

THE ANTECEDENTS OF FAILURE AND EMERGING HOPE: AMERICAN INDIANS & PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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American Indian education is a microcosm of the American Indian world. This paper provides a contextual overview for understanding the major issues which lead to the antecedents of failure of the American Indian in public education and ultimately to under representation at public institutions of higher education. Highlighting major federal studies over the past 40 years and more recent initiatives emanating from Indian Country, it provides evidence for emerging hope. This hope is predicated on a willingness of public universities and colleges to provide a much needed climate and academic environment that is culturally responsive to American Indian and Alaskan Native students and the communities they represent.

Indian education is a microcosm of the American Indian world. The problems that plague the Indian world are not only manifested but also accentuated in education. Though commonalities may be found with other "protected" classes or groups, certain characteristics make American Indians and Indian education quite different. These characteristics have roots well grounded in history and context.

While some education policies and practices have changed to adapt to a more contemporary social climate, the U.S. government's intent to assimilate the American Indian by whatever means remains an issue. For example, in a recent speech by the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Kevin Gover stated, "...this agency participated in the ethnic cleansing....", and "...this agency set out to destroy all things Indian.". (Gover, 2000) While this served as an official acknowledgement of past practices, the question remains, will the

practice continue. The uniqueness of the problems lies in the uniqueness of the relationship between the American Indian and the American people.

As the original inhabitants of this country, the American Indian has maintained a special relationship to American society and its governing bodies. This relationship has resulted in manipulation and/or neglect. No other group has suffered the indignities of social malfeasance, as has the American Indian.

In the early years of Indian education, the church played an instrumental role as "civilizing" agent. At the behest of the federal government various religious denominations were given exclusive responsibilities to acculturate the native population through education, in preparation for eventual assimilation into civilized society. Only later did the federal government take direct control of its responsibility to provide an education to the

American Indian.

The most important characteristic is the special relationship of the federal government to Indian tribes and their entities. This trust relationship was developed through treaty commitments and obligations, as sovereign nation to sovereign nation. Included was the provision of education. The political and social status of the various tribes has had little bearing on the interactive relationship as it changed from the state of nation to nation, to that of ward and guardian and now the reassertion of nation to nation status.

Historical Overview

Early proponents of assimilation, including Thomas Jefferson, advocated the "Americanization" of the Indian. Implicit in this was the belief that the Indian needed to be transformed into a replica of an Englishman, thus allowing for quick movement into the predominant social order (Baker, 1972). Unfortunately, the assimilation philosophy, though often submerged in jargon and rhetoric, carries forth through today. The responsibility for accomplishing this task, both explicitly and implicitly has been acknowledged by the federal government. The tools used to realize this goal were varied and often controversial, ranging from the disciplinary approaches of missionary schools, to relocation and incarceration in federal boarding schools and training programs, to termination, to the granting of a modicum of self-determination.

As the Indian has adapted to each successive attempt to acculturate and assimilate them, factors beyond their control have conspired to prevent their

acceptance into the social mainstream to which they were expected to enter. The American Indian has found himself dealing with a non-Indian populace steeped in prejudice, discrimination, and blatant racism. The same educational and social institutions that were to provide the Indian with access to "civilization" and social equality were providing the non-Indian with miseducation or no education to understand, appreciate, or deal with this group that is culturally and racially different. Stereotypes persist as well as a mutual distrust born of uninformed, if sometimes well-intentioned, decisions and actions.

Indian education at its worse has taken on a mono-cultural thrust aimed at the destruction of one cultural entity and replacing it with another. At its best, the American Indian Policy Review Commission (AIPRC) observed, "both Indian men and Indian women suffer from inadequate and inappropriate education" (AIPRC, 1977, p. 91).

The formal education of American Indians by non-Indians began even prior to the creation of the United States. From this early involvement the seeds of a "coercive assimilation" policy were sown. Though the policy applications have changed since 1568 when Jesuit Brothers established a school in Cuba for the Indians of Florida, the intent has remained the same. Through doctrines of accommodation, removal, extermination, relocation and termination, little was known of the impact education was having on the Indian student or his cultural base.

During the colonial period of the United States Moore's Charity School, later to be renamed Dartmouth College, was estab-

lished in 1617. Its purpose was to train and civilize Indian and English youth. More than a century later, in 1723, William and Mary College opened a special house for Indian students. With the initiation of treaty making in 1778, the federal government began "exchanging services" for Indian land. Included among the services was responsibility for Indian education. The year 1802 saw congress authorize funds "to promote civilization among the savages." Aided by this funding, and later the congressionally supported Civilization Fund, various religious denominations flooded Indian lands with missions. No reservation or area with Indian population was spared the fervor of competing religious factions intent on converting Indian peoples. At the bequest of the federal government the missions became the first substantive attempt to meet the "educational services" promised to Indian peoples. This was followed by the creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a branch of the War Department. From 1824 to 1849, when the Bureau was transferred to the Department of Interior, the transition from religious to civil control of Indian education occurred. By 1849, 37 federal Indian schools had been established. By 1969 there were 226 federally operated schools. In 1860 the first federally operated boarding school began operation at Fort Simcoe on the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington State. This number grew to 77, 17 of which were off-reservation institutions. The purpose of the boarding school was to remove Indian youth from the influences of their respective cultures and isolate them for periods up to eight years so as to enhance the prospects of assimilation.

The year 1870 saw the development and implementation of an industrial skills training approach to Indian education when Congress authorized funding of industrial schools for Indians. Eight years after authorization, Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute began admitting Indian students. The following year Carlisle Indian School was opened under the guidance of General Richard Pratt, at an abandoned army barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In 1882 Haskell Indian School (more recently renamed Haskell Junior College) was created. Heavy handed unsophisticated vocational education was provided within the confines of strict military discipline. The intent was to prepare the Indian student in such a way that he would not and could not return to his people. In conjunction with this educational policy, the purpose of which was to dissolve the social organization of Indian life, Congress saw fit to enact the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887. Its intent was the dissolution of the Indian land base. In one fell swoop, two-thirds of the Indians' land base was taken from them, their social structure was being decimated, and they were placed in a hostile-dependent relationship with the federal government. Expectations were high that Indian peoples, without a land base and having been deprived of social/cultural support, would by choice assimilate into the greater society. Nonetheless, it took 40 years for the federal government to grant Indians citizenship in their own land, under the provisions of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

Prior to the granting of citizenship, no study had been undertaken to determine

the social, economic, and educational status of the American Indian. In 1928, the first of several landmark studies was issued. The Meriam Report, produced by Lewis Meriam and his staff at the Brookings Institution, had been commissioned by the United States secretary of the Interior. The findings were highly critical of federal Indian policies:

The most serious deficiencies in Indian administration were the total exclusion of Indians from the management of their own affairs, and the poor quality of services (especially health and education) rendered by public officials not responsible to the Indian people they served. (U.S. Senate Report 91-501, 1969, p. 153)

The report also found glaring needs for adequate secondary education and financial aid packages for Indian higher education. It also noted the need for educational specialists and educational administrators to head educational programs rather than bureaucrats and government administrators.

The impact of the Meriam Report was immediate. John Collier took over as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and quickly moved to implement the recommendation of the Meriam Report. The beginnings of an Indian "New Deal" were initiated with the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 and the Johnson-O'Malley Act in the same year. The IRA dealt primarily with the restructuring of the social, political, and economic mechanisms that governed Indian life. It also gave Indians, for the first time, a say in how their life and insti-

tutions were to be run. The Johnson-O'Malley Act was designed not to deal with organizational structure so much as the direct needs of Indian peoples (i.e., education, medical attention, agricultural assistance, and social welfare). Furthermore, it authorized the federal government to contract with states and outside agencies to provide services to meet Indians' needs.

The innovations and experimental policies initiated under the Collier administration were underfunded, undermined, and/or reversed during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1944 the Select Committee of the House to Investigate Indian Affairs and Conditions made its report on achieving "the final solution of the Indian problem. . . ." Recognizing education as a primary avenue of solving "the problem," it recommended an immediate return to the policies and practices condemned by the Meriam Report. In the same year the Senate Indian Affairs Committee proposed a liquidation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and thus the special-status of American Indians. By 1948, the 80th Congress had committed itself to reducing "big government" and cutting the costs of government. The first targets of this philosophy were American Indians and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The formulation of a policy of termination of federal responsibility to/for American Indians was begun.

By 1950, Termination as a policy was in full swing, directed by Dillon Myers, newly appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Not ironically, Mr. Myers was in charge of Japanese American relocation and internment during World War II. The proponents of termination were advocating a well-documented and historical

policy of coercive assimilation, through abrogation of treaty rights, relocation of Indian populations, the dissolution of federal recognition and services, and the acquisition and sale of Indian trust lands. Termination became law in 1953 with the adoption of Public Law 280 and House Concurrent Resolution 108. Termination as public policy and law was curtailed in the early 1960s under the Kennedy administration. Later events and reports would show that termination inflicted greater damage upon those Indians it touched than any other modern federal policy (Gross, 1978, p. 1213).

Recent Government Action

The 1960s and 1970s proved to be extremely important eras in both Indian education and federal Indian policy. Among several indirect but vital antecedents to the upcoming changes Indians would see was the Supreme Court ruling in the 1954 case, Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education. The Supreme Court found that segregation was inherently unequal and that its practice denied and perpetuated the denial of constitutional rights of those segregated. Another was the initiation of the space race by Russia with its launching in 1957 of the world's first satellite. This event brought about an increased awareness of the need for development and enhancement of modern education nationwide.

As a result of Brown and changing social/political attitudes, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As a part of this legislation, Congress mandated a nationwide survey of the quality and equality of educational opportunity. The

resultant Coleman Study, presented in 1965, found that the educational needs of disadvantaged minority youth were substantively different than those of the general school-age population. It further found that the level of need and disadvantage was dramatic, even for those still in school, when compared with the non-minority population. This study's significance cannot be understated in an era when heightening social interest in minority groups rekindled a similar response to the American Indian. It pointed out that American Indian population was the least visible and least recognized among the disadvantaged (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972).

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1965 was the second major piece of 1960's era legislation to directly impact the Indian population. As a part of President Johnson's Great Society Programs, it authorized Head Start, Upward Bound, the Job Corps, VISTA, and the Indian Community Action Programs. In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act set as a priority a national policy for the effective education of all disadvantaged youth. The 1966 Amendments to this legislation included Indian students and the Bureau of Indian Affairs as targeted potential recipients of funding under the Acts' various titles.

By 1966, direct Indian involvement in the direction and practice of education was becoming evident. In that year, the first Indian Teacher Corps projects were begun in Nebraska. Two years later, similar projects were started in nine other Indian impacted states. The year 1967 saw the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) establish the National Indian Education Advisory Committee. This committee, made up of

16 Indian representatives, was to advise the Commissioner of BIA and his Assistant for Education on issues directly related to Indian educational programs. During this period, the Navajo tribe of Arizona took two dramatic steps forward. In 1966, the tribe opened Rough Rock Demonstration School in Chinle, Arizona, under the direction of an all Indian Navajo Board of Education. In 1968, the tribe founded Navajo Community College. Both actions were to set precedents for later Indian-controlled and/or directed education programs.

In 1967, two comprehensive studies of Indian education, the first since the Meriam Report, were undertaken. The first, the National Study of American Indian Education: The Education of Indian Children and Youth, was funded by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education and was directed by Robert J. Havighurst. This study took five years to complete. The findings suggested that of the major problems confronting modern Indian education, of primary importance was the "need to re-evaluate goals in terms defined by Indian people themselves" (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1973, p. 18).

The second study was initiated in August 1967 by a Special Subcommittee on Indian Education under the U.S. Senate Committee of Labor and Public Welfare. Under the guidance of Senators Robert F. Kennedy, Wayne Morse, and finally Edward M. Kennedy, this committee was given the mandate to investigate the problems of American Indian education. The final report, published in 1969 with the title Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge, is considered by many the single most important

contemporary document in Indian education. The 1969 report was a damning indictment of both Indian education and federal Indian policy. It found that little had changed since the Meriam Report 40 years earlier. The report found that both public schools and the federal Indian education system had continued the impossible, yet historical, policy of turning Indian children into whites. The subcommittee chose to call the policy "coercive assimilation." The results of this policy include:

- The destruction and disorganization of Indian communities and individuals.
- Prejudice, racial intolerance and discrimination towards Indians far more widespread and serious than generally recognized.
- The classroom and the school becoming a kind of battleground where the Indian child attempts to protect his integrity and identity as an individual by defeating the purposes of the school.
- Schools which fail to understand or adapt to, and in fact often denigrate, cultural differences.
- Schools which blame their own failures on the Indian student and reinforce his defensiveness.
- Schools which fail to recognize the importance and validity of the Indian community. The community and child retaliate by treating the school as an alien institution.
- A dismal record of absenteeisms, drop-outs, negative self-image, low achievement and ultimately, academic failure for many Indian children.
- A perpetuation of the cycle of poverty which undermines the success of all

other federal programs. (Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, Report No. 91-501, p.21)

Though the report addressed Indian education in general, it is implicitly understood that higher education was included in the study when it found that:

- Only three percent of Indian students who enroll in college graduate.
- Only one of every 100 Indian college graduates will receive a masters degree. (p. xiii)

The report identified the roots of the "coercive assimilation" policy and its failure as:

- A continuous desire to exploit, and expropriate, Indian land and physical resources.
- A self-righteous intolerance of tribal communities and cultural differences. (p. 21)

The report served the purpose of awakening the nation, the President, and Congress to the crisis state of Indian education and the link between education and self-determination.

It should be noted here that throughout the social turmoil of the 1960s, American Indian enrollment at institutions of higher education was rapidly increasing. In 1957 raw estimates indicate an Indian enrollment of 2,000 at institutions of post-secondary education (Fuchs & Havighurst, p. 260). By 1970, the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare reported nationwide American Indian

enrollment in higher education at 26,914 undergraduates and 1,290 graduate students. This rather dramatic increase in enrollment may have several explanations, including an increase in the number of high school graduates. It seems more probable that it was brought about by the trend in U.S. colleges and universities to develop "Minority Studies Programs."

These programs, developed in response to the racial/ethnic unrest of the times, served to diffuse the social demands of minority groups as a whole and allowed institutions of higher education to provide an affective if not effective response to the real needs of the various minority groups, American Indians included. Understaffed, underfunded, ill researched, misprepared and misdirected, whether intentional or not, the programs were doomed from the beginning (Churchill & Hill, 1979, pp. 45, 52-53). Several Indian specific programs, including those at Arizona State, Dartmouth and Pennsylvania State, have survived as responsive and effective models. All three have received institutional and federal commitment to meet needs identified through research and the direct involvement of American Indian groups.

Congressional action, in response to the Special Sub-committee Report of 1969, did not occur until 1972 when Public Law 92-318—The Indian Education Act—was enacted. Provisions were made to meet special needs of Indian students in public schools, to establish a National Advisory Council on Indian Education to train teachers of Indians, to begin work with Indian community colleges, and to give tribes and other Indian organizations priority in funding for discretionary program use. At the

same time, eight new tribally/or Indian community-controlled community colleges began operation.

In 1975, Indian people and Indian education were beginning to emerge from the morass of inequity, neglect, and coercion. In January of that year, Public Law 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination, and Education Assistance Act, became law. Consisting of two parts, the first part (Title I) directed the Departments of Interior and Health, Education, and Welfare to contract certain federal programs to Indian control at the request of any Indian tribe (Gross, 1978, p. 1199). Title II, the Educational Assistance Act, focused attention on Indian education in public schools and required public schools receiving Indian education funds to pay greater attention to meeting the needs of Indian students (Gross, 1978, p. 1200).

Just prior to Public Law 93-638 becoming law, Congress established the American Indian Policy Review Commission. Chaired by Senator James Abourezk, its mission was similar to that of the Meriam Report, to study the situation and status of American Indians and review government programs and policies dealing with the same. The significance of the Commission's study was the premise that it should and would not take place, exclusive of Indian input. For the first time, Indians would be allowed to conduct an investigative study of their own status, evaluate the data unearthed and make recommendations that could effect the American Indians' future well-being. Two hundred and six specific recommendations were forwarded to Congress in the Commission's 1977 Final Report, many dealing directly and indi-

rectly with Indian education, and with higher education specifically. The study charted a reasonable starting point from which Indian self-determination could become a reality. Nonetheless, if history is to be a guide, recognition of the importance of this study and its recommendations have been a long time in coming, though seemingly small victories have been realized along the way (e.g., the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978).

Almost fifteen years after submission of the AIPRC Final Report, the U.S. Secretary of Education gathered testimony throughout the nation and Indian country. Done under the auspice of the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (INAR), directed by William G. Demmert, Jr. (Tlingit/Sioux) and Terrell H. Bell, hearings were conducted in 1990 and 1991. The findings of the task force, published in 1991

indicated that many Native students still attend schools with "an unfriendly school climate that fails to promote appropriate academic, social, cultural, and spiritual development among many Native students." Such schools also tended to exhibit a Eurocentric curriculum, low teacher expectations, "a lack of Native educators as role models," and "overt and subtle racism." These factors contributed to Native students having the highest high school dropout rate (36%) of any minority group in the United States. (Reyhner, 1994)

With regards to public higher education, the INAR Task Force found that persistent barriers to access, retention, and graduation inhibited Indian students. The Task Force specifically noted unsupportive institutional climates, inadequate academic preparation, insufficient financial support, few Indian role models, and unaddressed cultural influences on student adjustment as major causes for Indian student disenfranchisement.

In a commissioned report on Indian post secondary education for the INAR Task Force, recommendations included the need for institutions of higher education serving Indian student populations to, "..... provide adequate financial support and other resources to maintain a quality American Indian and Alaskan Native studies center. These academic, support services, and cultural centers should serve as the focal point for Native students, but should not be viewed as isolating, separatist programs. At the same time, these Centers must serve the diversity goals of the institution and provide academic, social and cultural enrichment to the campus community." (Wright, 1991)

The following year, the White House Conference on Indian Education (WHCIE), came forth with its report and 114 recommendations, 31 of which specifically targeted higher education. Most mirrored those of the INAR Task Force. In both cases, formal education for Indians, despite progress in the preceding twenty years, was found to still be in desperate straits. It lacked real cultural responsiveness in both the federal and public sectors, was in need of direction, effective goals and strategies and, account-

ability to Indian peoples, Tribes and parents. (WHCIE, 1992)

Following President Clinton's election in 1992, Indian leaders throughout the nation expressed concern that little or nothing was being done, on any level, to address the needs of Indian students and communities as detailed in the findings and recommendations of the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force or the White House Conference on Indian Education. It became evident to Indian leaders that what was needed was a united Indian voice to be heard and acted on; a statement crafted by Indian people for implementation by the federal government that focused on a quality, responsive education for Indian people. What emerged in 1995 was the draft of the Comprehensive Federal Indian Education Policy Statement. (CFIEPS). Rooted in the findings of the INAR Task Force Report, the WHCIE Report and the 1995 summit of Indian education leaders, including the National Congress of American Indians, the National Indian Education Association, the National Advisory Council on Indian Education and the Native American Rights Fund, the CFIEPS was enacted as Executive Order 13096 of August 6, 1998 American Indian and Alaskan Native Education. "Indian Country" had finally been heard and in doing so empowered Indian peoples to take control of the education of their youth.

Emerging Hope

Since 1960, Indian enrollments in institutions of higher education have seen peaks and valleys. This may be a reflection of economic pressures, varying institutional commitments, and responses or changes

in the national political climate. What is evident is an American Indian student population that is growing rapidly. American Indian enrollments at universities and colleges are higher than they have ever been. According to data compiled by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 87,700 American Indian students were enrolled at institutions of higher education in the fall of 1982. By the fall of 1994, 127,400 American Indian and Alaskan Native students were enrolled at institutions of higher education. Among American Indians there is a commitment to the precept that a highly skilled and informed Indian population is a necessity if self-determination is to be an actuality.

There is an apparent inconsistency between Indian student enrollment increases and a lack of responsiveness by institutions of higher learning to the Indian population. The growth in enrollments may be explained by increasing pressures from within the Indian population to acquire post-secondary education. What is apparent, is that the growth in Indian student enrollment since 1968, corresponds with the development of Tribally Controlled Community Colleges. By 1995, there were 30 Indian controlled community colleges. Despite serious under-funding and lack of resources, these institutions enrolled 12,400 American Indian/Alaskan Native students. The impact of these institutions cannot be understated. In 1983, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) found Indian students who completed a program of study at a Tribal Community College and then transferred to an institution offering a 4 year degree program had a completion rate

75 percent greater than Indian students who went directly to 4 year colleges and universities from high school. (Steiner, 1992) Though there is limited data available concerning the dropout rates of students from the Indian world, it is apparent that Tribal Community Colleges have effectively become a, "...cultural intermediary for Native college students, reaffirming Native identity and training for survival in the contemporary world." (Szasz, 1999)

Conclusion

This brief review of American Indian education history documents the level of articulation by this indigenous population. Evidence has been given that clarifies their stated needs, expectations, and models have been identified that exemplify a legacy of uniqueness, resilience and endurance.

As public colleges and universities move into the twenty-first century, they need to respond to their constituents, the students and the cultural entities that support their presence at those institutions. Both are primary stakeholders that support the legitimacy and value of what those institutions provide and represent. The expectations and voices of American Indian peoples have been too long ignored.

Like American Indians and Alaskan Natives, who as sovereign nations, have retained their cultural integrity, resisted assimilation and adapted to a changing world, public higher education as governmental entities, must adjust accordingly. Institutions of higher learning must commit themselves to the provision of a qualitative, culturally responsive educational opportunity. If public universities

and colleges are truly the vanguards of an informed and useful social order that recognizes, appreciates, and advocates the maintenance of cultural diversity, they must create a climate and an academic environment that is conducive to the inclusion of American Indian and Alaskan Native students and the communities they represent.

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