often lead to a lack of reading comprehension. In addition, teachers typically have higher academic expectations for mainstream English speakers, most of whom are white, than for Black children speaking AAVE. Jamil, Larson and Hamre linked future achievement of minority youth to teacher’s expectations of them, making this issue particularly important and in need of

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48 Stanton 2014.
49 Bosse, Duncan, Gapp, and Newland 2011.
50 Chaudri and Shau 2016.
51 Stanton and Morrison 2018.
52 Braithwaite 2010: 14.
53 Goodman and Buck 1978.
54 Cecil 1998.
correction. Hines-Knapp also found in her study that many educators held negative views and various misconceptions about AAVE which undoubtedly affect student performance and comfort in the classroom. Given current cases of linguistic oppression, including Louisiana’s “just give me a lawyer, dog,” where a Black man was denied a lawyer because the courts ruled that he asked for a “lawyer dog” as well as AAVE being delegitimized and mocked in the Trayvon Martin case, this topic is both critical and life-altering.

Disproportionate exclusionary punishment

American Indian youth experience disproportionately high rates of expulsion, suspension, and corporal punishment in schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, though these youth account for approximately 1% of the population, they comprise 2% of all out of school suspensions and 3% of expulsions, making them the racial group most likely to face these forms of punishment per capita. Additionally, American Indian males comprise 13% of all male out of school suspensions, and American Indian females comprise 7% in the female category. Native youth are also the most likely per capita to be referred to law enforcement.

Pyscher and Lozenski argue that oppressive and genocidal practices that Native people have endured have maintained residence in modern-day schools as evidenced by these disproportionately high numbers of exclusionary punishment. Additionally, they propose that these youth are further brutalized by being punished by the very systems that seek to Anglicize them, while these removals from school settings situate them on the school-to-prison pipeline, characterizing them as “throwaways.” The authors indicate that schools seek to label these students as noncompliant, deviant, and disordered, rather than employing restorative justice practices to address systemic issues in educational settings.

Love contends that rather than being protected and educated, Black students instead are “steered into detention centers, jails, and prisons from the hallways of school buildings.” Schools subsequently become centers of dehumanization and humiliation for them. National statistics concur with Love’s points; even in pre-school, Black children account for 48% of all out-of-school suspensions while only accounting for 18% of the preschool population. Beyond preschool, Black students are suspended at three times the rate of their white peers. The data on Black students and law enforcement interactions is perhaps even more troubling; though Black students account for

56 Hines-Khapp, Oliphant-Ingham, Davis, Holmes, and Monroe 2015.
57 Jackson 2017.
58 Rigoglioso 2014.
59 Brown and Di Tillio 2013.
60 Civil Rights Data 2014.
61 Civil Rights Data 2014.
63 Pyscher and Lozenski 2014: 34.
64 Love 2013: 12.
65 Civil Rights Data 2014.
16% of the student population, they represent 27% of those who referred to law enforcement and 31% of those subjected to a school-based arrest. Love refers to this crisis - the criminalization of Black youth - as an intrinsic part of ‘soul murder,’ defined within the school context as “the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism.” Schools complicity in soul murder propels their service as agents of the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Policing of Native and Black Hair and Culture in Schools**

As the boarding schools sought to eradicate Native cultures, similar practices are seen in schools today. There have been multiple incidences of school suspensions of students, specifically males, for wearing long hair or other traditional hairstyles like mohawks. Additionally, in an effort to standardize dress, many Native students are forbidden from wearing cultural attire or donning eagle feathers, a “traditional symbol of great personal accomplishment,” during graduation ceremonies or other important school events. Walters indicates in his survey of American Indian community members, that microaggressions like being asked to change their appearance or to cut their hair are common experiences. The author also found that such experiences were highly correlated with feelings of distress over the lifespan of the individual, and that such daily stressors deleteriously impact health outcomes. Black students endure similar trauma. In December 2018, a Black student wrestler’s locs were cut by a referee before a match, though the official policy stated that hair only needed to be covered, not cut. Though the student still won the match, he won out of the unnecessary humiliation the referee subjected him to. This policing of Black hair is not a one-off, but is endemic in American history and now, in American schools.

**Native and Black Student Assignment to Low-Level Tracks**

Early into their pre-K12 experience, students are often tracked based on ability levels into groups or classes presumably best designed for their proficiency level. Native and Black students, however, are disproportionately placed in lower-level ability groups early on, which often determines how they are tracked for the remainder of their school years. Jamil, Larsen and Hamre contend that teachers’ subjective perceptions of students’ abilities guide their classroom decision making processes, including students being given differentiated assignments or being tracked into lower-
or higher-level ability groups. These perceptions, however, are not immune to human bias, but rather, are informed by them. Other studies show that teachers often have lower expectations for students of color and higher expectations for white students. Additionally, Native American students are disproportionately represented in vocational education in high school and Black students are significantly more likely than their white peers to major in vocational education at the community college level.

**Discussion**

Though the Hampton schools and Indian boarding schools are no more, the spirit of them is alive and well in our schools today. American Indian and Black students still face disproportionate rates of punishment, forced hair-cutting, tracking into vocational programs and other assimilatory practices in modern-day education systems. Grande states that American Indian youth continue to endure an education that seeks to Anglicize them through whitewashed curricula that either ignores or erases Native experiences, histories and cultures. Love contends that modern-day schools are sites of harm, not healing, for Black students. Faircloth warns that a failure to correct these modern-day iterations of historically traumatic schooling practices makes us complicit and that we are responsible for abolishing educational practices that diminish and erase Indigenous stories. Decolonizing schooling is one method by which transformation can occur. Battiste states that decolonization is both “deconstruction and reconstruction”; in order to construct a better educational system, it must first be deconstructed. Though education has been a historically assimilatory process, the harm must end so that Indigenous and Black children might not be forced to continue to suffer to learn.

In conjunction with decolonizing content and engaging in truth-telling, educators must also work to decolonize pedagogy. Lecturing to students daily is disengaging and uncommunal; Indigenous and Black students often require a more relational and reflective approach. Storytelling is one way to incorporate more inclusive pedagogy and theory into the classroom. Educators should also work to be culturally responsive to the locality in which they are situated; for instance, many American teachers view Native American people as a people existing in the West, however, hundreds of thousands of Native people live in the Southeast United States and have maintained residence there for millennia. Educators must learn about the history and issues of Native people in their own school district, town and state. They must also understand their own relation to the soil they occupy and ask themselves difficult questions like “when did my ancestors come here?” and “whose land did they occupy when they came?” It is imperative, as well, for white educators to know whose land

75 Jamil, Laresn, and Hamre 2018.
76 Jussim and Harber 2005.
77 Gershenson and Papageorge 2018.
78 NCES unknown.
80 Love 2016.
81 Faircloth 2018.
they currently occupy and to understand themselves as settlers on stolen land. Additionally, many of the counties, towns and schools where teachers teach are likely named after slave owners; it is critical for teachers to explore the histories of their localities in these contexts, as well. Questions like “who is my town named after?” and “who built the historical buildings of my town” are critical in understanding the contexts in which teachers and their students are situated.

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