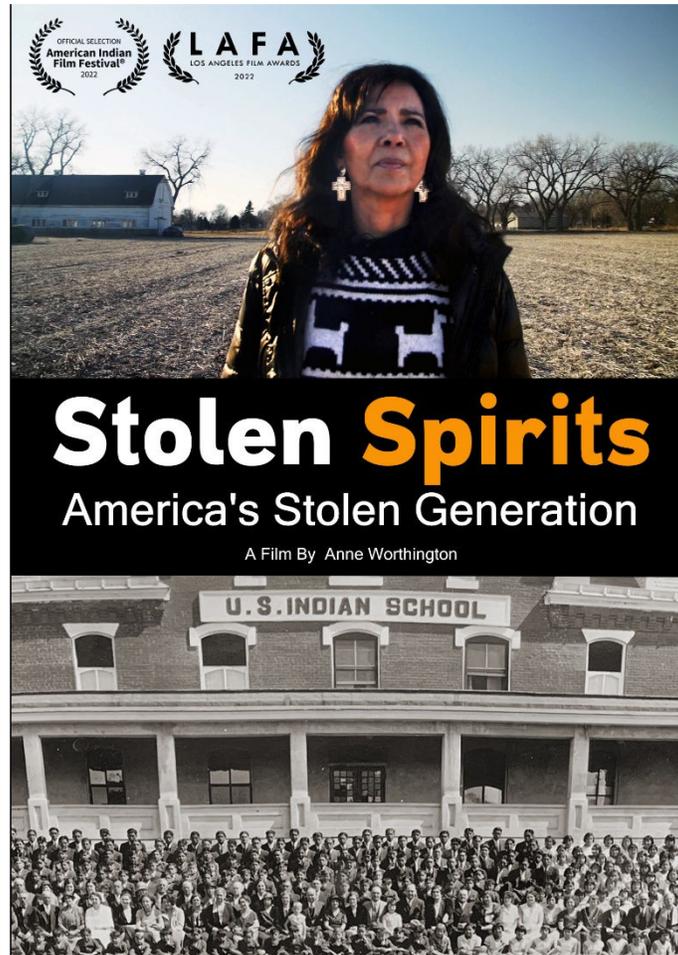




STOLEN SPIRITS



STUDY GUIDE

To order this and other programs:
(323) 301-3663 or
www.epfmedia.com

Stolen Spirits

In 2021, in the small rural town of Genoa Nebraska, a harrowing search commenced to locate the graves of Native American children who were taken from their tribes and sent to the Genoa U.S Indian Industrial school, one of America's largest and longest running boarding schools for indigenous children. The Genoa school was part of a vast network of institutions for Native American children set up in the 19th and 20th centuries across the USA. Their purpose was to assimilate indigenous children into the white man's world. By 1926, it's estimated more than 80 per cent of Native American children were enrolled in these institutions. Many of these children left the school their culture broken, some didn't return home at all. Last year, the discovery of more than a thousand graves of children at the sites of former boarding schools in Canada pushed the USA to examine its own history. Presented by ABC journalist Stan Grant, whose family was impacted by Australia's assimilationist policies, Stolen Spirits is a powerful and haunting story of one community's attempts to uncover the truth about a painful past.

Indian Boarding Schools

According to a 2022 report by the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), the United States established 408 federal Indian Boarding Schools in the United States between 1819 and 1969, across 37 states or then-territories. The author states that each of these schools was attended by up to 1,000 students.¹

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania was the first major U.S. government-funded off-reservation boarding school. It opened in 1879, and became a model for the many schools that followed it. Canada was also influenced by the Carlisle School and the U.S. policy of trying to assimilate Native American children.

In 1891, the U.S. government passed a law that made it compulsory for Native American children to attend these boarding schools. However, despite this law, many people resisted and a large percentage of the children who ended up in the schools got there as a result of force or coercion. According to National Geographic, "The Bureau of Indian Affairs—the federal agency tasked with distributing food, land, and other provisions included in treaties with Native tribes— withheld food and other goods from those who refused to send their children to the schools, and even sent officers to forcibly take children from the reservation."² The 2022 DOI report includes one account of efforts to forcibly take children to the schools. It says, "When called upon for children, the chiefs, almost without exception, declared there were none suitable for school in their camps. Everything in the way of persuasion and argument having failed, it became necessary to visit the camps unexpectedly with a detachment of Indian police, and seize such children as were proper and take them away to school, willing or unwilling. Some hurried their children off to the mountains or hid

¹ https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf

² <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/a-century-of-trauma-at-boarding-schools-for-native-american-children-in-the-united-states?loggedin=true&rnd=1694806664740>

them away in camp, and the Indian police had to chase and capture them like so many wild rabbits.”³

According to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, records have been scattered across the country, so nobody knows exactly how many children went to the boarding schools. However, the organization estimates that by 1900, there were 20,000 children in the schools, and by 1925, there were more than 60,000. By 1926, it says, almost 83 percent of school-age Indian children were in a boarding school, with 367 schools operating in 29 different states.⁴ The Coalition finds that Oklahoma had the most boarding schools—a total of 83—followed by Arizona, Alaska, New Mexico, and South Dakota.⁵

The Indian Industrial School at Genoa

According to the Genoa U.S. Indian School Foundation Museum, the Indian Industrial School at Genoa was the fourth-largest non-reservation boarding school that operated in the United States. The organization explains that the U.S. government chose the site because it already owned the land there, which had formerly been part of the Pawnee Reservation. The Genoa school was opened in February 1884. Genoa is a city in the eastern part of Nebraska. The Foundational Museum reports that the Genoa school’s students came from more than 40 different tribal nations, and more than 10 U.S. states. The school began with 74 students, and expanded to more than 30 buildings on 640 acres, housing up to 599 children a year. It closed in 1934, but since 1990 it has held an annual student reunion for students.⁶

Manual Labor

Records and interviews reveal that children at the Genoa school learned in the classroom for half of the day, and then received vocational training for the other half of the day. That vocational training was primarily manual labor. According to Historian Wilma Daddario, “The amount of work done by the boys in the school’s first summer of 1884 was incredible. First, the land was cleared of weed and stubble. Corn was planted on 130 acres and cultivated six times. Forty-five acres were sown to oats, forty acres to hay, and twenty seven acres in potatoes and garden vegetables. The boys planted 3500 fruit trees, 3500 vines and plants, milked sixteen cows morning and evening, fed fifty-four pigs, and took care of all the horses and mules. The little boys, ages eight to ten, tended the garden.”⁷ The girls worked equally hard at a range of domestic jobs such as doing laundry, working in the kitchen and dining room, sewing, picking and canning fruit, and helping in the hospital.

Most other boarding schools followed a similar pattern. The U.S. Department of the Interior report states that manual labor was a prominent part of the curriculum in most boarding schools. It says that this included: “Livestock and poultry raising; dairying; western agriculture production;

³ https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf

⁴ <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/>

⁵ <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NABS-Newsletter-2020-7-1-spreads.pdf>

⁶ <https://genoaindianschoolmuseum.org/>

⁷ Quoted in <https://history.nebraska.gov/flashback-friday-the-tragedies-and-successes-of-the-genoa-indian-school/>

fertilizing; lumbering; brickmaking; cooking; garment-making; irrigation system development; and working on the railroad system.”⁸

Brenda Child, historian, author, and a descendent of boarding school students, explains one of the reasons students spent so much time doing manual labor. She says, “At the time, people thought Indians had to go into manual trades because they were good with their hands. They weren’t educated to be doctors or teachers or lawyers. And so . . . [one of the first schools] had this program where students would spend half the day in the classroom, and then students would be trained in vocational work during half the day. And so other schools copied that.”⁹

Treatment of Native American Children

The 2022 report by the U.S. Department of the Interior describes the ways that Indian Boarding Schools attempted to assimilate Native American students. It says, “The Federal Indian boarding school system deployed systematic militarized and identity-alteration methodologies to attempt to assimilate American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children through education, including but not limited to the following: (1) renaming Indian children from Indian to English names; (2) cutting hair of Indian children; (3) discouraging or preventing the use of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian languages, religions, and cultural practices; and (4) organizing Indian and Native Hawaiian children into units to perform military drills.”¹⁰

The report also details a number of other ways in which Native American children were mistreated in these schools. For instance, “Corporal punishment such as solitary confinement; flogging; withholding food; whipping; slapping; and cuffing.” The author also finds that overall care was “grossly inadequate,” and says, “Rampant physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; disease; malnourishment; overcrowding; and lack of health care in Indian boarding schools are well-documented.”¹¹

Boarding Schools Today

Most schools were shut down by the mid-twentieth century. In 1975, the U.S. government passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Under this act, Native American tribes gained control of programs that had been administered by the federal government up to that point. This meant that they were now able to operate their own schools. Today, there are four off-reservation boarding schools operating in the United States, which are run by the Bureau of Indian Education. They are: Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Oklahoma; Sherman Indian High School in Riverside, California; Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon; and Flandreau Indian School in Flandreau, South Dakota.

⁸ https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf

⁹ Quoted in <https://time.com/6177069/american-indian-boarding-schools-history/>

¹⁰ https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf

¹¹ https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf

Mark Cruz, a member of the Klamath Tribes in Oregon and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior explains existing boarding schools. He says, “Today, the mission of our off-reservation boarding schools is to provide Indian children with a high-quality, culturally-relevant education and, to build within our students the knowledge, skills, and character needed to address and overcome the challenges of adulthood, while giving them the educational foundation to pursue their dreams.”¹²

Calls for Recognition

There are widespread calls for the United States to do more in investigating and recognizing what happened at Indian Boarding schools in the past. In 2009, the federal government passed a resolution called the Native American Apology Resolution. National Geographic explains that this includes, “Reference to ‘the forcible removal of Native children from their families to faraway boarding schools where their Native practices and languages were degraded and forbidden.’”¹³ However, the resolution has been widely criticized as inadequate. In 2016, efforts began to repatriate the remains of bodies buried at the Carlisle Indian School to their tribes and families. However, many people believe that a lot more needs to be done to find truth and justice. As the National Native American Boarding School Healing School Coalition states, “The truth about the US Indian boarding school policy has largely been written out of the history books.”¹⁴ The coalition is just one of many groups advocating a deeper investigation and discussion of what happened.

Additional Resources

Books

- David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995.
- Margaret L. Archuleta, Brenda J. Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, eds., *Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences, 1879-2000*. Phoenix, AZ: Heard Museum, 2000.
- Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
- Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.
- Denise K. Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries: The History, the Unforgivable, and the Healing of Northern Plains American Indian Boarding School Survivors*. Fargo, ND: North Dakota University Press, 2019.
- Andrew Woolford, *The Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015.

¹² <https://www.doi.gov/ocl/indian-boarding-schools#:~:text=The%20Bureau%20of%20Indian%20Education,School%20in%20Flandreau%2C%20South%20Dakota.>

¹³ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/a-century-of-trauma-at-boarding-schools-for-native-american-children-in-the-united-states?loggedin=true&rnd=1694806664740>

¹⁴ <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/>

Online Sources

- Erin Blakemore, “A Century of Trauma at U.S. Boarding Schools for Native American Children,” *National Geographic*, July 9, 2021.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/a-century-of-trauma-at-boarding-schools-for-native-american-children-in-the-united-states?loggedin=true&rnd=1694806664740>
- Sequoia Carrillo and Allison Herrera, “Federal Indian Boarding Schools Still Exist, But What’s Inside May Be Surprising,” *NPR*, June 6, 2023.
<https://www.npr.org/2023/06/06/1155723922/federal-indian-boarding-schools-still-exist>
- National Indian Child Welfare Association, “Indian Boarding Schools,” no date.
<https://www.nicwa.org/boarding-schools/>
- National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, “Healing Voices Volume 1: A Primer on American Indian and Alaska Native Boarding Schools in the U.S.,” June 2020.
<https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NABS-Newsletter-2020-7-1-spreads.pdf>
- Bryan Newland, “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report,” U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, May 2022.
https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf
- U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative,” no date.
<https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>

Contact

For inquiries, please contact:
EPF Media
(888) 570-5400; (323) 301-3663
info@epfmedia.com

Copyright. The Study Guide is owned by EPF Media Group, LLC. You may use the Study Guide solely for personal or educational, non-commercial use, and you may download or print any portion of the Study Guide solely for personal or educational, non-commercial use, provided you do not remove the copyright or other notice from such Content. No other use is permitted without prior written permission of EPF Media Group, LLC.