

# UC Berkeley

## ISSI Fellows Working Papers

### Title

The Urban "Half": Resituating the History of Urban Relocation and Public Education

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3vt690fq>

### Author

Murphy, Kimberly R.

### Publication Date

2010-01-22

ISSC WORKING PAPER SERIES 2008-2009.41

**The Urban “Half”:  
Resituating the History of Urban Relocation and  
Public Education**

**by Kimberly R. Murphy**

Department of Ethnic Studies  
University of California, Berkeley  
January 22, 2009



INSTITUTE FOR  
THE STUDY OF  
SOCIAL CHANGE

Kimberly R. Murphy  
Department of Ethnic Studies  
University of California, Berkeley

**murphymontoya@gmail.com**

Through a “three pronged” termination policy, including the termination of tribal sovereignty, cultures and lands, the U.S. federal government sought to finally end the trust relationship it held with Native Americans. While both the termination of Native Nations and Public Law 280 assaulted the sovereignty of Native Nations, it was the relocation program that would finally force Native individuals to be active participants in the capitalist system. By the time the relocation program was brought to Oakland, California, in 1956, the city was undergoing drastic demographic and population shifts, which would have a major impact on the opportunities available to the relocation program participants. Like the reservations, the flatland neighborhoods of Oakland were both economically and politically controlled from the outside, rendering them a virtual colony of the larger city. Thus, rather than advance their economic or political status, as the actions of the Relocation Office would suggest, this new colonial system, operating within the internal colony of the “Black ghetto,” would perpetuate the low economic position of Native peoples. Tracing the history of American relocation into Oakland, this paper examines and exposes the central role of vocational training in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) educational system, which not only enabled the largest relocation of Native peoples into urban areas, but forced Native students into urban school systems that simultaneously maintained and transformed colonial narratives, policies and rhetoric of the earlier BIA educational models while also inadvertently creating spaces that facilitated the most organized forms of intertribal resistance and activism. Tracing the history of relocation into the flatlands of Oakland is of particular interest as it highlights how the processes and understandings of sovereignty, internal colonialism, and positionality intersect within and between racially colonized communities. Consequently, by reconstructing the story of relocation into Oakland, we can begin to question what impact this had on the relocatees’ colonial status as “wards of the state,” in addition to asking how, as well as whether, relocation transformed the ways in which Native peoples were viewed externally (from various levels of government along with local non-Native neighbors and community members) and how this shifted, if at all, internal perceptions of self and community. Thus, using the history of relocation and urban Indians as a guide, we can begin to unpack the ways in which their colonial relationship has changed over time and space.

The Institute for the Study of Social Change (ISSC) is an Organized Research Unit of the University of California at Berkeley. The views expressed in working papers are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the ISSC or the Regents of the University of California.

## Introduction

Created in the 1830s by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to police and manage Native peoples (at the federal, local and even personal level), the reservation system was used by a group of U.S. policy makers to force the liquidation of Native Nations and cultures. Ultimately, the goal of policy makers was to rid the federal government of its treaty obligation, and thereby legitimize the federal government's existence as the only sovereign nation within U.S. boundaries. By the late nineteenth century an ideological and political battle between these seemingly opposed objectives (management and liquidation) converged to create a reservation system that functioned to both control and isolate Native peoples, while also working to prepare them to be inserted into the larger capitalist society of the U.S.

Although there were multiple levels involved in this transitional process of removing Indian peoples from their Native lands and cultures, including allotment and citizenship laws that were used to force the individualist structure of capitalism onto Native peoples, the central institution in which American Protestant ideologies were promoted was U.S. controlled schools (Adams 1997). The use of vocational training in off reservation BIA boarding schools further accelerated this transition. Indeed, since the early 1860s when the Bureau of Indian Affairs opened the first reservation day schools, the focus of U.S. controlled American Indian education was to steadily transition Native children from what were considered nonproductive colonized communities into areas<sup>1</sup> where they would assume a role as industrious workers within the lowest sectors of the wage labor economy.

---

<sup>1</sup> I use the word "areas" here to highlight that the BIA initially pushed Native peoples into the labor force in both urban and rural areas, it was not until the 1950s through the employment assistance program that the BIA would specifically focus on pushing Native peoples into urban areas.

By the mid-twentieth century, however, many U.S. policy makers were dissatisfied with the little “progress” that had been made in achieving this goal through the established programs, and they again pushed for a new set of policies that would accelerate an Americanization process. Through a “three pronged” termination policy, which included the termination of tribal sovereignty, cultures and lands, the U.S. federal government sought to finally end the trust relationship it held with Native Americans (Beck 2002, 1). While both the termination of Native Nations and Public Law 280<sup>2</sup> assaulted the sovereignty of Native Nations, it was the relocation program that would finally force Native individuals to be active participants in the capitalist system (Fixico 1986). Through this legislation the BIA asserted that it would no longer allow Native students to “waste” (Deloria 2006) their education on maintaining their tribal ties but would thrust them into the heart of American cities, where they were expected to assimilate into the socio-economic fabric of the inner city.

The relocation program, later renamed the employment assistance program, was not created in a historical vacuum. Rather it drew from earlier BIA educational institutions and contracts, such as BIA boarding schools, vocational training, the outing program and the Navajo special education program. More specifically, policy makers used the employment skills and status of relocatees as a guide to choose relocation sites. Being that most relocatees were educated in BIA or local public reservation schools, and thus had only a basic education, the majority of relocation sites were established in inner cities, where relocatees could be effectively transitioned into menial laborer positions alongside the rest of the working underclass. Thus, urban relocation was only possible on such a massive scale, with over 12,000 in the first four years (Fixico 2000), because of earlier BIA educational policies that not only forced American

---

<sup>2</sup> Public Law 280 allowed for states to take over jurisdiction on reservation lands, which up until this point fell under federal jurisdiction. According to Donald Fixico (1986), this public law was part of a larger post war policy to shift federal responsibility to that of the states in order to downsize the federal government and deficit.

Indians off their reservations and into vocational training but also maintained colonial rhetoric, which enabled the BIA to push Native relocatees into the lowest sectors of the U.S. economy.

Unfortunately, little research has been done on the transition of American Indian children into urban schooling or the more general history of American Indians' experiences with public education. Rather, most scholarship on the history of Indian education has tended to focus on three main areas including early English and American missionary schools, BIA boarding schools, and, to a smaller degree, mid-twentieth century boarding and day schools. Because of this gap, the work that has been done on public schooling (either rural or urban) for American Indians is still in its infancy, providing basic story lines about policies and policy makers and relatively little analysis.

While more research has been done on the history of the relocation era, most scholarship still focuses on the larger policies and actors of the period. The small amount of scholarship that does focus on the education of Native peoples during the relocation era is mostly centered on the question of accommodation<sup>3</sup> and adjustment to urban centers. The few exceptions to this are several recent case studies that have reconstructed the history of one urban school or area, generally in the context of self-determination and sovereignty movements during the relocation era (Amerman 2002). In addition, several relocation scholars have included a brief history on the creation of the relocation program through vocation training (See, for example Philp 1985, Fixico 1986, 2000). Unfortunately, these histories fail to connect vocational programs with the longer trajectory of BIA education and ideologies.

---

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars used urban educational sites as a way to “measure” American Indian accommodation into urban areas. However, because much of this scholarship was written during the relocation era itself, it is more concerned with the psychological and economic adjustment of Native peoples into the city rather than questioning the motivations for relocation, or identifying the larger forces that both created and maintained this transition, either on the part of the BIA or relocatees themselves. See, for example, Molohon 1977.

With these research issues in mind, this paper aims to reconstruct and question the policies, practices and motivations that eventually led BIA agents to create the relocation program. More specifically, this paper will focus on reconstructing the ways in which BIA educational ideologies and policies surrounding cultural evolution and “progress” were ultimately used to push Native peoples off their reservations and into the urban centers of the U.S., where they would become part of the working underclass.

During the height of the relocation program, from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, there were over thirty federally mandated urban transfer sites. This paper will focus on the processes of and reaction to American Indian relocation into one of those sites, located in Oakland, California. The story of American Indian relocation into the flatlands of Oakland is of particular interest, as it highlights how the processes and understandings of sovereignty, internal colonialism, and positionality intersect within and between racially colonized communities. More specifically, by reconstructing the story of relocation into Oakland, we can begin to question what impact this had on the relocatees’ colonial status as “wards of the state.” It also allows us to investigate how, as well as whether, relocation transformed the ways in which Native peoples were viewed externally (from various levels of government along with local non-Native neighbors and community members) and how this shifted, if at all, internal perceptions of self and community. Moreover, using the history of relocation and urban Indians as a guide, we can begin to unpack the ways in which their colonial relationship has changed over time and space.

When embarking on this analysis, rather than using models of colonialism that tend to focus only on the actual act of conquest, which in-turn creates a simplistic binary of colonized versus colonizer, I employ the concept of “coloniality” which takes into account not only the

ways in which such relationships of power are perpetuated and rearticulated by the governing state/body, but also how colonial oppression is multilayered, institutionalized, normalized and internalized. As philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) explains:

Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience (243).

By using a coloniality frame, scholars can begin to deconstruct the multi-leveled histories and spaces in which several racialized groups are oppressed simultaneously, both from the outside and in relationship to or even with each other. Moreover, coloniality helps to get at the complicated process of how such practices and effects are mapped onto the bodies and every day experiences of “colonial subjects” who may no longer live in a contained “colonized” space created explicitly for the control and oppression of themselves and their larger communities.

This analytic framework is especially useful for deconstructing the histories of many urban Indians who were essentially moved from one internal colony, the reservation, a space that was explicitly created to control Native peoples, into another internal colony, “the Black ghetto,” which during the height of relocation was transformed into a space to oppress and contain another colonized minority, African Americans. Thus, although urban Native Americans were still in a colonial relationship with the U.S. due to their tribal status, they were no longer in a colonized space that was specifically created to contain or control them. Rather, when relocatees moved into the Oakland flats they became an almost invisible minority of a “new” colonial system, which rather than advance their economic or political status, as the relocation office would suggest, only perpetuated their low economic position through a new colonial system, the



internal colony of the “Black ghetto.” Moreover, I argue that even while their economic status remained relatively consistent, the socio-political positionality of Native peoples shifted from a classic form of colonialism, as citizens of a colonized nation, to a marginal position within the internal colony, which created a neo-colonial status that was upheld through the BIA and urban public school systems. Thus, rather than look at relocation as an era of Federal Indian law and policy or as part of the history of American Indian resistance and activism, it is time that Native American Studies scholars put relocation into conversation with the larger trajectory surrounding “the colonial subject” and, more specifically, coloniality.

### **Methods and Organization of the Paper**

When conducting my examination of urban Indian relocation and education in the Oakland area, I employed several methods, including using archival documents as well as reinterpreting secondary sources. More specifically, I used various historical materials that are both archival and community in nature. These included: East Bay city council and school board meeting notes, school curricula and resources, BIA documents, relocation documents, U.S. Census data, newspaper articles, community documents, flyers, and clippings, along with other historical notes, journals and documents which allowed me to piece together the histories of public and, more specifically, urban Indian education. In addition, I traced educational and American Indian policy shifts at the local, state, and federal levels in order to understand how policy makers viewed the issues and needs of urban schools and the issues and needs of American Indian children within these schools.

This paper is divided into seven sections that build off of each other in order to trace the history of urban Indian education. The first section, “The New Battlefield: American Indian

Boarding Schools and the Outing Program,” looks at how and why Henry Richard Pratt and Samuel Chapman Armstrong built an educational system centered on theories of cultural evolution and assimilation policies with the goal of trying to force Native children into the lowest rungs of the capitalist system. The second section, “The transition must not be pushed too fast,” discusses the changing views of BIA education, particularly the debate over BIA versus public schools for Native students. During this period, the BIA, through the Education Director Will Carson Ryan, continued to promote vocational training as its core curriculum further perpetuating late nineteenth century ideas of cultural evolution and social status. The third section, “The Perfect Storm: How Relocation was Enabled by BIA Vocational Training,” analyzes how the BIA educational system, through the actions of Education Director Hilgered Thompson, seemingly promoted new college opportunities while simultaneously expanding and shaping the vocational education program used to push Native peoples into urban centers. The fourth section, “Relocation means to locate from where you are to some other place” uses BIA relocation documents and flyers to unpack both the motivations for relocation and the ways in which relocation was being advertised to relocatees. The fifth section, “From One Internal Colony to the Next,” questions and discusses the changing colonial status and relationship of urban Indians who moved from the reservation into the Oakland flatlands. The sixth section, “Inner-city Public Schools,” interrogates the ways in which the political geography of Oakland positioned Native peoples as an almost invisible minority. This section also demonstrates how the public schools, through different programs and curriculum resources, perpetuated colonial narratives surrounding race, culture, and savagery. The last section, “Whatever Necessary,” discusses the Oakland Indian community’s resistance to the public school system.

## **The New Battlefield: American Indian Boarding Schools and the Outing Program**

The rhetoric and expansion of federally controlled Indian education came out of the 1869 Grant Peace Policy which sought to rid the BIA of its rampant corruption through a close partnership with both Christian agencies and philanthropic organizations (Adams 1997). While the policy itself was short lived it ushered in a new era focused on the expansion and use of education in the new ideological and cultural war against Native peoples. By the 1860s there were over 48 BIA day schools in operation, and in 1879 Carlisle Industrial School, the first Indian-only boarding school, was opened by former U.S. army captain Richard Henry Pratt.<sup>4</sup>

Although Pratt essentially had creative control over Carlisle, the education model he applied was based on what he learned from Samuel Chapman Armstrong, founder of the Hampton Institute for African Americans. Like other missionaries of the period, Armstrong believed that colonized peoples, who he deemed “inferior,” could only be integrated into mainstream America through an Americanizing education process, which would simultaneously strip them of their “primitive” values while inculcating them with American ideologies, Protestant morals and manual training. Armstrong presented Pratt, and other American philanthropists with a model for how to instill in Native American children the educational qualities he felt were necessary to ensure their integration into the larger American society. However, unlike Armstrong who was more tolerant of “Native cultures,”<sup>5</sup> Pratt believed that the Hampton educational model needed to be modified in order to completely remove Native cultures, languages and ideologies (Fear-Segal 2007). Therefore, he focused on promoting a

---

<sup>4</sup> Since the beginning of European occupation, missionary schools run by different Christian sects were created to provide Native individuals with a Christian education; however, they were not controlled by the BIA or larger federal government, and were not funded by the BIA until the early nineteenth century. See Fear-Segal 2007.

psychological transformation in which Native children were pushed to remove any ideological vestiges of their Native identity.

The academic curriculum in BIA schools not only focused on providing basic skills in reading, writing, history, and arithmetic but also had a dual purpose of inculcating American ideologies and narratives of Manifest Destiny, cultural evolution, and capitalism. While academic instruction, especially History and English classes, allowed teachers to inculcate these ideologies, classroom periods were short, as the majority of the school day was spent doing chores. However, the ideological lessons of the classroom did not end at the door, but were incorporated as a central focus of what Pratt billed as industrial training. As K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty (2006) have argued, “Resolving the dilemma of integrating Indian individuals into a racially segregated society meant destroying tribes as ‘encysted’ nations and incorporating racially defined individuals into their proper place in society” (53). Native peoples would not just be stripped of their tribal ties. They would be molded to fit into a particular racialized space within American society.

The use of manual labor in the boarding schools served two purposes. It enabled a severely underfunded BIA to stretch its already tight budgets by utilizing the children’s labor, and it promoted the essential tenants of a wage labor economy including, among others, the notion that Native peoples occupy an inferior status within the larger U.S. racial and socio-economic hierarchy. Similar to other aspects of BIA schools, the role of manual labor within the larger education curriculum was reproduced from Armstrong’s Hampton model (Fear-Segal 2007). Moreover, Indian educators and philanthropists utilized the same social evolutionary rhetoric that Armstrong used in order to justify manual labor as a central aspect of boarding school curriculum. Armstrong’s decision to train African American and later Native students for

menial labor was supported by nineteenth century theories surrounding race, eugenics and social Darwinism, which asserted their inferiority as an outcome of an evolutionary process.

By claiming that racially colonized groups were biologically and culturally inferior, white theorists rearticulated the colonial discourses of slavery and conquest and in doing so were able to maintain their colonial status as benevolent paternalists. These theories were not only used to justify the central role of manual labor (coupled with the substandard academic curriculum) within BIA educational institutions. They became self-fulfilling as this educational model, designed for racially and culturally inferior students, only ensured their entry into the lowest socio-economic sectors, which in turn served to maintain their inferior status and perpetuate existing colonial ties and oppression. As Brenda Child (1998) explains, “Indian students in government schools were constantly bombarded with the notion that they were best suited for menial labor. This message was reinforced daily in classroom lessons, by limited vocational training, and during endless hours of labor in the gardens, dairies, kitchens, and laundries of the schools” (81). In short, the BIA education system effectively restructured the subjugated position of its students to conform to a wage labor economy, which fit within the larger modernist goals of creating a second-class citizenry not intended to have full access to or participation in the capitalist system.

It was not enough, however, that students understood the basic concepts of capitalism or their place within that system. More important was that they buy into the American capitalist doctrine of possessive individualism and Protestant work ethic. By making vocational and domestic service central to the curriculum, policy makers were attempting both to perpetuate a colonial system and to instill the ideologies that supported it, including respect for private property, economic self-reliance and accumulation of private wealth. Moreover, policy makers

argued that once the students adopted these ideologies into their own belief systems, students would be better prepared to accept their new status as menial laborers and domestic servants. (Adams 1997). Similar to the setup of the school itself, the majority of lessons were not taught in the classroom but during endless hours spent laboring for and outside of the school.

**“The transition must not be pushed too fast”:  
Will Carson Ryan and the BIA’s View of the Transition of  
Native Students to Public Schools**

Although Henry Richard Pratt was the founder of the American Indian boarding school system, he was also a proponent of eventually transitioning Native students into American mainstream school systems. As Pratt (1973) states in an article to the Friends of the Indian in 1892:

Indian schools must, of necessity be for a time, because the Indian cannot speak the language, and he knows nothing of the habits and forces he has to contend with but the highest purpose of all Indian schools ought to be only to prepare the young Indian to enter the public and other schools of the country (7).

While Pratt does not provide specific details for how such a transition would take place, this statement is truly remarkable, given the fact that less than thirty years from its creation the very founder of the BIA educational system was himself envisioning a time when Native students would be moved out of BIA schools and into mainstream American schooling. However, Pratt’s statement still leaves the reader wondering how or when he envisioned this transition would take place. Pratt only seems to point to the ambiguous barriers of “language” and “culture” as the factors affecting such a move.

In fact, the issue of when and how Native children would be transitioned into public schools was not specifically taken up by the BIA until almost thirty years later, when the Meriam

Report and more specifically William Carson Ryan advocated for such a transition. Echoing the ambivalence in Pratt's earlier assertion (quoted above), Ryan and other BIA officials did not completely embrace the idea of making this transition. BIA officials of the 1930s, including Ryan, were overwhelmingly critical of the public school system's ability to provide what they deemed an adequate education for Native students. Thus, even as Ryan promoted public schools, he was clearly still hesitant about the idea of moving Native children into these schools, stating in the report, "the transition must not be pushed too fast" (Connell Szasz 1999, 100). The BIA's reaction to this transition was equally complicated, as it pushed for a curriculum that would simultaneously begin to de-center as well as perpetuate the same nineteenth century ideologies surrounding racial and cultural inferiority that were central to the original BIA educational systems.

In this section I analyze the early concerns of BIA officials surrounding the transitioning of Native children to public schooling. These concerns are important to highlight given that twenty years later, during the initial phases of relocation, a discussion with similar concerns was noticeably absent within the BIA, even though the public school systems that these later generations of Native children would attend were arguably worse than local and/or reservation public schools of the 1930s and 40s.

While it may seem obvious that the BIA school system initially had the greatest enrollment of Native students, by the turn of the twentieth century the entry and integration of Native children into local public schools was slowly growing. In 1900, according to BIA records, only two hundred and forty-six children attended public schools, while over twenty-two thousand were in the BIA system. These numbers grew exponentially over the next decade. By 1915 almost as many children were enrolled in public schools as in BIA schools, and by 1925

over thirty thousand Native children attended public schools, accounting for almost half of all Native students (Adams 1997). Yet this population growth only illustrates the rising use of the public school system when no other alternative was present, being that enrollment in other educational institutions, including both the BIA system and mission schools, stayed relatively constant.<sup>6</sup> Rather, these statistics mark the beginning of a reluctant relationship between the BIA and public schools, a relationship that would be simultaneously fostered and resisted by BIA educational directors and agents, reflecting the current BIA policies and sentiments of the American public.

By the early twentieth century there was a growing body of BIA critics who argued against the effectiveness and morality of the BIA educational model. In particular, the methods of cultural genocide and removal of children from their communities was becoming a sore spot both within the BIA and externally from concerned white citizens and philanthropists alike. This was not an argument over the need to protect Native cultures or languages. Rather, the argument was framed around the moral issue of when and how Native peoples would be transitioned into mainstream America. Thus, even though a large percentage of Native parents, students and communities had continually spoken out against the effects and tactics of the BIA educational system, within the confines of the government's patriarchal ambitions their arguments were considered to be unfounded and unimportant.

Administrators within the BIA felt that the most potent attack on the BIA educational system came from a federally funded study, "The 1928 Meriam Report," also known as *The Problem of the Indian Administration*. The Report was contracted by Secretary of the Interior

---

<sup>6</sup> In fact these numbers seem to defy the change in the congressional financing structure, which phased out all funding to non-BIA mission and contract schools between 1890 and 1912, including Hampton Industrial School. The majority of this funding phase out was done between 1890 and 1900. Only Hampton Industrial Institute was allowed funding for Native students until 1912, and the last Native cohort graduated in 1916 (Adams 1997).



Hubert Work and the Board of Indian Commissioners in order to investigate mounting criticism directed at the BIA educational system. While the Brookings Institution, under the direction of principle investigator John Meriam, issued the report, it was Will Carson Ryan who was the lead investigator of the education portion of the study.<sup>7</sup> Similar to the rest of the Meriam Report, Ryan's findings condemned almost every aspect of the boarding school system, from dilapidated health conditions to inadequate curriculum. One of the only exceptions in the overall bleak report was "general praise" for the transitioning of Native students into local public schools (Adams 1997).<sup>8</sup> However, even as the report praised this move, Ryan included a warning not to push the transition too fast, a warning with which many BIA administrators agreed. As Margaret Connell Szasz (1999) argues, even with the growing number of JOM contracts,

the Education Division reasoned that Bureau education was geared more to the needs of Indian students than was public-school education. A number of education administrators who worked with the states were deeply concerned about the weaknesses of the public-school systems. Their experience convinced them that most public-school administrators had very little background in developing special programs for a unique group such as the Indian students, and they feared that the students would be seriously affected by this lack of understanding (100-101).

Thus, although the Meriam Report had praised the Bureau for moving children into local public schools, BIA educators were highly critical of the ability of public school administrators or districts to offer schooling that would fulfill the needs of Native children in what they referred to as "special programs," possibly pointing to the recent addition of Native American classes offered at BIA schools, along with other curricula specially designed for Native students.

By the time the Johnson O'Mally Act and even suggestions from the Meriam Report were implemented, the BIA system was undergoing a partial overhaul, pushed by the new

---

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Ryan was appointed the director of Indian education in 1930, two years after the Meriam Report was published, further demonstrating the potency of the report. See, Connell Szasz 1999.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, by 1900 the BIA had contracted with over 16 different public school districts across the nation to accept Native students. However it was not until 1934 that the BIA was able to "centralize the contracts on a federal-state basis" under the new Johnson O'Malley Act (Connell Szasz 1999).

Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, through the Indian Reorganization Act, better known as the Indian New Deal. Along with ending overt assimilation policies such as land allotment, the Act also redefined the internal organization of the boarding school system. Thus, although the purpose of the Indian education system remained relatively consistent, by continuing to prepare Native students to transition into the lower echelons of mainstream America, the system was reshaped to provide an education more aligned to the contemporary public schools.

In contrast to what was offered in public schools, BIA educators made a conscious effort to implement classes that offered some tribal history, folklore, and arts and crafts<sup>9</sup>. However, while this curriculum development was a departure from the overt cultural genocidal tactics of the earlier BIA system, it was far from a Native-centered or controlled model. On the contrary, as Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) argue, “Schooling, even in allegedly Native content, was too decontextualized from Indigenous frameworks of meaning and transmission of knowledge, too much a product of non-Native experts accustomed to isolating ‘traits’ for study, too subject to the control and power of even the most well-intentioned federal employees” (85).

Even as the BIA appeared to make a drastic shift in the curriculum, most Native courses that were allowed in the schools were stripped of any meaningful tribal context and reshaped to fit the same Americanization line. However, this did not stop BIA agents from using these changes to question the ability of public schools to provide for the special “needs” of Native children. Indeed, BIA agents pointed to these changes as examples of how the BIA education system was superior to the public school system in that BIA schools were able to provide for the cultural needs of their students.

---

<sup>9</sup>Some isolated teachers and schools had already begun to allow some Native curricula before the BIA curriculum overhaul of the 1930s.

While it is clear that BIA administrators and educators were concerned about – if not adamantly against – the transition of Native students into public schools, the question remains as to why Ryan would both praise the BIA’s previous work of transitioning Native students into public schools while also warning against its hastiness. By looking further into the Report, it becomes clear that Ryan was not just concerned with the speed of the transition but with the quality of education that would be provided.

Rather than push the public school system to overhaul their curriculum in order to provide resources or programs designed specifically for Native students, Ryan instead stated that the BIA should “supplement the public school work by giving special attention to health, industrial and social training in the relationship between home and school” (Connell Szasz 1999, 197). Thus, while Ryan might have believed that transitioning Native students into public schools was a good decision, he also seems to suggest that the public school system would neither be able nor willing to meet the necessary range of Indian educational needs. Instead, Ryan asserts that it is the job of the agency to provide these supplemental trainings.

Unfortunately, Ryan does not go into detail about the inadequacies of the public schools and even ignores the lack of Native American relevant curriculum in public schools, which he would later help to implement in the BIA system, albeit devoid of much cultural context. Rather, Ryan highlights both social and industrial training as two of the three core areas that should be supplemented, the same two areas that he criticized the BIA for mishandling. While his statement is vague as to how these supplemental trainings will be organized, it leads one to question why Ryan believed that social and industrial training would not be provided for in the public schools. Moreover, Ryan’s promotion of supplemental trainings seems to re-invoke Pratt’s nineteenth century model of industry and citizenship training. In doing so, Ryan

perpetuates the same theories about Indian cultural and racial inferiority that Pratt used to push Native children into the lowest sectors of the labor market. Even after explicitly condemning the boarding schools for using industrial schooling as a guise for cheap labor, Ryan still promotes it as necessary supplemental training.

Ryan's statement reveals the complexities involved in transitioning Native children to public schools. More importantly, it illustrates how entrenched manual labor as an educational tool for Native students was for white educators, including those outside the BIA. Thus, even in the 1930s and 40s, like Ryan, many BIA education administrators and teachers were not only concerned about the kind of education that would be provided in public schools, they paradoxically continued to perpetuate a racialized labor market through their focus on vocational education, while simultaneously beginning to slowly shift their own pedagogy and organization in order to provide a more "culturally relevant" education for Native students. Even so, and as Ryan's statements and the reactions of BIA educators make clear, the BIA still felt that it was the foremost institution to address the needs of Native students, a belief that would not be voiced during the next phase, the transition of Native children into urban public schools.

### **The Perfect Storm: How Relocation was Enabled by BIA Vocational Training**

In 1953, the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress adopted House Concurrent Resolution 108 in order to terminate the unique status of American Indian tribes. In doing so, Congress not only severed its trust responsibility but also liquidated Native lands, resources and communities. While over 100 tribes were terminated through this process, these resolutions were costly, time consuming, and adamantly resisted by both Native and non-Native peoples alike. In reaction to these growing concerns, the Bureau of Indian Affairs quickly shifted its focus, abandoning termination policies

in favor of an individualized “termination process” which they labeled the Indian Relocation Program. Yet, rather than admitting that this relocation was actually an extension of termination policies, or part of the longer trajectory of nineteenth century assimilation policies, the BIA encoded relocation in the rhetoric of postwar patriotism, liberation, and civil rights (Fixico 1986) by advertising the program as one that offered free vocational training and abundant post war employment opportunities in large urban areas. Although a permanent relocation into urban centers was a new assimilation tactic meant to cut cultural, language, tribal and most importantly federal trust ties, the program had been in the making for over seventy years, through the programs and curriculum of BIA schools.

Like the BIA educational curriculum, the core components of the relocation program were vocational training and employment assistance, both of which had been central to the BIA education system since its inception.<sup>10</sup> Since vocational training had always been a primary focus of the BIA education system, when the new BIA Education Director, Hilgered Thompson, completely restructured it in the early 1950s in order to push students into what she termed the “urban technological age,” it only seemed natural that vocational training continued to be a central aspect of the transition to urban employment and schools. Similar to earlier BIA education policies that were implemented to support federal theories on how best to deal with the “Indian problem,”<sup>11</sup> the second wave of Native children transitioning into public education systems was the direct effect of the perfect assimilation policy storm in which federal relocation policies were perfectly aligned with BIA education practices, through the direction of Thompson, to effectively force a mass exodus off reservations into urban centers. However, unlike earlier

---

<sup>10</sup> Vocational education was based on Armstrong’s Hampton Model, and the Outing Program, which placed Native children in temporary jobs in rural and later urban areas, was developed by Pratt. See for instance Adams 1997.

<sup>11</sup> I use this term to underscore the U.S. government’s view that Native Nations needed to be managed and controlled in order for the U.S. to maintain access to Native Lands and resources without compromising their claim as the only sovereign Nation within U.S. borders

boarding school assimilation policies, Thompson's policies were more covert. For the first time Native students were seemingly given a choice in their educational options.

Thompson asserted that the BIA schools needed to prepare students for urban technology jobs, which she believed represented the future employment track for all American workers. In order to achieve this goal she focused BIA efforts on three interconnected steps. First, she focused on raising the school enrollment of Native children. Second, she set out to redesign BIA boarding school curriculum to align more with public high schools by pushing for a more academic model alongside a revamped vocational training program. Third, after completing high school Native students would be enrolled in either college or an adult vocational training program, which she felt would make them employable in urban markets.

Unfortunately, the option of either higher or vocational education was more a dream than a reality. Rather, BIA data from this time period reveals that the majority of Native American students were not adequately prepared for college. Of those who did attempt college, less than 25 percent of the students who enrolled made it through their first semester, and less than 10 percent graduated. When the BIA investigated the high dropout rate of Native American college students, it found that it was the BIA education system itself that was to blame, as it provided a substandard education that did not adequately prepare students to either enter or succeed in college (Connell Szasz 1999). Thus, even as the restructuring of the BIA curriculum suggests that there was an equal opportunity for Native students to access a post high school education, the numbers and experiences of Native people suggest otherwise. Rather than being adequately prepared for college, and in turn white-collar positions, most students were pushed into vocational programs. In fact, while Thompson restructured and advertised the system to highlight college, her administration not only streamlined vocational training but expanded it to include

adult training programs. The effect of this was to directly support termination policies by providing the BIA with the easiest and cheapest way to relocate individuals into urban centers.

Along with Thompson's redeveloped and expanded BIA vocational programs, the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress passed Public Law 959, better known as the Indian Vocational Training Act, in 1956. This Act allowed the Bureau to make special contracts with private business to provide vocational and on the job training for Indian clients both on and off the reservation. At its height vocational programs offered over 133 courses; however, as other scholars have pointed out, many were irrelevant to the current job market and/or had a high turnover rate (Philp 1985).

The main purpose of the vocational training programs, whether offered in BIA boarding schools or through private programs, was to prepare Native individuals to relocate to urban centers. Thus all of the vocational programs were geared to provide students with basic skills necessary to get a job in the city. However, as the program title suggests, the vocational training program was not necessarily concerned with providing training that would allow individuals to get the best jobs in the city or even allow a transition into the middle class. Rather, the majority of vocational training courses provided specialized skills in entry-level positions such as secretary, factory worker, and construction worker.

By pairing the relocation program with vocational training, the BIA was able to utilize its educational systems to force Native peoples into the lowest sectors of the wage labor economy. Although Thompson's educational policy seemed to push for more academics in the classroom, the majority of Native children still received an education more aligned to the vocational model that Pratt and Armstrong promoted seventy years earlier. Thus, through its educational policies the BIA continued to perpetuate the idea and practice that Native people were neither intelligent nor modern enough to be given an education that would provide the skills necessary to do more

than menial labor, an argument that is vital for understanding the motivations behind the organization and locations of the relocation program.

### **“Relocation means to locate from where you are to some other place”**

The latest version of urban relocation initially began in 1951 with a pilot employment placement program specifically designed for Navajo and Hopis recruits. In 1954 the program was expanded to complement House Resolution 108, better known as Termination. During this initial expansion period, area offices were set-up in eleven different regions of the country, along with nine relocation field offices, the largest of which were set up in Los Angeles and Chicago (Fixico 1986). The relocation program continued to expand throughout the mid-50s. Offices were opened in Oakland in 1954, San Francisco in 1955, and San Jose and Saint Louis in 1956. Offices would later be opened in Dallas, Denver, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Cleveland, and Milwaukee, to name just a few of the larger metropolitan areas (Fixico 1986). In addition, the BIA relocation branch was moved from Washington, D.C. to Denver in 1957 in order to be closer to many of its reservation area offices.

Urban Indian relocation was not an original idea or even a new process. What was different was the scale and weight of the 1950s policy, which grew from a small educational policy into the foci of all other BIA policies. In short, in the 1950s relocation efforts were restructured to align with termination policy in order to force a *permanent* move of Native populations off of tribal lands rather than promote temporary employment or residence in urban areas. Although, such permanent relocation was not initiated or even sought out by the majority of relocatees, it was central to the BIA termination discourse which, similar to nineteenth century assimilationist policies, actively sought to both physically and psychologically remove Native



peoples from their tribal lands, identities and Indian status. The connection to nineteenth century ideologies did not end here, however, as a rearticulated form of colonialism was used to promote a similar brand of entry-level jobs and semi-skilled vocational training, which “naturally” situated Native peoples at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

The urban relocation program was set up to place a relocatee based on his or her previous education and work experience. Since most who applied for the program had gone to either reservation or BIA schools that only trained students for semi-skilled or menial labor, BIA offices were strategically placed inside urban centers, which had the highest percentage of semi-skilled or menial jobs available. In short, Native peoples were inserted into the lowest socio-economic area in order to fulfill what they had been trained for – to become part of the working underclass. They would not upset the natural position at the bottom of the social evolutionary ladder, but rather, according to the rhetoric of the American dream, they would begin to slowly work their way up, eventually joining the lower middle classes. In fact, merely moving off a reservation was promoted to be a step up the evolutionary ladder. As one BIA relocation branch bulletin stated:

The word RELOCATION does not have any mysterious meaning. RELOCATION means to locate from where you are to some other place.

Usually this is done to secure an advantage in general living conditions. It is usually done because people want to go to a place where living conditions are easier- may be more modern- or school opportunities are better- or where there are opportunities for steady work and an income all year around- or where chances for self-improvement and earned promotions are better.

That is RELOCATION<sup>12</sup>

By deconstructing this bulletin with its simplified language and condescending tone, we can begin to expose how BIA agents represented and promoted the relocation process to possible

---

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs Branch of Relocation Services, Nevada Indian Agency, Stewart, Nevada, p.2

recruits. The opening statement clearly sets up a paternalistic relationship between the agency and the reader stating, “The word RELOCATION does not have any mysterious meaning. Relocation means to locate from where you are to some other place.” This sentence is overwhelmingly demeaning as it assumes that Native people, whose recent histories had been centered in their removal and relocation to reservation lands, would not have the capacity to understand or define the basic process of relocation.

The paragraph that follows this sentence creates a good/bad, modern/backwards binary between reservation communities and urban centers, placing a positive value on relocation by using words such as “advantage,” “better,” “more modern,” and “easier” to describe the areas in which the relocatees would be moved. This intentional emphasis on the supposed positive effects of relocation also implicitly suggests that living on a reservation involves poor living conditions, being anti-modern or backwards, and having difficulty accessing steady employment or good schools. It fails to mention that all of these conditions were created by federal Indian laws and policies. The paragraph implies that the BIA is a benevolent agency only trying to offer the best opportunities to its wards, while covering up their ongoing role as the colonial agency which has continually worked to maintain such oppressions. Moreover, this paragraph implies that by relocating, the individual would have access to a better, easier and more “modern” life, without revealing that the majority of relocatees would be placed into low socio-economic areas in which they would have to fight for limited resources and jobs, alongside other oppressed communities.

This comparison of the language used in the brochure with relocation experiences makes clear that the BIA relocation branch actively worked to downplay the consequences of relocation with general descriptions and oversimplified language, which made relocation appear straightforward and more enticing. Using similar tactics to those used to manipulate the

relocation process, the BIA continued to advertise abundant employment opportunities in areas which themselves were becoming increasingly more impoverished and racially segregated due to a flooded labor market and white flight to the suburbs.

### **From One Internal Colony to the Next**

By the time the relocation program was established in Oakland in 1954, the Bay Area was undergoing drastic demographic and population shifts that had a major impact on the opportunities available to the relocation program participants. The Oakland flatlands, including West Oakland, Fruitvale and East Oakland, where a majority of Oakland relocatees were initially moved, was drastically transformed during the post war period from a working class white neighborhood into what was similar to the reservation economy – an overwhelmingly impoverished area, in which a majority of the residents were part of the working poor or unemployed with little opportunity for economic or political advancement. The residents in the Oakland flats, as in many other urban centers, were in a heated fight with the surrounding suburbs over the distribution of political and economic resources. This fight was not only divided along neighborhood lines, but, as many urban historians and sociologists have argued, it was an outcome of racial exclusion and exploitation in which white people not only moved out of the inner city into newly developed suburban neighborhoods but actively sought to exclude people of color from doing the same. Historian Robert Self (2003) explains:

[T]he SUBURBAN ‘white noose’ surrounding the urban black community stood metaphorically for metropolitan inequality and segregation. Unwelcome in the South County (Southern Alameda County) suburbs, African Americans in Oakland were denied access to the region’s fastest growing employment and housing markets. Suburban Alameda County, from San Leandro through Fremont (and across the Santa Clara County line into Milpitas) was closed to Black homebuyers in most respects through the middle 1970s (256).

As Self makes clear, the political geography of the East Bay was being forcibly segregated. African Americans were not only surrounded by what Self calls the “white noose” of white middle-class suburbia, they were becoming confined to the flatlands of Oakland through inequitable housing and employment practices. Moreover, with the deindustrialization and outward flight of capital, the Oakland flats became a ghetto of the surrounding suburbs, where the community’s economic and political resources were controlled from outside the community.

Commenting on the “black ghetto,” William Tabb (1970) states, “In its relations with the dominant white society, the black ghetto stands as a unit apart, an internal colony exploited in a systematic fashion.” He explains that “there are two key relationships which must be proven to exist before the colonial analogy can be accepted: (1) economic control and exploitation, and (2) political dependence and subjugation. Both necessitate separation and inferior status” (23). By the early 1950s Oakland was slowly assuming the characteristics of this colonial model, where African Americans and other people of color were geographically contained due to white flight and racist policies, while also being denied political, social, and economic control of their districts. In short, the Oakland flats were, and arguably still are, classified as an internal colony, in which the residents are systematically controlled and subjugated by outside economic and political institutions.

Although defining the colonial status of Oakland is helpful in situating the racial and political climate that Native peoples were relocated into, it is less clear how urban Indians fit into the picture. In order to understand the significance of Native relocation into the internal colony of the “black ghetto” it is important to first acknowledge the colonial status of Native peoples at the time of their relocation. The colonial structure and ideologies that the relocation program fell under had been set up more than one hundred years earlier by Chief Justice John Marshall, who

in the 1830s ruled that the relationship of Native Nations to the United States was like a “Ward to its Guardian” with a semi-sovereign status. Marshall’s rulings set up a nation within a nation relationship in which the United States not only held supreme sovereignty over Native Nations but was able to control and rule over them. The result of Marshall’s judgment was the first American Indian removal policy, which allowed for the confiscation of Native lands and the confinement of Native peoples onto federally designated reservations.<sup>13</sup>

The reservation system managed by the BIA, was created to “contain” and control Native peoples, rendering the reservation an isolated internal colony of the larger United States. Although there had been attempts at the policy level to give more autonomy to Native Nations and people, the reservation and larger BIA system remained under the direct control of mostly non-Native BIA officials through the entire extent of the relocation program.

Consequently, BIA officials were in complete control as to where and when American Indian individuals and/or families would be moved through the relocation program. Families were not just relocated into any low socio-economic neighborhood in the Bay Area. Rather, they were moved from one internal colony – their reservation/Pueblo/Rancheria – into another internal colony – the flatlands of Oakland – which was arguably focused on the control and exploitation of a different racialized group, African Americans. The BIA placed Native relocatees into the internal colony of the Black ghetto not only to ensure their assimilation into the lowest socio-economic sectors of the city, but to incorporate Native people into a new colonial system, which would contain and exploit them just like their racialized neighbors.

---

<sup>13</sup> Better known as the removal of the “five civilized tribes” or the trail of tears, the first federally mandated Indian removal policy was passed by Congress in 1834 under the direction of President Andrew Jackson.

## Inner-city Public Schools

By the 1950s, the earlier BIA concern that public schools would be inadequate was pushed aside as Thompson, the BIA Education Director, reorganized the larger BIA education system to not only permanently relocate thousands of American Indians into urban centers, but also effectively shift the schooling of later generations into urban public schools. Although Indian children had been allowed to attend public schools (while retaining their special trustee relationship) since the early part of the twentieth century,<sup>14</sup> the majority of such institutions were local. Consequently, it would not be until the implementation of the relocation policy that large numbers of intertribal youth were drawn into urban school systems.

Unlike the outing program, which recruited mostly single students for employment, the relocation program specifically targeted families through their ad campaigns and brochures. In fact, the BIA would use the promise of urban schooling as a selling point to recruit families by implying that such schools would provide more opportunities for their children. For instance, in a Stewart, Nevada, relocation brochure the question “Why Relocation?” is posed to the prospective relocatees, to which the brochure answers:

“Maybe you have decided that you want your children to grow up in a place where there may be part-time work for them, or where there are good schools, high schools and colleges nearby” (Ladd et al. N.D.)

Although part of a longer list of “answers,” this statement is of particular significance in the way that it specifically connects relocation to educational opportunity. Stating that a relocatee may “have decided that [they] want their children to grow up in a place [...] where there are good

---

<sup>14</sup> It is important to acknowledge that while sending Native children to public schools was originally the long term goal of the BIA, and more specifically Colonel Richard H. Pratt, initially Native children were forced to go to Indian-only boarding schools or day schools which had specialized curriculum and pedagogy designed to both assimilate and Americanize these children in order to further undermine their sovereignty and self-determination. It was not until the early part of the twentieth century, after boarding schools had been running for over thirty years, that a substantial percentage of Native school children were enrolled in local public schools.

schools” positions the urban space as having the better schools while also insinuating that the schools the relocatees’ children currently attend are not good enough, and may in fact be holding children back. Stating that the relocatee “may have decided” emphasizes the individual’s “choice” in providing a place where their children will have access to good schools, thereby placing a positive value on relocation and a negative value on staying.

Educational success through relocation is further emphasized as the brochure sets up a clear path to college by stressing that should the relocatee “decide” to relocate, their children will have easy access to good schools that will ultimately provide them with the opportunity to attend “good” high schools and colleges. Such statements clearly demonstrate that urban schools were not just a minor consequence of the relocation process but became a vital selling point for the BIA. Unfortunately, the brochure fails to connect educational opportunity with the relocatee’s location. Instead, by asserting that there are only “good schools,” it situates all urban schools as the same and in doing so actively covers up the grave disparities between such schools and, more importantly, the relocatee’s position within them. Being that most relocatees were low-wage laborers and could only afford to live in the poorest neighborhoods, the majority of Native children found themselves attending inner city schools that by the mid-1950s were on the verge of collapse.

Due to limited resources, a crumbling infrastructure, and high dropout rates, Native children entered some of the worst public schools in the nation with the overwhelming possibility of achieving the same socio-economic status as their parents, if not worse. Thus, the next generation’s status was not necessarily improved by the urban public school system. Rather, like their African American and Chicano classmates, Native students were pushed into a

“failing” education system, which maintained the economic, political, and social status quo of the inner city.

Although multiple institutions and agents, such as the police, the judicial system, the welfare system, landlords, business owners and city politicians all worked to effectively retard any community-owned or controlled development, the perpetuation of the internal colony was in large part maintained through the public schools, which actively worked to dominate the larger community. The inner city schools became colonial spaces that rearticulated western narratives, policies and rhetoric to justify the community’s low status within the larger U.S. Moreover, unlike what sociologist Bob Blauner (2001) has termed “classic colonialism,” the internal colonialism at play in the inner city schools had become transformed into a new form of colonial oppression—coloniality—that both maintained the colonial relationship while simultaneously expanding it. As philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) explains: “...coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience” (243). Coloniality outlives colonialism, which is theoretically bound to a nation-to-nation relationship, by addressing the multi-layered forms of colonial oppression that both individuals and communities experience. Thus, even as the BIA education system still operated within a colonial framework, relocated Native children were moved into an educational system founded on the tenets of coloniality that were used to both Americanize and control inner city communities.

This transition of Native American children into inner city public schools harkened back to the late nineteenth century BIA educational system, which, through the collaboration of Armstrong and Pratt, designed American Indian boarding schools to mirror the curriculum model



of the Hampton Institute for African Americans. During both periods in history this movement of Native children into U.S. controlled institutions intended for African Americans reinforced the perception that African Americans and Native Americans shared a similar colonial status at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, which warranted a parallel education for their colonial/racial condition. In short, an educational system that perpetuated the low status of one colonized group was deemed appropriate for maintaining the low status of another. In this sense then BIA-controlled education for Native students, at least for relocatees, came full circle, by again using educational institutions and curriculum models that were created to contain and further oppress African American communities. More specifically, in the Oakland flats, as well as in many other inner cities such as Minneapolis, Chicago, and Los Angeles, Native children were once more being pumped into an educational system that was designed to perpetuate the low status of African American students.

Many urban schools not only perpetuated the inferior status of its Native students but also created a more oppressive educational space. Unlike BIA schools or community controlled schools such as Rough Rock Demonstration School, which had some room to design special curriculum models and classes for Native students (such as language, culture and history), urban schools were both unfamiliar and to a larger extent unconcerned with the needs of Native children. For instance, as detailed in Table 2 below, Native students made up less than one percent of the total student body in the Oakland public school district during the 1968-1969 school year. Although these numbers may misrepresent the total population to some degree, given the fact that many Native children, especially those from southwestern tribes, had Spanish surnames, 1970 U.S. Census data shows the total population of Native students K-12 in the San Francisco–Oakland area to be only 2,292 students. Thus, even if every Native student in the area

attended an Oakland school, they still would be the smallest population of students within the school district. Consequently, Native students were both numerically and politically insignificant within the district.

**Table 2. Minority Student Population in the Oakland Unified School System**

<i>Minority Group</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent of School Total</i>	<i>Percent of School Minority</i>
Blacks	35,346	55.29	79.92
Orientals	3,326	5.20	7.52
Spanish-American surnames	5,241	8.2	11.85
<b>American Indians</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.71</b>

Source: October 1968 Oakland Unified School System Report, under the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights. Elementary and secondary school survey required under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Oakland, California, Oakland Unified Public Schools.

While their small representation may have affected many aspects of the children's school experience, such as their racial invisibility and isolation within the classroom, it also created an atmosphere in which most if not all faculty were not properly trained to teach accurate historical or contemporary Native realities/experiences. In this sense then, inner city school systems and agents effectively maintained the coloniality of Native peoples by perpetuating their inferiority and primitivism while simultaneously covering up their colonial status.

Even in specialized curriculum reports created to aid teachers, Native peoples continued to be positioned as a primitive, uncivilized, and backwards race. For example, in a 1966 teacher's resource guide entitled *Oakland Public Schools Resource Guide for Teaching About Contributions of Minorities To American Culture*. This guide provided secondary level school teachers (grades 7-12) with a list of media (including texts, visual and audio resources) about various racialized and ethnic groups represented in the United States. While multiple racialized

“minorities,” including African Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans and Latino Americans, were represented within the resource list, it is only Native Americans that are specifically positioned as primitive. For example, in the Group Difference resource section, the description for the “Eskimo” example, entitled “The Case of the Borrowed Wife,” states:

Law and justice among the Eskimo. Incident demonstrating the most primitive of all legal systems with no officials or specialized punishments. There is no concept of estate but law per se exists. Law, however, is private law and justice must be taken in one’s own hands. Incident involves food, games, magic, wife borrowing according to custom, and wife seizing which violates custom....

While there are many points that stand out in this description, it is significant to note that this resource guide instructs Oakland district teachers to use a film that asserts that the “Eskimo” legal system is “the most primitive of all legal systems.” By doing so it provides the teachers with the idea that Inuit communities are not only primitive but at the bottom of the social evolutionary ladder. The description continues to reinforce primitivism as it emphasizes the rest of the film’s contents, “games, magic, and wife borrowing,” all of which promote a childlike mentality and archaic treatment of women. The description fails to give a full account of how these smaller themes are connected to the Inuit legal system, but rather continues to reinforce the inferiority of this community as compared to modern Western societies.

This Inuit community is further silenced as the film continues to use the colonial term of “Eskimo,” which denies them the power to even name themselves. Moreover the positionality of the film is never questioned, but rather is provided as fact, reinforcing a Westernized perception of Inuit peoples, which perpetuates their primitivism in a modern world. Unfortunately, this film is not the only resource on Native Americans within the guide that perpetuates such stereotypical images and ideas of Native peoples. Indeed, the rest of the guide continues to reify these assertions. Even in the tenth grade curriculum section, which specifically focuses on American history, Native American Nations are positioned as either pre-colonial communities or culturally

primitive and anti-modern, placing them on the periphery of American history.

In contrast, non-Native minority communities are represented in the resource guide as a fundamental part of both American history and contemporary struggles. For instance, the resources for African Americans included such titles as “Great Negro Americans,” “Anthology of Negro poetry,” “The Sit-in Story” and “The Threshold of Equality,” which situate African Americans not only as modern peoples within the United States but more importantly deserving of equality and civil rights. In contrast to this, the resources for American Indians include the titles “Injun Talk,” “Indians of the Plains: Present Day,” and “Blackfeet Indian Portraits.” These titles continue the practice of portraying Native communities as confined to a primitive life on the reservation. These examples not only demonstrate the way that Native communities were dehumanized in the curriculum, they show the absence of discussion of Native peoples and/or communities who did not live on a reservation, effectively rendering the experience of the children in the classroom invisible and insignificant. Even inside this specialized resource guide there were no materials that provided either an accurate or respectful portrait of Native peoples, much less resources that were critical of the Native peoples’ social, political, or economic struggles on or off reservations. This massively flawed curriculum contributed to creating a classroom where most teachers perpetuated racialized stereotypes of Native peoples without ever discussing the processes of colonialism or conquest except to reinforce the national narrative of Manifest Destiny.

While this is only a small example of how the Oakland schools perpetuated the coloniality of Native peoples, it gets at the heart of what Bill Wahpepah asserted almost ten years later in 1975 at the opening of the American Indian Alternative School in Oakland. At the gathering, Wahpepah called the Oakland schools a “political weapon against [Native] children,

[and] people...destroy[ing] them culturally, spiritually and sometimes physically” (Pollard N.D.). Wahpepah’s statement reflects the ways in which many Native people in Oakland felt about the local public schools their children were forced to attend. Such schools were not only viewed as racist or oppressive but also as a “political weapon.” Community members believed that the schools, along with the agents within them, were organized to effectively destroy Native children while also undermining Native communities in the process. The Native American resources in the *Resource Guide for Teaching About Contributions of Minorities To American Culture* were part of a larger system that naturalized the inferiority and backwardness of Native peoples, making them defunct in society.

At the same event, Dennis Banks, co-founder of the American Indian Movement and a teacher of the Oakland Alternative School, also expressed to the reporters that many of the Oakland Indian community members felt that “the public schools had teachers that were racist and very bigoted,” which, he explained, contributed to the “pitfalls that can cause Native American youth to commit suicide at an early age. Alcoholism comes from going through a system not designed to help us but to oppress us.” Like Wahpepah, Banks pointed out the multiple layers of oppression and coloniality that Native students confront on a daily basis as well as some of the “pitfalls” that such oppression breeds. In addition, he tied this racism and bigotry to some of the effects it has had on some Native students, such as pushing them towards suicide and alcoholism.

Although Banks cited the most severe reactions of students, many sociologist and scholars have also pointed out the connection between self-esteem, self-efficacy and racism (Fryberg 2006). As Cornel Pewewardy (1998) argues,

Children’s self images are very pliable and susceptible to external forces. Unfortunately, young Indian students who are treated as though they are less than human—whether in movies, children’s books, sports mascots or phenomenon such as the “tomahawk

chop”—will tend to assume they are inferior to white children. And this has a profound educational impact. Some educators, in fact, contend that American Indians remain the least educated ethnic group in the nation (193).

Pewewardy not only problematizes and speaks out against negative images of Native people as “less than human.” He argues that they are especially dangerous for young Native children because they negatively impact their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Moreover, this inferiority complex created by negative representations of Native peoples ultimately affects the educational experience of Native children, even pushing some to quit school. This argument was shared by Oakland Native community members, who understood the negative psychological and educational effects that the Oakland public schools had on their youth, and came together in order to fight it.

The harsh reality that drove local Native leaders, parents, and students to start a school in someone’s backyard using a tipi as the classroom, rather than return to local public schools not only suggests the anger and frustration of this community but shows their self-determination and commitment to providing a better education for their children. Moreover, the opening of the Oakland Survival School, along with Wahpepah’s and Banks’ statements, are representative of a larger movement that took hold throughout Indian country, in which Native peoples demanded both their sovereignty as Native Nations as well as their self-determination as Native communities. Thus, although schools were a constant site of tension and oppression for Native students, they were also a space contestation and resistance for the larger Native community.

### **“Whatever Necessary”: Urban Indian Educational Resistance**

Native American activism became visible to the mainstream U.S. public in the 1960s and 70s, along with other social movements for gender and racial equality that emerged onto the

national stage. Native American resistance during this period combined traditional forms of resistance, such as the assertion of community control and self-determination, with new tactics aimed at fighting the larger policies of termination and relocation. In contrast to other movements of the period, however, which framed their struggles around equality, civil rights and integration, most Native activist groups did not embrace these concepts because they silenced the historical struggles and central issues in Native communities who had been forced to fight to maintain “their cultural integrity” and community ties (Langston 2003). Instead, Native activist groups, representing both urban and reservation communities, began demanding community-controlled federal programs and policies that would support their needs as the community, not paternalistic non-Native bureaucrats, defined them. As a famous XIT song, “End,” asserted in 1972:

The Indian has been out there on the ghetto of the reservation for a long, long, time. We have existed without adequate food, clothing, shelter or medicine, to name but a few. In their place we have been given malnutrition, poverty, disease, suicide and bureaucratic promises of a better tomorrow. Your America has not been the land of your proclaimed equality and justice for all. May your god forgive you! The treatment of our peoples has been a national tragedy and disgrace, the time has come to put an end to that disgrace. Alcatraz, Fort Loudon, whatever necessary, we must now manage our own affairs and control our own lives, and through it all remain to be the true American.<sup>15</sup>

This song exemplifies the demand for self-determination made by individual Native Nations and communities as well as the larger intertribal movement of Native America. More specifically, while the lyrics explicitly blame the U.S. government for creating an environment rampant with “disease, poverty, and suicide” and even compare the reservation to the “ghetto,” the power of the song lies in the lyrics which insist that Native people are no longer willing to listen to “bureaucratic promises” but rather will do “whatever necessary” to develop and control their lives apart from the U.S. government.

---

<sup>15</sup> XIT “End” Plight of the Red Man, 1972. Soar Records.

While this demand for self-determination had various implications for different Native communities, it meant that American Indians would no longer wait for politicians or philanthropists to create and organize Native controlled programs, as had been the case in the past. Like other colonial resistance movements such as the Black Panthers, American Indian communities utilized and expanded existing community organizations and initiatives to support their needs. For urban Indian communities, most of these organizations were created during the relocation period, again demonstrating that Native people were not complicit in their relocation, but, similar to the boarding school experience, actively formed new intertribal alliances and support networks to maintain community and cultural ties.

Similar to earlier forms of Native resistance, which date back to eighteenth century Cherokee mission schools, many urban communities focused on the future of their children and concentrated their efforts and resources on their children's education. This was also true for the Oakland Native community, which created multiple sites for the education of Native children during the relocation period. Although the American Indian Alternative School (founded in 1975) received the most public attention, it was part of a much larger educational network. In fact, the school itself was in part based on the Oakland Intertribal Friendship House elementary tutoring program. Additionally, in 1969 the Native American Studies Program was created at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1972, in reaction to the poor quality of Oakland public schools, concerned parents created a Native American preschool entitled Hintil Ku Caa (Lobo 1990). Years later, after the Indian Alternative School was closed, the Oakland Indian Child Resource Center created an Indian education program. Moreover, it was in part through such community actions, advocacy and lobbying that federally funded Indian Education Programs were enacted, such as the Indian Education Act in 1972 and the 1975 American Indian Self-



Determination Act. However, both before and after the opening of the Oakland Unified School District's American Indian Educational Office in the late 1970s, the Intertribal Friendship House and Indian Child Resource Center continued to maintain and even expand their education programs.

The largest urban Indian educational movement was initiated by the American Indian Movement (AIM). Three years after the first Black Panther Liberation schools were opened in Oakland, AIM created the survival school model (Self 2003). According to the Federation of Survival Schools' chronology, the first Survival School, Heart of the Earth, opened in Minneapolis in 1972 with an enrollment of thirty-five students. The school opened after a Native American family was threatened with jail time if they could not find an alternative to the public school system in which they refused to place their children (Marin 1976). The second survival school, Red School House, opened one month later in St. Paul, Minnesota with an enrollment of thirty-eight students. By the late seventies over eleven survival schools had opened in cities across the United States, including the Oakland American Indian Alternative school in 1975.

Dennis Banks, a teacher at the Oakland school, asserted at its opening celebration that survival schools were not about "withdrawing students from public schools to keep them away from education. It is an act of putting them in an alternative school designed to meet the basic needs of the Native American Student"(Pollard N.D.). Banks not only made it clear that Native community members were not trying to take away education from their children, but he advocated for community control of the education that their children would receive. Banks and other school organizers were more concerned with the quality of education their children were receiving than whether it was mandated by the state or federal government. Thus, rather than

turn their backs on education altogether, the Oakland American Indian community organized and implemented their own educational model.

An Oakland mother offers further insight into how Native community members perceived the failings of the Oakland public schools, stating,

I think it's the educational system. It teaches them about white culture and forces them to participate...they structure the environment and the children make the choices, but they decide what all the children choose (Bowman et al. 1975).

This mother's statement highlights that it was not only the academic quality of the public schools that was at issue. More importantly, it was the way in which American schools were designed to promote Western ideologies and narratives that directly undermined tribal values. For these reasons it is likely that many Native parents viewed the survival school not just as an alternative to public schools, but as a complete replacement of them. However, it is important to emphasize that such schools were not created in opposition to public schools. Rather, they were created to bridge academic needs with cultural, epistemological, linguistic and other specialized needs of Native children. In particular, such schools offered core academics as well as Native American culture and language courses.

For example, in a Red House informational packet the school states it offers:

Arts/Crafts: Regional difference of style and decoration. Performance and student Expression.

Civics: Government structures of Reservation - local, state, federal relationships and responses, treaties, legislation pertaining to Natives.

Communications: Speaking, writing, through formations, self-confidence and expression.

Economics: Native American economy - Urban and Reservation.

History: Local and national from Native perspectives, analysis and correction.

Languages: (Native-foreign) practical, comparative.

Math concepts

Native American Culture: Historical, transitional, contemporary, religious ideologies, life styles, value systems, music (dance and sing), psychology, community structures, migrations and change.

Social Studies: Contemporary issues, attitude analyses, modern adaptations of Native people.

Looking at these course offerings demonstrates how the schools were trying to provide academics as well support the cultural integrity and needs of the children. By offering courses that included Native American perspectives on larger issues, the school was breaking the perpetuation of Western ideologies and narratives.

Moreover, the schools provided a safe place for the students to learn about themselves and other Native peoples without feeling harassed or inferior. As Chuck Robertson Sr. (1988), director of the Red School House argued in 1988,

We established the Heart of the Earth Survival School, Red School House, Milwaukee Indian Community School, and a few others in an attempt to adjust the things that are excluded in public schools. We attempt to create a place where Native children can learn because of the school, not in spite of it (23).

Robertson makes it clear that for him and many others at the Red School House, survival schools were not simply alternatives to mainstream public schools; they were vital for the health, growth, and education of Native students. Native children needed a school environment where learning was central to the curriculum rather than impeded by it.

Although survival schools were the largest and most visible form of educational resistance, they were only a small fraction of a larger educational oppositional movement within urban Indian communities. Native parents, students, and researchers all pushed for community controlled schooling. For example, in *American Indian Socialization To Urban Life: Final Report* (Bowman et al. 1975), Native researchers from the nearby University of California, Berkeley, many of whom themselves came from a relocated family, both acknowledged and reaffirmed Native parents' demand for American Indian educational programs:

As the very high dropout rate indicates, urban education is failing our Native American children. There is a need for bicultural programs to give our children a better grasp of their traditional way of life. There ought to be serious exploration of ways and means to help Indian children to retain or acquire knowledge of their native language.

Similar to what the survival schools were trying to achieve, these Native American scholars both emphasize the fact that urban education systems were not meeting the needs of Native youth and point to a “bicultural” educational model that would provide curriculum on the children’s traditional life and language. Thus, even outside the survival school system Native peoples had similar interpretations of how to remedy educational systems they felt were both failing and corrupting their youth.

### **Conclusion**

*K’u’l’luchnek’we: Chespute’met Khwegulsyet’apnt’weshet steemilgwes*<sup>16</sup>

Unlike several survival schools that are still in operation,<sup>17</sup> the Oakland school only lasted into the mid-eighties. In spite of its relatively short life, the Oakland American Indian Alternative School played an important role in facilitating the demand by Native community members for an American Indian-centered education. As Bill Wahpepah stated at the school’s opening celebration, “We understand that the struggle to begin is very hard because we probably will have flack from the authorities, but we want our children to be taught correctly” (Pollard N.D.)

This sentiment still resonates today as Native communities continue to struggle in order to find schools that promote academic success alongside Native-centered curriculum. For instance, by the late 1960s many BIA schools were actively working to implement Native-centered curriculum and in recent years many of these schools have been acquired by individual tribes. However, BIA students continue to score below their public school counterparts on standardized tests (Moran 2008). Thus, while these schools have provided culturally sensitive

---

<sup>16</sup> Salish language translation: “Come together as one: We will honor our children.”

<sup>17</sup> These include the Red School House, although due to budget short falls it was converted into a public charter school.

and appropriate education, a majority of their students does not graduate with the skills necessary to finish college or find stable employment. Urban Indian children have not fared much better. Even with the continued push for community-controlled education, without tribal and federal funding<sup>18</sup> the majority of urban Indian peoples have had to rely on community organizations to provide supplemental educational programs, such as tutoring services and cultural classes.

In the late 1990s, the Oakland Indian community worked together again to establish a Native American educational space through the American Indian Public Charter. Unfortunately, the school has been abandoned by the majority of community members in recent years due to a decision by the school's board to change the direction of the school to focus on non-Native curriculum and state testing. Thus, it seems that forty years after their initial relocation, the Oakland Native community is facing the same problems as when they first arrived.

In particular, dropout rates are perpetually high. In July 2008, an Oakland Tribune editorial (Oakland Tribune 2008) revealed that the city had the second highest dropout rate in the East Bay at 37.4 percent.<sup>19</sup> A separate study found that only 52.1 percent of the state's Native American students graduate from high school. Moreover, the socio-economic status of urban relocatees has persisted, as many families remain low-income residents of the Oakland flats (Willard 1997).

While these statistics point to a grim future for this community, the fact that there still remains a strong Oakland Native community, which has urban networks throughout the Nation, is a testament to the resilience of this community, as the whole purpose of the BIA's urban relocation program was to cut tribal ties. Indeed, this complicated history demonstrates the community's continued resistance and demand for Native education in the face of the relentless

---

<sup>18</sup> While Title VII provides funding for Indian Education Programs, it is at a low rate and barely funds the program salaries.

<sup>19</sup> Richmond had a drop out rate of 39.6 %.

assault on their sovereignty, self-determination and very existence as Native peoples. Moreover, the survival school movement both within Oakland and the larger federation illustrates the ways in which Native people have continued to resist the colonial education system that has been forced onto their children since the Boarding School era.

One question that remains is how contemporary Indian educators might incorporate the same pedagogical or curricular practices of survival schools into public or BIA institutions, while still maintaining the required levels of Westernized standards of “success.” I do not propose to answer this question in this paper, nor do I expect any educator to do so at this time. Rather, I pose it as a thought, a goal, an understanding of how Indian education could be.

This paper has set out to examine the way in which U.S. controlled education has been used to push Native children into the lowest sectors of the labor economy, thereby ensuring their continued colonial status. More specifically, this paper has explored how the status of Native Americans as colonized peoples has shifted and been transformed in urban spaces into a relationship of coloniality, which not only has served to perpetuate the low status of Native peoples but has worked to make them invisible. Thus, rather than being represented as distinct Nations with different languages, politics, economies, and cultures or even multi-dimensional people, the images and representation of Native peoples continue to perpetuate narratives of savagery, Manifest Destiny, and the overall insignificance of Native peoples in the modern era.

This paper illuminates the ways in which colonial educational spaces and policies transform, intersect, and work together in order to control and conduct surveillance of certain groups of people. While some new scholarship is coming out that is beginning to address these links, many scholars still tend to ignore the way that U.S. policies for colonized and racialized

groups interconnect. This is especially true of U.S. colonial educational policies and institutions, which were adapted to oppress and contain multiple colonized groups such as Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, along with peoples from U.S. territories such as the Philippines, Guam, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico. As scholars and educators, we not only need to analyze the history of education. We need to question the motivations and purpose of U.S. educational institutions and policies which continue to shape our children in order to meet a pre-determined status.

## References

- Adams, David Wallace. 1997. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*. University Press of Kansas.
- Amerman, Steve. 2002. *Making an Indian Place in Urban Schools: Native American and Education in Phoenix 1941-1984*. Dissertation. Arizona State University.
- Beck, David R. M. 2002. "Developing a Voice: The evolution of Self-Determination in an Urban Indian Community." *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Autumn), Sovereignty and Governance, II:117-141.
- Blauner, Bob. 2001. *Still the Big News: Racial Oppression in America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Bowman, Beulah, Walter Carlin, Anthony Garcia, Chris Maybee, Dorothy Miller, Peggy Sierras. 1975. *American Indian Socialization to Urban Life: Final Report*. Institute for Scientific Analysis, University of California, Berkeley, CA.
- Child, Brenda. 1998. *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940*. University of Nebraska.
- Connell Szasz, Margaret. [1975] 1999. *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Davis, Julie. 2004. *American Indian Movement Survival Schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1968-2002*. Dissertation, Unpublished. Arizona State University.
- Deloria, Philip J. 2006. *Indians in Unexpected Places*. University of Kansas Press.
- Fear-Segal, Jacqueline. 2007. *White Man's Club: Schools, race, and the struggle of Indian acculturation*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- Fixico, Donald Lee. 1986. *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian policy, 1945-1960*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000 *The Urban Indian Experience in America*. University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque.
- Fryberg, Stephanie Ann. 2003. "Really? You Don't Look Like an American Indian: Social Representations and Social Group Identities." Ph.D. dissertation. Stanford University.
- Ladd, Burton A., Harry A. Rainbolt and Erwin D. Ridley. N.D. *Agency Bulletin 1: GR 2-3411* United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs, Branch of Relocation Services, Nevada Indian Agency, Stewart, Nevada.



- Langston, Donna Hightower. 2003. "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s." *Hypatia*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Spring).
- Lobo, Susan and the Intertribal Friendship House. 1990. "Oakland's American Indian Community: History, Social Organization and Factors that Contribute to Census Undercount." Ethnographic Exploratory Research Report 12. Center for Survey Methods Research. United States Census Bureau.
- Lomawaima, K. Tsianina and Teresa L. McCarty. 2006. *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*. Columbia University Teachers College Press.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2007. "On the Coloniality of Being." *Cultural Studies*, 21(2): 240-270.
- Marin, Elaine. 1976. "For your Information Fact Sheet: Chronology of Survival School." Federation of Survival Schools, Minneapolis MN. October 16.
- Molohon, Kathryn Theresa. 1977. The adjustment of Native American students to public schools in the east San Francisco Bay Area. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.
- Moran, Rebecca, Bobby D. Rampey, Gloria S. Dion, and Patricia L. Donahue. 2008. "National Indian Education Study, 2007; Part I: Performance of American Indian and Alaska Native Students at Grades 4 and 8 on NAEP 2007 Reading and Mathematics Assessments." National Center for Educational Statistics on behalf of the Office of Indian Education.
- Oakland Tribune. 2008. "Editorial: Alarming Dropout Rates." July 18.
- Pewewardy, Cornel. 1998. "Why One Can't Ignore 'Pocahontas'." In *Native American Voices: A Reader*, edited by Susan Lobo and Steve Talbot, pp. 193-195. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Educational Publishers Inc.
- Philp, Kenneth. 1985. "Stride Towards Freedom: The Relocation of Indians to Cities, 1952-1960." *Western Historical Quarterly* 16, April.
- Pollard, Veronica. No Date. "Oakland Alternative School Opens: Teaching Indian Kids in a Teepee." *San Francisco Chronicle*.
- Pratt, Richard H. [1892] 1973. "Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction." *Americanizing the American Indians: Writing by the 'Friends of the Indian' 1880-1900*, pp. 260-273. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Robertson Sr., Chuck. 1988. "Education and the American Indian." *The Circle*, August, pg. 23

- Self, Robert O. 2003. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Princeton University Press, Oxford.
- Tabb, William K. 1970. *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Willard, William. 1997. "Outing, Relocation, and Employment Assistance: The Impact of Federal Indian Population Dispersal Programs in the Bay Area." *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring): 29-46.



**INSTITUTE FOR  
THE STUDY OF  
SOCIAL CHANGE**

2420 Bowditch Street #5670  
Berkeley, CA 94720-5670

tel: 510-642-0813  
fax: 510-642-8674

email: [ISSC@berkeley.edu](mailto:ISSC@berkeley.edu)  
web: <http://issc.berkeley.edu>