

ECHOES ON EASELS

INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS



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Thomas Indian School, George C. Longfish, 1970

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On March 3, 1819, the Civilization Fund Act was passed by the United States Congress. This was an act that encouraged groups like Christian Missions and the federal government to provide education for the Indigenous children in the U.S., and they were given money annually to help stimulate the 'civilization process'. The act also led to the formation of the boarding school system for Indigenous students. Federal funds were put aside for these schools, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs was created in 1824 to oversee the schools.

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To change a group of people, it is easiest to start with the children. In order to fill the schools, children were taken from their homes and sent to these schools, which were mainly far away from their familiar surroundings. The first children to go to these schools were those from the tribal nations who were most outspoken about colonization. These would have been western and plains tribes, though Indigenous children from all over Indian Country would attend these schools. The schools were designed to assimilate the child into Eurocentric culture and discard their language, customs, and traditions. This was often done by force. Children often faced abuse from teachers and administrators. Abuse ranged from verbal to sexual and physical. The effects of these boarding schools are generational. The trauma and abuse have been carried down from generation to generation. Until 2024, there was no concrete work done by the federal government to investigate the effects of boarding schools in the United States.

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GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What was the reason for the boarding schools?
- How did boarding schools affect the children?
- Are there lasting effects today?

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RESOURCES

- *Racial Injustice in America: Indigenous Peoples Boarding Schools* by Heather Bruegl
- Library of Congress – Lesson Plan: Exploring Stories Behind Native American Boarding Schools
- Library of Congress – Primary Source Set: Native American Boarding Schools
- National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition: The National Indian Boarding School Digital Archive