

# HISTORY OF INDIAN EDUCATION IN COLORADO

A report by People of the Sacred Land's Truth, Restoration,  
and Education Commission (TREC) of Colorado

*INDIAN EDUCATION IN  
COLORADO*



# INTRODUCTION

Due to the critical nature and pivotal role that the field of education has played throughout the history of the United States, the TREC deemed it essential to examine the complex history and current state of both K-12 Indian Education and Native American Higher Education in Colorado. The resulting reports from this examination are included in this section of the TREC final report.

The purposes of both of these reports are to provide an extensive historical overview, highlighting both the national context as well as specific experiences and conditions within Colorado. Both reports emphasize the importance of addressing historical injustices, tackling systemic barriers, and fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for AI/AN students.

The “Overview of the History of Colorado K-12 Indian Education” situates the history of Indian Education within a broader context, emphasizing the longstanding challenges faced by AI/AN students. The report provides a detailed account of the histories of various tribes in Colorado particularly the Utes, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. A significant portion of the report is also dedicated to the history of boarding schools within the state. Finally, the report highlights the significant legislative changes that have occurred since 1972 and the opportunities for improvement that are now available to address the unique needs of AI/AN students and to ensure the preservation of AI/AN cultural heritage.

Colorado, where the violent displacement of Indigenous populations has been largely ignored for over a century, has a long-documented history of oppression and marginalization of AI/AN communities. The majority of Colorado residents have attended or are currently enrolled in schools that either completely ignore or only briefly touch upon the history of

Colorado's original inhabitants, often presenting inaccurate or inadequate information. Despite some limited efforts over the past fifty years, particularly in the last decade, these unfortunate circumstances persist and have serious negative implications for the well-being of AI/AN children.

The second report entitled, "History of Native American Higher Education in Colorado", traces the history of higher education for AI/AN students and underscores the historical trauma and systemic issues that have historically impeded the educational progress of these students. Much of the history of higher education in the US has its origins in stolen land. This is particularly true in Colorado where, due to the absence of Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCUs) in the state, all Native college/university students attend private or state public institutions. This report extensively examines Colorado State University (CSU) as the only land grant institution in Colorado and Fort Lewis College, the only Colorado higher ed institution contracted to serve AI/AN students. The report concludes by identifying ongoing challenges and opportunities for improvement calling for continued collaboration between tribes, state agencies and educational institutions to address historical injustices and to better serve the unique needs of Native students.

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# A HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF INDIAN EDUCATION IN COLORADO

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Academic attainment for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN)<sup>1</sup> students continues to be an elusive goal. Graduation rates for AI/AN students have been significantly lower than those for white students for decades — indeed, lower than any other racial or ethnic subgroup, especially in Western states, where the largest AI/AN populations reside<sup>2</sup>. Every year, around one-third of Native youth in the West fail to complete high school. AI/AN youth are also suspended and expelled at disproportionately high rates<sup>3</sup>. Native students are identified for special education services at a rate that is twice as high as that of the overall student population<sup>4</sup>. AI/AN students also consistently perform two or three grade levels below their white classmates in math and reading despite decades of federal educational reforms<sup>5</sup>, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

One way to conceptualize these negative education outcomes is through adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the impact of intergenerational or historical trauma. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that children experience from birth to age 18, such as exposure to domestic violence or substance abuse by a household member<sup>6</sup>. Exposure to just one ACE is associated with myriad negative outcomes from heart disease and substance abuse to premature death and depression. Exposure to multiple ACEs is positively correlated with an increased risk of negative school outcomes, including attrition<sup>7</sup>, learning and behavior problems<sup>8</sup>, academic failure, and chronic absenteeism<sup>9</sup>. Research also suggests that trauma may contribute to attention and processing delays that may be linked to challenges with reading and writing<sup>10</sup>. According to Kenney and Singh (2016), AI/AN youth experience multiple ACEs at rates of up to three times greater than their non-Hispanic white peers<sup>11</sup>.



Intergenerational trauma is defined as the unresolved manifestations of traumatic experiences that are passed from one generation to the next<sup>12</sup>. In Native communities, intergenerational trauma as manifested from historical trauma, has resulted in widespread cycles of violence, abuse, premature deaths, and other undocumented physical and mental consequences<sup>13</sup>. This trauma has been transferred through various factors such as biology, psychology, environment, and society, creating a cycle of trauma that continues to negatively impact Native communities, individuals and families<sup>14</sup>.

To fully grasp the impact of intergenerational trauma and the high prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among AI/AN youth, it is important to consider the complex history of AI/AN communities, specifically the violent harm inflicted on Native peoples by the federal government, often through legislative means. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, the General Allotment Act of 1887, and Termination in 1953 led to the forced displacement of many tribal communities and the loss of vast amounts of land, totaling hundreds of millions of acres. The repercussions of lost lands and forced relocation, in particular, have had long-lasting and severe effects that continue to impact AI/AN communities in the present day. Native people had such a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things — living and nonliving — and had an “expressed relationship to the natural world that could only be called ‘ensoulment’ — the belief that nature is infused with a soul”<sup>15</sup>. The bond between Native peoples and the land was so strong that forcibly relocating them from their ancestral lands over the last two centuries has resulted in a significant loss of identity for multiple generations. Severing the deeply ingrained bond between Native people and their homelands resulted in profound divisions within individuals and communities, leading to a wide range of both social and psychological issues<sup>16</sup>.

Additionally, federal Indian policies like the Civilization Fund Act, which brought about the boarding school era, had profound and enduring negative consequences for AI/AN children, families, and communities<sup>17</sup>. Government-run or government-sponsored religious boarding schools were the de jure process for assimilating American Indians from the 1870s until the 1930s; many continued to attend these schools through the 1970s. The explicit purpose of these boarding schools was to strip away tribal identities, languages, and cultural/spiritual belief systems and practices, to be replaced by European/Euro-American and Christian values and beliefs<sup>18</sup>. Boarding schools often adhered to the ideology of Richard Henry Pratt, first Superintendent of the Carlisle Indian School, who collaborated closely with the U.S. government to adopt the strategies used at Fort Marion, Pratt’s American Indian prison camp, as an educational model for American Indian youth<sup>19</sup>. Although some church-run boarding schools had already been employing variations of this round-the-clock approach, the government now aimed to establish multiple federal boarding schools that would implement Pratt’s military-style techniques. One notable aspect was the immediate transformation of the students’ appearance and attire, as well as their adherence to the accepted rules of etiquette in American society<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, in response to the ongoing issue of students reconnecting with their

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families and tribal communities derailing their assimilation progress, these schools were intentionally constructed far away from their homelands. In extreme cases, the administrators were authorized to forcibly take children away from their homes and oblige them to attend these schools, making it a prerequisite for their families to continue receiving financial support<sup>21</sup>.

The near destruction and/or complete loss of tribal languages and cultural practices are the most palpable results of boarding schools<sup>22</sup>. However, the unintended negative consequences of this experience are also pervasive. Multiple generations of children who were removed from their homes to attend boarding schools became adults without the benefit of learning how to be an effective parent or a contributing member of a community or family<sup>23</sup>. This impairment of traditional parenting skills has allowed trauma to be transferred across generations. The sexual, physical, emotional, and mental abuse that was experienced by many boarding school students has also had a devastating impact on AI/AN communities. When the victims returned home to their communities, they often brought these abuses with them. Brave Heart et al. write that prior to boarding schools, “Women and children were esteemed as sacred beings. Domestic violence and child abuse were not tolerated<sup>24</sup>.” These types of abuses, along with substance abuse, now run rampant in many Alaska Native families and tribal communities<sup>25</sup>.

### **WIDELY UNTOLD HISTORY OF COLORADO**

Most people are unaware of the largely untold history of Native people in Colorado. Over the course of thousands of years, nearly 48 tribal bands/nations have resided and/or occupied land in the area that is presently Colorado, considering it their ancestral homelands<sup>26</sup>.

The Ancestral Puebloans resided in southwest Colorado for at least a millennium and were primarily engaged in agriculture. They constructed various masonry structures along cliffs that were multi-room and often multi-story. It is worth noting that they were incorrectly called “Anasazi” within the last century. Today, there are 21 federally recognized Pueblos.

The Ute people have inhabited the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and New Mexico for the past one to two thousand years. They practiced a nomadic lifestyle, moving according to the seasons to hunt, gather necessities, and also engaged in horse trading. Today, the Utes consist of three tribes: the Southern Ute Indian Tribe in Colorado, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in Colorado and Utah, and the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah & Ouray Reservation in Utah. The Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute are the only two official tribes in present day Colorado.

Today, the Native American tribes that lived in the Great Basin desert, including western Colorado, for hundreds, if not thousands, of years are now recognized as the following nations: the Navajo Nation in Arizona and New Mexico, the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe in Arizona.

Over the course of the last 400 years, eastern Colorado has also been home to numerous tribes that traversed the Great Plains. Their way of life revolved around hunting bison, adhering to a seasonal cycle, and participating in the trade for horses and other commodities. The

Cheyenne and Arapaho people (Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma; Northern Arapaho Tribe, Wyoming; and Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Montana) are recognized as part of these tribal nations along with the following: Apache Tribe of Oklahoma; Fort Sill Apache Tribe, Oklahoma; Jicarilla Apache Nation, New Mexico; Mescalero Apache Tribe, New Mexico; Comanche Nation, Oklahoma; Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma; Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma; Osage Nation, Oklahoma; Wichita & Affiliated Tribes, Oklahoma; Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, South Dakota; Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, South Dakota; Oglala Sioux Tribe, South Dakota; Rosebud Sioux Tribe, South Dakota; Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, North Dakota; Three Affiliated Tribes Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, North Dakota; Crow Tribe, Montana; Eastern Shoshone Tribe, Wyoming; and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Idaho.

## **THE UTES**

The Ute tribes' traditional homelands encompass most of what is now Colorado and parts of New Mexico, Wyoming, and Utah. Traditionally, the Utes resided in separate bands and organized themselves geographically in protected mountain river valleys for their winter homes, utilizing nearby mountains and high plateaus for seasonal hunting. They thrived as hunter-gatherer mountain tribes well into the 19th century until there was an increasing presence of white settlers after the Civil War. The Utes initially sought peaceful coexistence instead of immediate conflict, but eventually engaged in warfare against the invaders as a last resort<sup>27</sup>. The forced removal of the Utes from their ancestral lands was not the first or last attempt by the United States to eradicate Native peoples, but it was one of the most ambitious. This was due in large part to the impassioned efforts of several prominent individuals in Colorado and a propaganda campaign initiated by regional newspapers.

In 1868, the U.S. government initiated a treaty that aimed to remove the Utes' rights to the totality of their homelands and established a Ute reservation covering almost the entire western portion of present-day Colorado. In 1873, the government made further efforts to negotiate the surrender of additional lands. The Brunot agreement of 1873 was the outcome of these negotiations; however, this agreement, ratified by the United States in 1874, is widely regarded by the Utes as a deceitful treaty that unjustly took away their land. The Utes were led to believe that by signing the agreement, only the lands containing valuable gold and silver resources in the San Juan Mountains would be accessible for mining, while about four million acres of non-mining land would remain under Ute ownership. Unfortunately, they were ultimately forcibly coerced into giving up these lands to the U.S. government<sup>28</sup>.

The Meeker Massacre, also known as the Meeker Incident, occurred in Colorado on September 29, 1879. Nathan Meeker, the Indian agent in charge of the Ute reservation, had made unrelenting efforts to convert the Utes to Christianity and repeatedly prevented them from engaging in their traditional lifestyle. In an act of rebellion against these efforts, a group of White River Utes launched an attack on Meeker, killing him and his ten male employees. As this incident unfolded, U.S. Army forces who were on their way to the agency from Fort

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Steele in Wyoming due to threats against Meeker were intercepted by the same group of Utes and Major Thomas Thornburgh and thirteen U.S. soldiers were killed. Additional U.S. troops were deployed to restore order, leading to the dispersion of the Utes<sup>29</sup>.

The news about the battle and massacre quickly spread throughout the country. In Colorado, several newspapers called for the Utes to be removed from the state. They felt that the federal government could not solve the “Indian problem” because the federal Indian Bureau had too much of a vested interest in lucrative contracts in Colorado. The newspapers opined that the Colorado militia should force the Utes out and get rid of them. Other editorials suggested that the Utes should be assimilated, exterminated, or moved to Indian Territory, New Mexico, or Utah. Through the use of publishing half-truths, exaggeration, and fear mongering, the Colorado media rallying cry that “The Utes Must Go!” became extremely effective in forming national public opinion against the Ute people<sup>30</sup>.

Additionally, Rozanne Meeker, the daughter of Nathan Meeker, made pleas to east coast publications to persuade both eastern readers and politicians to agree with her point of view: that innocent white men had been brutally murdered by the Utes without provocation. She emphasized that if the U.S. army had acted promptly, swiftly, and with a larger force as requested by her father, both the agency workers and her father would still be alive. She also asserted that the life of an ordinary white person held more value than that of all the Indians put together. The majority of Colorado newspapers echoed Miss Meeker’s call for retaliation, while out-of-state newspapers went further by advocating for extermination and revenge against the Utes<sup>31</sup>.

Governor Frederick Pitkin also actively worked to incite public fears and provoke hostilities by sending telegrams to mining towns throughout Colorado, warning of an impending war with the Utes. In these messages, he portrayed the Utes as a threat, urging the settlements to view them as game to be hunted and exterminated<sup>32</sup>.

Pitkin continued to fuel the conflict by also stirring up trouble in the press and even threatened Washington with his own solution to achieve peace — calling upon the Colorado militia. Despite efforts made by the federal government to mediate peace between the Utes and Colorado, ultimately, Pitkin and others like him succeeded in forcing the Utes out of the state of Colorado and/or relegating them to a small reservation along the southern border of the state<sup>33</sup>.

Under duress and realizing the futility of further warfare against the U.S. army, the White River Ute leaders reluctantly signed a peace agreement in 1880 and were forcibly relocated from Colorado. The other Ute bands were meant to also be removed in subsequent years; however, due to the failure of the U.S. Congress to follow through and the introduction of the General Allotment Act of 1887, the southern Ute bands were not removed. The Allotment Act granted the federal government the power to divide reservation land into smaller portions called allotments, which would then be distributed to individual people. Chief Ignacio, leading the Weenuchiu band of Utes, believed that land should be collectively owned by the tribe rather than individually owned. As a result, the Weenuchiu moved westward and settled in a

dry and arid area now called Towaoc, Colorado. Eventually, the Ute Mountain Ute reservation and tribe was established in this area. The Southern Utes (Mouache and Caputa bands) agreed to take ownership of land through the allotment process. Unfortunately, many of these allotments were either sold to non-Indians or to the tribe itself. By the 1940s, approximately 300 allotments were owned by heads of households from the Southern Ute Tribe. However, this number has significantly decreased over time<sup>34</sup>.

## **THE CHEYENNE AND ARAPAHO**

Before 1700, the Arapaho people migrated from the Great Lakes region to the northern plains and eventually entered what is now Colorado in the 1700s. The Cheyenne followed a similar migration pattern and arrived in the Colorado region around 1800. Both the Northern and Southern Cheyenne bands formed alliances with the Arapaho, who also had their own northern and southern divisions. This alliance allowed both tribes to expand their territories and assert their presence on the plains. In the southern plains, the Arapaho and Cheyenne joined forces with the Comanche, Kiowa, and Plains Apache to defend against invading settlers and U.S. soldiers. Tragically, on November 29, 1864, the Arapaho, along with the Cheyenne, were present at the Sand Creek Massacre on the eastern plains of Colorado when a peaceful encampment of mostly women, children, and the elderly were attacked, brutalized, and killed by U.S. soldiers<sup>35</sup>.

The ongoing dispute over control of the eastern Colorado plains played a critical role as a catalyst in the Sand Creek Massacre. Initially, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 granted the Cheyenne and Arapaho ownership of the land north of the Arkansas River to the Nebraska border. However, the influx of gold-seeking white miners in the region put immense strain on the limited resources of the arid plains. As tensions between new settlers and Native people escalated, a Cheyenne delegation led by Chief Black Kettle, along with several Arapaho leaders, agreed to a new settlement with the federal government on February 8, 1861. Despite relinquishing much of their land, they secured a 600-square mile reservation and annuity payments<sup>36</sup>.

It is important to note that this agreement, known as the Treaty of Fort Wise, was not accepted by all of the Cheyenne and Arapaho bands. The treaty was negotiated under duress and included several questionable articles. The introduction stated, “Arapaho and Cheyenne Indians of the Upper Arkansas River, they being duly authorized by said Tribes,” making it clear that the treaty was made with only the southern bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho. Without the signatures from the northern bands, the land north and south of the South Platte River could not be ceded. There is consistent evidence that the needed signatures were never secured and that compensation for the land was never paid. There is also consistent evidence that the U.S. government was aware that the land had not been lawfully ceded<sup>37</sup>.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho were unable to sustain themselves with the new reservation and federal payouts that had been established within the Treaty of Fort Wise. During the Civil

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War, tensions increased and there was sporadic violence between white settlers and the plains tribes. In order to isolate uncooperative Indians, Governor John Evans of the Colorado Territory invited “friendly Indians” to camp near military forts and receive provisions and protection<sup>38</sup>.

In August 1864, as the result of encouragement by Governor Evans, Black Kettle moved his band to Fort Lyon, Colorado. However, in an act of betrayal on the part of Evans and Colonel Chivington, the acting commander, the U.S. army launched a surprise attack on the unsuspecting Cheyenne and Arapaho. Men, women, elderly, and children were scattered and hunted down. Nine of Chivington’s men were killed while 148 of Black Kettle’s followers were slaughtered, with more than half of them being women and children. The Colorado volunteer cavalry members returned to the village, killed the wounded, mutilated the bodies, and set the village on fire<sup>39</sup>. Afterward, Chivington and his men were given a parade through the streets of downtown Denver in celebration of the massacre where they displayed body parts of those who were killed.

### **COLORADO BOARDING SCHOOLS<sup>40</sup>**

Between 1880 and 1920, there were nine schools in Colorado that were designed to provide Native youth with a Euro-American, Christian-based education. These schools included two off-reservation boarding schools (Grand Junction Indian Boarding School — more commonly known as the Teller Institute — and Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School), two on-reservation boarding schools, and at least three day-schools managed by the federal Indian Service. Additionally, there were two reform schools that also had federal contracts specifically for Native students. The goal of the off-reservation schools in particular was to assimilate the Ute population into mainstream society. However, the Ute people successfully resisted federal education policies, especially off-reservation schools, until the early 1900s. Thus, these schools ended up recruiting and enrolling many students from tribes outside of Colorado as well as non-Native students.

A typical day for a student at a boarding school would begin early in the morning, often before dawn, with roll call and preparations for breakfast. Since labor was an integral part of their education, some students had to wake up early to bake and prepare food for themselves, their peers, and their teachers. The students were supposed to receive half a day of academic training, focusing on the fundamental subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, reports from Fort Lewis and Teller indicate that this was not always the case, particularly in the early years when there was a shortage of trained teachers and academic resources. Nevertheless, the students were always engaged in work. They had the responsibility of keeping the school functioning, and if it was an agricultural school like Fort Lewis and Teller, they had to simultaneously learn farming skills while ensuring their own sustenance by successfully raising dairy cows, cultivating crops, and constructing irrigation ditches. As for the girls, they were expected to acquire skills in “domestic practices,” which included tasks such as sewing,

laundry, cooking, dishwashing, and floor scrubbing.

Hair cutting was a common practice in all Indian schools, where new students were forced to have their hair cut, sometimes by being physically restrained. This was justified as a hygiene measure, with the government and school officials claiming it was necessary to remove lice. At Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, the experience of having their hair cut was not only traumatic but also uncomfortable, as the school lacked proper facilities for bathing. This likely made the psychological impact on students even worse. It's important to note that the requirement for short hair extended beyond students; those returning to the reservation from school and Native men employed by the Indian Service were also expected to maintain short hair or face punishments, such as having their rations withheld.

Another major change students were immediately subjected to was having to give up their Native names and adopt an American-style name. The guidance from Washington, D.C. was not simply to anglicize their last names, but to provide them with a completely new identity. The process of assigning these American names was often not documented and became left up to the discretion of the superintendent of the school or whoever was put in charge. The majority of students at Fort Lewis and Teller were given anglicized or Hispanic names. Sometimes, the schools gave students the names of famous individuals, such as presidents, or even the names of teachers or other staff members at the school.

Allegations of mistreatment of students by superintendents, teachers, and other staff members were quite common. The abuse took various forms. In 1883, Ute students at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School complained about being subjected to starvation-like conditions. Just a few years later, students from the Ute Tribe reported being abused by the head teacher at the Teller Institute, which contributed to both parents and students refusing to return to Grand Junction.

Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs officially banned physical punishment and school jails in 1893, these practices continued to occur well into the twentieth century. This was partly because their illegality allowed Washington to pretend that they no longer took place. Physical abuse, particularly for minor offenses, was common and came in many forms.

It is impossible to measure the extent of the abuses that took place in schools where students and even staff had no means of seeking justice or adults to advocate for their well-being. Some of the most horrifying accounts were about the sexual abuse that students in Colorado endured. Polly Pry, a journalist for the *Denver Post* in 1903, exposed how Thomas Breen, who served as superintendent of Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School between 1894 and 1903, had subjected girls and young women to long-term sexual abuse. However, Breen was never prosecuted for these crimes and died still claiming his innocence.

It is worth noting that students at boarding schools engaged in acts of resistance in various ways, with running away and arson being some of the most noticeable forms. The stories of runaway students have become intertwined with the overall narrative of Indian boarding schools, as some tried to go back home, transfer to more familiar or welcoming schools, or

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simply disappeared into society. Arson was a prevalent and highly visible act of resistance within the federal boarding school system. Fires frequently broke out in these schools, and while some could be attributed to old heating and lighting systems, scholars widely believe that students themselves were responsible for setting them. Although the evidence is mainly circumstantial, it is compelling due to the circumstances surrounding the fires. Many fires occurred in unoccupied buildings while students were gathered elsewhere, for example. The issue of fires was so significant that it even became a recurring topic of discussion among policymakers in Washington.

The Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School experienced several large fires. In January 1896, a devastating fire engulfed three buildings on the campus: a dormitory for boys, a playroom for boys, and a lavatory that was still being built. In another unfortunate incident that August, the superintendent's residence and everything inside it were completely destroyed by a fire that occurred in broad daylight. There were no reports of arson at the time.

Diseases were a common occurrence at boarding schools, affecting many students at Teller and Fort Lewis. These diseases included pneumonia, chicken pox, tuberculosis, and trachoma, a bacterial eye disease that can lead to blindness, deafness, or even death. Neglect, unsanitary living conditions, and inadequate nutrition were also responsible for the frequent illnesses that affected the schools. At both schools, the policy was to send sick students back home. There are reports indicating that some of these students passed away once they returned home. However, it is likely that once the students were on the reservation, the superintendent no longer considered them his responsibility, so this information may not have always been communicated or recorded. There are also accounts of students dying during transit, and what happened to their remains is unknown.

### **UTE RESISTANCE<sup>41</sup>**

The Ute people had a strong resistance to adopting an American-style education system even before their children were enrolled in federal Indian schools. This resistance stemmed from the tragic experiences they had with off-reservation boarding schools and their mistrust of the U.S. government in general. They had also experienced the government's failure to honor treaties and agreements, particularly through the War Department and later the Department of the Interior.

Supervisor of Indian Schools, A.O. Wright, reported in 1901 that the Jicarilla Apaches, Southern Utes, and most of the Paiutes did not have schools, and the Northern Utes opposed the schools they had as well. With the exception of the Mescalero Apaches, according to him, the "wild Indians" of Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico had limited access to education. In Utah, the Northern Utes sent less than 100 children to their two schools and very few to off-reservation schools, despite a school capacity of about 400.

Chief Ignacio of the Southern Ute strongly opposed all off-reservation schools, including Fort Lewis, but eventually allowed some children to enroll there. At one point, Bartholomew,



the U.S. Indian agent for the Southern Utes, was ordered to remove Ignacio from his position as head of police. Bartholomew warned the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that this decision would not only cripple the police force but also create attendance problems for both Ute and Navajo communities at Fort Lewis, as Ignacio held influence over his neighbors. Bartholomew advised against using force and suggested gradually breaking down the resistance to the school. Ignacio was reinstated in the police force within ten days when the federal government realized that they needed him and that their forceful tactics had no impact on him.

Ultimately, Ignacio yielded and permitted sixteen children to attend the first year of Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School in 1891. He and other chiefs personally accompanied the children to the school and made frequent visits to ensure satisfactory living conditions. However, the first year proved to be catastrophic as trachoma, a prevalent bacterial infection in reservations and Indian schools, spread rapidly throughout the school. Tragically, two Ute children lost their lives, while three others, including Colorow's son and Avarico's daughter, became blind. Another child suffered both deafness and blindness. In 1893, all four children, aged between 9 and 11, were sent to the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind in Colorado Springs. Additionally, three Mexican children, who may have also been attending the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School with the Native students, were also relocated. As a result of this incident, the number of Ute students drastically decreased in the school, and the chiefs rejected any further enrollment of Ute children. Instead, the vacant spots were filled by Navajo children and other students, including some from distant places like Arizona, such as the Tohono O'Odham.

The Utes were successful in their resistance against sending their children to boarding schools located off-reservation. Eventually, their demand for an on-reservation school was fulfilled with the establishment of the Southern Ute Indian Boarding School in 1903. This school was specifically intended to cater to the Southern Ute tribe, while a separate on-reservation boarding school served Navajo Springs, later known as Towaoc, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. It is likely that, despite promises made in treaties and the Utes' continuous resistance to off-reservation boarding schools, the federal government did not provide these facilities to the Southern Ute tribe until they had accumulated enough money from the sale of allotments. This also explains why the Weenuchiu Band did not receive an on-reservation school for their children until 1910.

The Navajo Springs Day School was established in 1910 in the present-day Towaoc area, followed by the Allen Day School in Bayfield in 1912. These schools catered to smaller, rural populations of children. The Allen Day School had less than ten regular students on average, while the Navajo Springs Day School had around twelve regular students in its first ten years. Similar to boarding schools, day schools were overseen by the federal government and followed an approved curriculum that included half a day of academic instruction and half a day of vocational training, with a focus on agriculture. In some cases, the day schools also served as boarding schools, accommodating students who lived far away. Additionally, the Allen Day School assigned one night a week for older students to help tend the school garden

during summer break, which may have been a common practice in federal Indian day schools across rural America.

### **ORIGINS OF THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE<sup>42</sup>**

Established in 1881, the Colorado State Industrial School for Boys in Golden, Colorado was not originally intended solely for Native youth. However, students who had conflicts with the boarding school superintendent, rebelled multiple times, or had legal trouble (for either minor or serious infractions) were sometimes sent to reform schools like the school in Golden or juvenile prisons that were contracted with the federal government. There is a lack of existing records regarding the experiences of Native youth who were removed from the system and placed into this mainstream penal system. However, according to records from 1900, two seventeen-year-old runaways from Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, Jim Bush and Vicenti, were detained in Durango after a crime spree. The U.S. Indian agent requested permission to send these boys to the “reform school,” likely referring to the State Industrial School. In 1968, the facility’s name was changed to the Lookout Mountain School for Boys. By the 1980s, it became a high-security corrections center for boys and young men aged 15 to 21 who had been found guilty of a crime. It was then renamed as the Lookout Mountain Youth Services Center.

Girls who were deemed unmanageable were sent to the Good Shepherd Industrial School for Girls in Denver between 1884 and 1887, under a contract with the federal government. Although the Good Shepherd School was not exclusively for Native youth, it was created by the Colorado legislature in 1887 with the aim of reforming young, marginalized women and providing them with foster care and prison-like training to become domestic servants. During the time that the Indian Service worked with the Good Shepherd School, they enrolled forty-six Chippewa girls, who belonged to the Turtle Mountain tribe. These Chippewa students were seen as either orphans or troublemakers and were taken out of the regular boarding and day school system. The decision to institutionalize troubled young individuals has had a lasting impact on Colorado’s juvenile justice system and has served as a model for modern programs. Today, this institution is known as the Mount View Youth Services Center, which is a coeducational detention facility in Lakewood that provides both residential detention and secondary education.

### **NOTABLE CONSIDERATIONS — FIRST HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

According to the 1900 census, the American Indian population had significantly declined to about 237,000, marking the lowest point since the initial encounter with Europeans in 1492<sup>43</sup>. At the time of initial contact, it was estimated that there were around 10 million Native people. At the turn of the 20th century, the majority of Indians were living in extreme poverty, and the living conditions on many reservations were unsuitable, inadequate, and often unsanitary,

leading to the emergence and propagation of diseases such as tuberculosis and trachoma<sup>44</sup>. The mortality rate, both among adults and infants, was also distressingly high<sup>45</sup>.

In the early 1900s, the U.S. government's Indian education policies went through significant changes aimed at trying to make education for AI/AN children more organized, mandatory, and uniform. During this period, more and more Native students began to enroll in public schools<sup>46</sup>.

By the 1920s there was ever increasing mainstream criticism of government-run boarding schools. Reformers heavily criticized the strict discipline, overcrowding, disease, limited access to food, and the intense pressure for students to assimilate<sup>47</sup>. In response to this criticism, Congress granted permission for a comprehensive examination of the federal Indian policy. The publication of the Meriam Report in 1928 validated the claims made by the government's detractors. Consequently, educational reforms were introduced via the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 aimed at expanding the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) curriculum to encompass Native history and cultures<sup>48</sup>. Other progressive ideas were also introduced such as incorporating Native languages and art into government-run schools; however, these changes were never fully implemented due to the overshadowing impact of World War II.

## **THE UTES<sup>49</sup>**

During the early 1900s, despite its flaws, the Southern Ute Indian Boarding School remained a preferred option for many tribal families seeking education for their children until the 1920s. The Utes were also strongly encouraged to enroll their children in local public schools as part of the assimilation process. This plan also shifted the financial responsibility of education from the federal government to the local and state school systems. Many local schools, including the La Plata County school system, resisted this integration. Native students faced racism from both community members and school officials. In 1917, District No. 32 tried to remove Ute children from public schools, claiming issues such as overcrowding, special needs, hygiene, and health. The district wanted the children to attend the boarding school in Ignacio instead.

The school district faced resistance from the federal government, including E.E. McKean, the superintendent of the Southern Ute Indian Boarding School. Correspondence with officials in Washington, D.C., revealed McKean's concerns that if District No. 32 succeeded in excluding Ute children from school, other districts in La Plata County might do the same. In response, McKean expressed his passionate support for the Utes, emphasizing their significant contributions and the importance of their land and water to the local community. He also gathered letters and testimonials from the teachers of the students in question, who praised the Ute students' excellent grades and progress in the school system.

## POST-WORLD WAR II

After World War II ended, the United States engaged in a tremendously ambitious investment to rebuild Europe. The U.S. aid program known as the Marshall Plan, or the European Recovery Program, was established in 1948 to assist Western Europe in recovering from the widespread destruction caused by the war<sup>50</sup>. With a budget exceeding \$15 billion, this initiative, named after U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, aimed to rebuild cities, industries, and infrastructure over a four-year period. Additionally, it aimed to promote trade among European nations and eliminate barriers to commerce between these nations and the United States<sup>51</sup>.

This kind of initiative would be considered very large by today's standards, but at the time, it was astronomical. Seemingly unrelated but no less convenient, around the same time the sentiment of the U.S. government toward honoring its financial obligations to tribes began to drastically change. The policy of termination was introduced in Congress in 1953 stating, "make Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the right prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship."<sup>52</sup> Over 100 tribes were terminated from federal assistance and state governments were given the authority to assume criminal and civil jurisdiction over terminated tribal lands<sup>53</sup>.

Additionally, in response to termination, the BIA initiated a voluntary program that incentivized American Indian individuals and families to move from their rural tribes to large cities like Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Cleveland, and Seattle<sup>54</sup>. The BIA promised to help them find housing and employment. Many American Indians decided to make the move to these cities. However, they encountered various challenges as they tried to adapt to life in a bustling metropolis. They faced difficulties finding work, ended up in low-paying jobs, experienced discrimination, felt homesick, and lost the traditional cultural support they once had<sup>55</sup>.

The objective of the relocation effort was to move Native people to urban areas, with the intention of assimilating them into the dominant white American culture, leading to their gradual disappearance<sup>56</sup>. Although this attempt did not succeed in eradicating tribes, it did result in a significant migration that brought about substantial changes in Indian Country. By the 1970s the Native population in urban areas surpassed the population in rural areas due in large part to the relocation program<sup>57</sup>.

It is worth noting that during this same time period, while the federal government was relinquishing its obligations towards tribes, Congress incorporated Indian reservations into federal education initiatives — including school construction programs and impact aid programs, leading to a greater federal role in Indian education by 1958<sup>58</sup>.

## **DENVER**

Located between the desert tribes in the southwest and the plains tribes to the north and east of the Rocky Mountains, the Denver area has always been a crossroads for Indian Country. Being designated as one of the initial destination cities for the relocation and employment assistance programs in the 1950s ensured that the Denver area would continue to be a hub for significant numbers of Native individuals and families. According to the 2020 census, there are over 74,000 people in Colorado who identify as AI/AN and the majority of them live along the urban corridor between Denver and Colorado Springs<sup>59</sup>. Denver has over 200 tribal nations that are represented amongst the population. The largest groups are comprised of descendants of tribes including Cheyenne, Lakota, Kiowa, and Navajo, and they play an essential role in the city's social and economic fabric<sup>60</sup>.

Despite the government's attempts to assimilate Native people by severing their ties to reservation communities via relocation, the AI/AN community in Denver established organizations and a foundation to support themselves and preserve their tribal identities<sup>61</sup>. In fact, Denver has more national AI/AN organizations than any other U.S. city<sup>62</sup>. Further, one of the unintended consequences of mass relocation to urban areas became the rise of Indian militancy and activism. Denver became one of the places of origin for the Red Power movement in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>63</sup>. The movement focused on empowering Native people and demanding self-determination and liberation from oppression.

## **SELF-DETERMINATION ERA – 1972 TO PRESENT**

The Indian self-determination era was influenced by the broader civil rights, anti-war, and various political, social, and economic reform movements that emerged in American society during the 1960s<sup>64</sup>. Tribal leaders and Native groups increasingly asserted their legal rights and advocated for change. In 1972, Congress passed the Indian Education Act (IEA), which had a significant provision known as the formula grant program<sup>65</sup>. This program mandated public school districts to engage in open consultation with Native parents and establish Native parent committees<sup>66</sup>. Furthermore, the IEA created an independent Office of Indian Education, separate from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), to oversee its implementation<sup>67</sup>, which is equally, if not more, noteworthy.

The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1975. This Act aimed to grant greater autonomy to Indian tribes and enable them to take charge of the programs and services previously managed by the Secretary of the Interior<sup>68</sup>. Through contractual agreements, tribes were given the opportunity to assume responsibility for these services. The Act aimed to prioritize the involvement of tribes in the decision-making process regarding federal government services, with the goal of tailoring these services to the specific needs and preferences of local communities<sup>69</sup>.

The ISDEAA marked a significant moment in which the federal government acknowledged tribal sovereignty and affirmed the authority of Tribal Nations to make educational

decisions for their own children<sup>70</sup>. This act also paved the way for future legislation like Title VII, which aimed to preserve and promote Native cultural and linguistic education in public schools<sup>71</sup>. Under Title VII, collaboration between Native education stakeholders, schools, and higher education institutions ensures the inclusion of culture-based education in curricula and addresses the educational requirements of AI/AN and Native Hawaiian students<sup>72</sup>. In 2016, Title VII became Title VI under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), expanding its support to include grant funds for Native language programs and requiring public schools and state agencies to consult with Tribal Nations regarding all federal educational programs for Native students<sup>73</sup>.

### **TRIBAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS**

Tribal Education Departments (TEDs) were first legally established in the IEA and have been subsequently reauthorized multiple times. However, TEDs operate as independent entities under the supervision of sovereign tribal governments of federally recognized tribes<sup>74</sup>. The primary objective of TEDs is to provide education to members of their respective tribes, including both youth and adults, in accordance with the priorities and resources of the tribal government<sup>75</sup>. Currently, more than 200 out of the 565 federally recognized tribes in the United States have established TEDs, with thirty-two states hosting TEDs within their boundaries<sup>76</sup>. TEDs are a part of the executive branch of the tribal government and typically administer an array of programs and initiatives<sup>77</sup>. These often include workshops on parenting skills; efforts to enhance parent involvement; early childhood education initiatives; child advocacy initiatives; assistance for academic achievement and graduation; prevention of truancy; cultural training for teachers; language and cultural instruction for tribal members; provision of libraries or cultural centers; facilitation of communication between families and public schools; administration of federal grants; and partnerships with state and local education agencies (LEAs) — in this case, LEAs are public schools that serve tribal members either on or near reservations<sup>78</sup>.

Both the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribes established TEDs in the 1970s. For the most part, the list of programs and activities above has been or continues to be the responsibility of these departments<sup>79</sup>. There have been instances where the treatment of Ute students in public schools has caused tension and conflict. However, both tribes report that over the years they have maintained a consistent working relationship with the LEAs that serve their tribal youth<sup>80</sup>. Prior to the past seven or eight years, the affiliation between the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the two Ute tribes lacked the same level of mutual understanding and cooperation. According to a study conducted in 2008, four decades after the implementation of IEA, CDE had not yet established a functional relationship with either of the state's tribes<sup>81</sup>.

Fortunately, both tribes now affirm that they have a productive and consistent relationship with CDE. This change in approach by CDE can be attributed to the new provision in ESSA requiring state agencies to consult with tribes on all Title programming. A working relationship between the Ute tribes and CDE is particularly important as the majority of Ute children

attend public schools in Colorado. One outcome of this fairly new partnership has been the creation of classroom resources about the Utes that have been made available for all teachers. In 2018, CDE collaborated with both Ute tribes, the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs (CCIA), History Colorado, the Denver Public Library, and the Denver Art Museum to create and publish a comprehensive curriculum for 4th graders that focuses on Ute history, culture, and their current lives<sup>82</sup>. More recently, CDE and the tribes have also released a unit of study for kindergarten and 1st grade students, and there are plans to develop additional units in the future<sup>83</sup>.

## **SOUTHERN UTE**

The Southern Ute Tribal Education Department offers the following services: K-12 academic assistance and advising; a higher ed scholarship program that provides monies for tuition and a stipend for living expenses; adult education, including a GED program; K-12 school counseling; distance learning support and resources; and administration of other federally funded programs like Johnson-O'Malley<sup>84</sup>. The Southern Ute Indian Montessori Academy (SUIMA) also operates under the TED and provides educational services to children from birth to 12 years of age. Additionally, the Southern Ute TED facilitates the Sunshine Cloud Smith Youth Advisory Council. This Council is comprised of a group of Southern Ute tribal youth who engage in community services and leadership activities throughout the school year<sup>85</sup>.

## **UTE MOUNTAIN UTE**

The Ute Mountain Ute Education Department offers the following services: K-12 student support; library program; an alternative education program; administration of other federally funded programs like Johnson-O'Malley; vocational training at the adult education family learning center; child development center that includes daycare and Head Start; cultural and language program; and a truancy prevention program<sup>86</sup>. The Ute Mountain Ute TED also spearheaded the effort to open a public charter school on the Ute Mountain reservation in Towaoc. The Kwiyaat Community Academy (KCA) currently serves grades K-3 and is in its third year of operation<sup>87</sup>. There is more detailed information about this school below.

## **DENVER METRO AREA INDIAN EDUCATION<sup>88</sup>**

During the time when the IEA was passed, Native students in Colorado's biggest school district, Denver Public Schools (DPS), faced similar challenges to Native students in other parts of the country. These challenges included a lack of cultural understanding among non-Native teachers and being in schools that emphasized the values and culture of the white dominant society. DPS had very few Native teachers or professionals with Native cultural training. Furthermore, the low number of Native children in DPS and Native parents on parent

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committees limited their ability to have a say in the decisions made by these committees or the district as a whole.

Many Native parents in Denver understood the significance of formal education in order for their children to thrive in the modern world and city lifestyle. However, they also wished for their children to maintain a strong connection with their cultural background and heritage, even though they lived far away from their reservations. Despite the fact that education had always been a major concern for Native people in Denver, they found it difficult to enhance the educational environment for their children due to the lack of funding specifically allocated for Native children residing in urban areas. Living away from reservations meant that urban Natives were unable to take advantage of education programs intended for AI/AN children, as these programs mainly focused on those living on or near reservations.

IEA gave the opportunity for all public schools with 10 or more Native students to apply for federal funding for special services and programs. In collaboration with Native parents, DPS submitted a proposal for grant funding under this law two years after it first passed. Native parents and community members actively participated in the creation of specialized programs, including tutoring and arts & crafts classes, at DPS. These initiatives reflected the strong determination of Native parents to take charge of their own lives and the lives of their children, while believing in Indian self-determination.

Native parents and the broader Native community in Denver had a shared goal of improving their children's education. The Denver Indian Center (DIC) played a central role in this effort, hosting various activities and meetings as required by IEA. The arts & crafts classes, which started in the mid-1970s, were immensely popular and continued through the 1980s. Another longstanding and popular program supported by Indian Education was tutoring. Both of these programs aimed to enhance the lives and educational opportunities of Native children. Additionally, these programs provided employment opportunities for Native adults who had the necessary cultural and/or academic background to teach or facilitate classes and activities.

The Indian Ed program at DPS has expanded and evolved over the years, and is now known as Native American Culture and Education (NACE)<sup>89</sup>. Compared to most Indian Ed programs in other Colorado districts (that often have a staff of one), DPS NACE has a large team of approximately twelve people who support anywhere between 500-1,000 students<sup>90</sup>. The ultimate objective is to partner with schools and families in order to address the disparities in graduation and dropout rates for AI/AN students and to prepare them for post-secondary education or careers<sup>91</sup>. The NACE team assists Native students in succeeding by collaborating with teachers, administrators, support staff, and families to create opportunities and interventions<sup>92</sup>. They also work towards implementing culturally responsive approaches in schools<sup>93</sup>. Additionally, DPS has offered Lakota language in several high schools and has just recently added Navajo as a language offering this year.

HOPE (Helping Our People Endure) is a notable program offered by DPS NACE in a limited number of high schools<sup>94</sup>. This program prioritizes the well-being of Native individ-



uals by addressing trauma and providing valuable support for suicide and substance misuse prevention. The program adopts a trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach, ensuring that it respects and acknowledges the unique needs of the community<sup>95</sup>. HOPE aims to equip school-based educators, administrators, community members, and local/regional adults with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively engage with Native youth. By emphasizing the inclusion of Native culture, traditions, spirituality, humor, and ceremonies, the program fosters a supportive environment for Native youth while promoting their overall development<sup>96</sup>.

## **COMMON CHALLENGES**

Newly formed Indian Ed programs in the Denver metro area faced persistent challenges that continue to have a significant impact on similar programs today. One of the issues is how Native students are identified<sup>97</sup>. Unlike other groups, Native people have to prove their race or ethnicity through membership or ancestry to receive government services and funding. This means they have to show they are part of a recognized tribe or have a specific bloodline. The way Native students are defined and identified varies, making it hard to obtain an accurate count<sup>98</sup>. Changes in federal definitions and data collection methods, which only allow for one race or ethnicity to be recorded, have resulted in many K-12 Native students being under-identified<sup>99</sup>. This is especially true for students with complex ancestral backgrounds. Additionally, the Indian Ed programs in districts often depend on schools within their districts to correctly identify AI/AN students by submitting the federal ED 506 form during enrollment. However, when schools fail to properly identify AI/AN students, the school data-tracking software becomes inaccurate<sup>100</sup>. Consequently, Indian Ed programs, which are notoriously understaffed, are burdened with the time-consuming process of manually reviewing enrollment forms and manually counting students to determine who should have an ED 506 form on record<sup>101</sup>.

The AI/AN population in the Denver metro area is widely scattered throughout the sprawling city, posing challenges in developing and executing targeted initiatives for Native children<sup>102</sup>. Schools with more Native students often receive more resources and support, while schools with fewer Native students may miss out on these opportunities<sup>103</sup>. This can create an unfair disadvantage for Native students in different schools. Additionally, Native children in Denver often have to switch schools for a variety of issues, which means they miss out on consistent programming and support<sup>104</sup>. Lastly, the diverse tribal backgrounds in the area make it challenging for Indian Ed facilitators to develop culturally appropriate programs without oversimplifying them as one homogenous “Indian culture”<sup>105</sup>.

## STATEWIDE FOCUS

### TITLE VI INDIAN EDUCATION

The federal government allocates approximately 68 million dollars for Title VI Indian Education formula grants<sup>106</sup>. The following entities are eligible: Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools; Public Schools that serve at least 10 AI/AN students; Indian Tribes; and Indian Community Based Organizations (ICBO). In 2018, out of 1,304 grantees, 88% were public school districts across the country<sup>107</sup>. Fifty percent of the total grantee pool received a grant of \$40,000 or less and the average per-eligible-student funding was \$213 per student<sup>108</sup>. Just as a comparison, in 2023, the U.S. government allocated 36.5 billion dollars in Title I funding to assist school districts in educating economically disadvantaged students<sup>109</sup> with an average per-student cost of approximately \$1,200.

Colorado has 179 school districts and 1,927 schools that serve 883,264 public school students<sup>110</sup>. In 2022, there were 5,742 American Indian/Alaska Native students<sup>111</sup> reported which is .6% of the total student population. The actual number is most likely higher. As mentioned above, challenges with identification, especially with students who are identified as “two or more races” is most likely causing under-counting. Also, the high mobility rate of the AI/AN population makes it difficult to get accurate numbers.

There are 13 Colorado school districts that receive Title VI Indian Education grant funding. Academic support, including aid with homework and study skills, cultural enrichment activities like field trips and special events, and parent engagement are the predominant services and programming<sup>112</sup> funded by Title VI in Colorado. The following basic information about each program was gleaned from district websites as well as CDE student demographic reporting<sup>113</sup>:

There are a number of Colorado school districts with 50 or more AI/AN students that do not receive Title VI funds<sup>114</sup>.

Documentation could not be found as to why a district would choose to not apply for Title VI funds. However, due to the low per-student funding of this grant and the number of staff hours that are required for federal grant management, many school districts may find this grant to be very cost prohibitive.

### CURRENT COLORADO TITLE VI PROGRAMS

DISTRICT	STUDENTS	AI/AN STUDENTS	% OF AI/AN	FULL TIME STAFF	# OF STAFF	NATIVE STAFF
ADAMS 12	34998	148	.4%	Yes	1	Yes
AURORA	37220	280	.7%	No	<1	No
BAYFIELD	1274	48	.3%	No	<1	No
BOULDER	28362	40	.1%	No	<1	No
CHERRY CREEK	52419	248	.4%	Yes	1	Yes
DENVER	88235	477	.5%	Yes	12	Yes

**CURRENT COLORADO TITLE VI PROGRAMS CONT.**

DISTRICT	STUDENTS	AI/AN STUDENTS	% OF AI/AN	FULL TIME STAFF	# OF STAFF	NATIVE STAFF
COLORADO SPRINGS 11	22744	117	.5%	Yes	4	Yes
DURANGO	5267	249	4%	Yes	11	Yes
FOUNTAIN	7885	67	.8%	No	<1	No
IGNACIO	691	207	30%	Unknown - Superintendent is listed as contact.		
JEFFCO	76172	356	.4%	Yes	5	Yes
MONTEZUMA-CORTEZ	2517	604	1.8%	Unknown - Person listed as contact not on staff directory.		
ST. VRAIN	32506	80	.2%	Data not yet available – new grant		

There are a number of Colorado school districts with 50 or more AI/AN students that do not receive Title VI funds<sup>115</sup>.

**NON- TITLE VI DISTRICTS WITH 50+ AI/AN STUDENTS**

DISTRICT	STUDENTS	AI/AN STUDENTS	% OF AI/AN to
27J	23108	95	.4%
ACADEMY 20	26607	80	.03%
ADAMS/ARAPAHOE	39148	232	.5%
ARCHULETA COUNTY	1604	96	5%
BYERS	6456	80	1.2%
DISTRICT 49	25799	167	.6%
DOUGLAS	61964	137	.2%
HARRISON	12386	62	.5%
POUDRE	29914	113	.3%
PUEBLO	14549	73	.5%
THOMPSON	15039	94	.6%
WESTMINSTER	7631	52	.6%
HARRISON	12386	62	.5%
POUDRE	29914	113	.3%
PUEBLO	14549	73	.5%
THOMPSON	15039	94	.6%
WESTMINSTER	7631	52	.6%

Documentation could not be found as to why a district would choose to not apply for Title VI funds. However, due to the low per-student funding of this grant and the number of staff hours that are required for federal grant management, many school districts may find this grant to be very cost prohibitive.

## COLORADO STATE LEGISLATURE

Since the late 1990s, there have been several significant state legislative actions regarding Indian Ed that have had an impact on Native students and public education as a whole. In 1998, the state legislature expanded a law mandating the instruction of Hispanic American and African American history, culture, and contributions to include American Indians as well. This resulted in revisions to the academic standards for 4th grade Social Studies and high school American History. Recently, in 2022, this law was amended to encompass additional ethnicities and identities. Furthermore, the law instructed the CDE to modify the standards to specifically include the Ute tribes and other tribes whose ancestral lands are located in present-day Colorado.

In 2006, the Colorado State Legislature passed a law authorizing the issuance of the American Indian Scholar license plate, which generates funds for a scholarship that is awarded annually to eligible Native students. Administered by the Rocky Mountain Indian Chamber of Commerce (RMICC), this program has achieved considerable success. As of 2022, RMICC has allocated over \$330,000 in scholarships through this initiative to support the higher education pursuits of Native students.

In 2012, a bill titled Concerning Indian Language Instruction was successfully passed and enacted as law. This legislation enables the inclusion of Native languages and cultural courses in public schools. Additionally, individuals who exhibit proficiency in a Native language acknowledged by federally recognized tribes can now request an authorization for teaching Native language and cultural instruction from the District Board of Education, regardless of their certification status as a teacher.

A law prohibiting the use of Indian mascots was passed in 2021 affecting all public schools and institutions of higher education. Any public school that continued to use an Indian mascot after June 2022 was fined \$25,000 per month, which went towards the state education fund. There are some exceptions to this prohibition. If there was already an agreement in place between a federally recognized Indian tribe and a public school before June 30, 2021, then the prohibition does not apply. However, the tribe does have the right to withdraw from the agreement whenever they wish. Additionally, public schools that are operated by a tribe or with the tribe's approval, and are located within the tribe's reservation boundaries, are exempt from the prohibition.

Federal law protects the rights of American Indians to practice their religious and cultural traditions. However, Native students across the country often face challenges or complete bans when it comes to wearing traditional regalia, such as eagle feathers, at school ceremonies such as graduations. In 2023, Colorado took a step to address this issue by passing a law that specifically protects the wearing of Native regalia at graduation ceremonies. This new law applies to all levels of education, from pre-kindergarten to college. Under this law, public schools and school districts are required to allow qualified students to wear and showcase their traditional regalia at graduation ceremonies. Similarly, public colleges and universities must also permit

qualified students to display their Native regalia at college graduation ceremonies.

The following are current laws, policies, and strategies that other states use to advance AI/AN education in public schools:

- State legislation to establish Indian Ed advisory councils, mandating collaboration between educators and tribal nations to ensure the public education system meets the needs and builds on the strengths of AI/AN students.
- State legislation that specifically empowers the state education agency to develop AI/AN education curriculum, provide training and evaluation, and certify AI/AN language instructors.
- State legislation and a constitutional mandate that encourages every citizen to learn about American Indians and for the state education agency and local school districts to work with tribal nations in the state when delivering Indian education for all students.
- State legislation that requires all school districts and teacher education programs to provide instruction on the state's tribal nations.
- State constitution language that provides for a program consisting of language, culture and history in the public schools and encourages community expertise in its development.
- State education agency policy to develop culturally inclusive guidelines to assist LEA's development of quality AI/AN education curriculum.
- State education policy that AI/AN history, culture, and contributions be included in academic content standards across all grade levels within history or social studies.

## **COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

As mentioned above, CDE has shown good progress in its approach to Indian Ed. One of the key changes that has had a great impact is the decision to increase the state level Indian Education Coordinator's position from a .25 position (10 hours per week) to a full-time role. This coordinator is responsible for overseeing and coordinating CDE's efforts to ensure that AI/AN students in Colorado schools have equitable opportunities in programs and services. Responsibilities also involve ensuring compliance with relevant state and federal laws, such as Title VI Indian Education in ESSA; facilitating consultation with State Agency and sovereign Tribal governments; partnering with Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs (CCIA) and complying with Colorado K-12 statutory requirements; and adhering to relevant early childhood and adult education laws. Additionally, the coordinator provides support to the 13 Title VI programs operated by Colorado in public school districts throughout the state. The Colorado Indian Ed Coordinator recently played a crucial role in overseeing necessary revisions and enhancements to the 4th grade Social Studies standards. Moreover, she facilitated collaboration between the Ute tribes and state level Exceptional Student Services Unit

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to design an online professional development course. This course aims to enhance teachers' comprehension and recognition of AI/AN students' needs in special education and is available to educators across the state. Additionally, she spearheaded a joint effort with the Ute tribes to develop an instructional unit centered on the Utes for students in grades K-1. Furthermore, she is actively engaged in developing a unit of study centered on the Jicarilla Apache tribe in partnership with them.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

In 2019, in partnership with the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) conducted a comprehensive examination of state education policies and programs supporting culturally responsive AI/AN K-12 curricula in public schools<sup>116</sup>. As Native curricula are not widely adopted and implemented, the study focused on the 35 states where federally recognized tribal nations are present<sup>117</sup>. Among the states surveyed, only one-third allocate funds for Native curricula, and unfortunately, Colorado is not one of them<sup>118</sup>. While a majority of states include Native references in their content standards (primarily in Social Studies), less than half of them require its instruction throughout K-12 schools<sup>119</sup>. Unlike neighboring states that incorporate references to AI/AN cultures in academic standards across all grade levels, Colorado only addresses Native people in 4th grade and high school U.S. history. Additionally, school districts have the option to access the 4th grade Ute curriculum, but it is not mandatory. Roughly half of the states surveyed have collaborated with tribal nations to establish essential understandings, which serve as agreed-upon vital principles for educating on AI/AN topics in these states<sup>120</sup>. Currently, Colorado does not currently have AI/AN essential understandings.

### **SCHOOLS FOR NATIVES BY NATIVES**

From the 1870s to the 1930s, U.S. schools were deliberately used by the federal government as a highly successful means of cultural genocide. Since then, the AI/AN student population has suffered from severe inequities and disparities in both Bureau-run or public schools. Consequently, many Native people have yearned for the realization of a long-standing vision: the establishment of schools that embrace the Native worldview and that are intentionally built to serve AI/AN children. This aspiration stems primarily from the significant number of Native people across generations that endured unimaginable horrors and anguish, frequently in school settings.

### **DENVER**

Throughout the years, Denver has witnessed the establishment of several schools by Native and/or Indigenous educators, with the aim of addressing the unique needs of AI/AN children. The first of these schools was the All Nations Traditional School, which was founded and operated briefly in the 1970s as an alternative option for Native families in the Denver-Boul-

der area<sup>121</sup>. This initiative was driven by the recognition of the prevailing insensitivity and racism displayed by public schools. Native organizers and parents devised a curriculum at the All Nations Traditional School that placed emphasis on AI/AN history and culture, music and dance, life sciences, and cross-cultural matters<sup>122</sup>.

In the 1980s and 1990s, The Circle of Learning, a pre-school and Head Start program, was run by the Denver Indian Center<sup>123</sup>. This program was grounded in cultural principles, with the belief that all children have common needs. The aim was to improve the social skills of each child, enabling them to thrive in their surroundings and make healthy choices regarding nutrition, health, and safety. The involvement of the child's entire family, including extended relatives, was highly encouraged<sup>124</sup>.

For more than 35 years, Escuela Tlatelolco Centro De Estudios provided education primarily to the Latino community in Denver. However, it also attracted many Native American families due to its strong cultural alignment. The school placed great importance on community-driven values, cherished kinship ties, and strived to empower students in the pursuit of social justice. Throughout its extensive existence, Escuela provided educational programs ranging from early childhood to college level<sup>125</sup>.

**AMERICAN INDIAN ACADEMY OF DENVER (AIAD)** The American Indian Academy of Denver launched in August 2020 as an innovative educational option for AI/AN and Latino students and families in the Denver metro area as a public charter school in Denver Public Schools. During its three years of operation, AIAD served a culturally and socioeconomically diverse community of approximately 130 students in grades 6-10. The school strived to build and maintain a community of students, families, and educators where students were supported holistically, secure in their cultural identity, and empowered to become community leaders. The community-driven operational structure of AIAD was predicated upon horizontal leadership and universal Native values (Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Reciprocity). In addition to Native culture and language being incorporated across all content areas, the signature learning experience for students was land-based learning in the Indigenized STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) courses. AIAD's land-based learning used an environmentally focused approach to education by first recognizing the deep physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual connection to the land that is an integral part of Indigenous cultures. Land-based learning provided an opportunity for youth to develop their own connection with the land and water, which in turn nourished them spiritually, physically, and mentally. Land-based learning also allowed students to develop an understanding of the history of the land and water, and the importance of good stewardship. Unfortunately, due to low enrollment and fiscal constraints, AIAD closed in 2023.

**KWIYAGAT COMMUNITY ACADEMY**<sup>126</sup> The Kwiyaqat Community Academy (KCA) currently serves grades K-3 and is the first Colorado charter school on an Indian reservation located in Towaoc, the home of the Ute Mountain Ute people. KCA has been a dream for the Ute Mountain community for many decades. Tribal visionaries imagined a K-12 school for the

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Ute Mountain Ute reservation to overcome boundaries and provide new opportunities for the future. The school is guided by Nuchiu culture and language and there is an emphasis on the revitalization of Nuchiu language with the belief that cultural knowledge will serve to ground Ute youth in a positive self-identity. KCA also incorporates modern Ute perspectives across all content areas. The school currently serves approximately 50 students and plans to build out to a K-5 school.

AIAD and KCA were/are a part of the NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN), which aims to develop outstanding schools that cater to the needs of their respective communities. NISN collaborates with dedicated fellows who have a vested interest in Native communities to establish schools in New Mexico and throughout the country in order to foster capable leaders who are not only academically proficient but also empowered, secure in their cultural identity, and capable of making a positive impact on their communities. Currently, NISN has schools operating in New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Oakland. NISN's flagship school is the Native American Community Academy (NACA) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. NACA has been in operation for over 20 years and serves K-12 students.

**NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY (NACA) CASE STUDY<sup>127</sup>** In 2021, CDE conducted a case study on the Native American Community Academy (NACA) in Albuquerque, NM and other schools in the NISN network. The main goal was to identify the research-supported aspects of these schools that help them serve AI/AN students more effectively than traditional public schools. These schools are designed and operated within the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Framework. This framework aims to assist educators in establishing learning environments that prioritize students, acknowledge their cultural backgrounds, support their academic success, encourage connections across diverse groups, amplify historically marginalized perspectives, empower students to bring about social change, and foster critical thinking skills, leading to student engagement, learning, development, and achievement. Because of the intentional focus on relationships, culture, identity, sense of belonging, and social-emotional well-being, the CR-S framework, especially the Indigenized version within NISN schools, is considered an effective method of educating the whole child.

This approach has been very successful at NACA in particular. The National Charter School Resource Center states that students at NACA consistently excel academically, surpassing their AI/AN peers in terms of achievement, proficiency, retention, graduation, and college attendance rates at the district, state, and national levels. According to the NACA 2019 Tribal Education Status Report, Native elementary students at NACA perform at a similar level to Native students in Albuquerque Public School (APS) and throughout New Mexico. However, as they progress into middle and high school, NACA students consistently outperform their counterparts in APS and New Mexico.



**CONCLUSION**

After a long-documented history of subjugation and marginalization in the United States, American Indian and Alaska Native people have been rendered invisible to many in mainstream society. This is particularly true in Colorado where the history of the violent eradication of the original inhabitants has been all but buried over the last 100+ years. The vast majority of Coloradans have either attended or are currently enrolled in schools that either completely disregard or only briefly mention information about Colorado’s original inhabitants, often providing incorrect or insufficient details. As a result, this continues to promote a damaging narrative about Native peoples, tribal nations, and their citizens. Although moderate attempts have been made in Colorado over the last five decades, in particular the last 10 years, these unfortunate circumstances persist and are highly detrimental to the well-being of AI/AN children.

The state of Colorado has never conducted a comprehensive study in regard to its Native K-12 students nor is summary data on the current status readily available. However, by harvesting data points from CDE’s graduation and drop out dashboard, the following information can be gathered: Year after year, Native students consistently record the lowest graduation rates, which are usually 10 points below those of the closest ethnicity or race, and the highest dropout rates, typically exceeding other ethnicities or races in the state by at least one full percentage point.

**COLORADO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE (2020 - 2023)<sup>128</sup>**

Year	All	AI/AN	Asian	Black	Latino	White
2023	83.1 %	<b>68%</b>	92.6%	78.6%	76.1%	88%
2022	82.3 %	<b>65.4%</b>	93%	77.4%	75.1%	87.3%
2021	81.7%	<b>64.5%</b>	91.5%	76%	74.2%	86.6%
2020	81.9%	<b>66.7%</b>	91.2%	76.6%	75.4%	86%

**COLORADO HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE (2020 - 2023)<sup>129</sup>**

Year	All	AI/AN	Asian	Black	Latino	White
2023	2.1%	<b>4.2%</b>	.7%	3.2%	3.2%	1.2%
2022	2.2%	<b>5.1%</b>	.8%	3.5%	3.5%	1.3%
2021	1.8%	<b>3.2%</b>	.5%	2.8%	2.8%	1.1%
2020	1.8%	<b>4.0%</b>	.7%	2.8%	2.8%	1.1%

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Colorado AI/AN students also continue to score significantly below their white classmates in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math<sup>130</sup>:

### ELA 4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE MEETS OR EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

	2023	2022	2019
<b>AI/AN</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	<b>30.3%</b>
<b>ASIAN</b>	56.3%	56.9%	62.3%
<b>BLACK</b>	25.6%	26.6%	31.9%
<b>HISPANIC</b>	25.8%	26.1%	31.3%
<b>WHITE</b>	55.5%	55.8%	59%

### ELA 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE MEETS OR EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

	2023	2022	2019
<b>AI/AN</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>33.8%</b>
<b>ASIAN</b>	63.3%	65.1%	69.7%
<b>BLACK</b>	29.8%	31.7%	33.4%
<b>HISPANIC</b>	25.6%	27.8%	31.2%
<b>WHITE</b>	54.4%	55.3%	57.1%

### MATH 4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE MEETS OR EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

	2023	2022	2019
<b>AI/AN</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>22.4%</b>
<b>ASIAN</b>	59.4%	62.5%	61.3%
<b>BLACK</b>	21.6%	23.4%	24.3%
<b>HISPANIC</b>	22.3%	21.2%	25.7%
<b>WHITE</b>	52.2%	50.6%	51.2%

### MATH 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE MEETS OR EXCEEDS EXPECTATION

	2023	2022	2019
<b>AI/AN</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>
<b>ASIAN</b>	59.5%	58.6%	64.3%
<b>BLACK</b>	16.9%	16.5%	18.8%
<b>HISPANIC</b>	15.8%	15.1%	19.9%
<b>WHITE</b>	45%	44.8%	48.1%

## **A CALL TO ACTION**

These dismal statistics and somber history are not a reflection of the abilities and/or potential of our AI/AN children. They are a call to action for everyone who believes that Native children are just as much a part of Colorado as any other child, and that Native history is an integral part of Colorado's history that should be recognized and understood by all Coloradans. In order to change the trajectory of academic failure we must change our approach in how we serve our children and their families. Research studies have shown that a student's connection to community and its cultural, familial, and linguistic strengths significantly increases his/her social and emotional well-being as well as improves academic achievement.

When IEA was initially passed, Raymond Cross, a law professor and citizen of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara (MHA) Nation from North Dakota, likened Indian Education to a "three-legged stool":

The three legs symbolize the need to address inequities and disparities that Native students face in public schools and for there to be deliberate and accurate representation of AI/AN peoples in state-run public education; the responsibility of the federal government to fulfill its obligations towards Native peoples; and the concept of tribal self-determination as it pertains to educational matters within tribes<sup>131</sup>.

To take this metaphor a step further, there are other specific actions that state governments like Colorado can take. To address the inequities and disparities experienced by AI/AN students, it is imperative for Colorado to invest significantly in Indian Education. Furthermore, Native educators who possess appropriate academic qualifications and cultural knowledge should be elevated to authoritative positions and given autonomy to lead these initiatives. Additionally, while it is important to recognize the significance of Colorado requiring the teaching of Native history and contributions in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, this requirement should be extended to every grade level for all students. Just as importantly, Native history and contributions should be taught in all teacher training programs and there should be professional development focused on Native history, culture, and contributions implemented for current teachers. Lastly, Colorado should continue nurturing its relationship with the Ute tribes while also establishing and maintaining stronger connections with Native communities along the front range, which often represent the descendants of other ancestral tribes and families who were relocated to this area during federal relocation.

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# HISTORY OF NATIVE AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN COLORADO

The purpose of this report is to provide a concise overview of the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) higher education history in Colorado. This includes discussing the involvement of Native students in higher education and the emergence and significance of tribally controlled higher education institutions. The history of higher education regarding the AI/AN population is also a narrative of how Native people have been treated historically by higher education institutions. Few groups around the world have been researched and analyzed as extensively as Native Americans over the past two centuries. Although this report primarily focuses on anthropology and archaeology, it could have easily also included other fields such as history, sociology, psychology, and others. The history of higher education for Native Americans is also a story of Native lands, revealing that many U.S. higher education institutions, including those in Colorado, were built and continue to operate on lands that were unlawfully taken or coerced out of tribal control.

## **NATIONAL CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In 2022, one percent of the total U.S. population identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) on an American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census. Among this group, only 16.8% of individuals aged 25 or older had achieved a bachelor's degree or higher. While this percentage has increased from the 2010 rate of 13.4%, it remains lower than

the national average of 35.7%.

Around 23% of Native American children who were under the age of 18 resided in a household where at least one parent had obtained a bachelor's degree or a higher level of education. In contrast, the percentage of white children living in such households stood at 56%.

Native students represented only 0.7% of the total number of students enrolled in higher education in fall of 2021. In 2021, around 28% of young Native Americans aged 18 to 24 were attending college, in contrast to the overall U.S. population where the college enrollment rate stood at 38%. The majority of AI/AN students choose to study at public educational institutions, which include Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU).

Over the past decade, there has been a significant decrease of 40% in the number of Native American students enrolling in undergraduate programs, while the decline in graduate programs stands at 18%. The reasons for this decline are not well-documented or theorized in the available literature. However, a couple of institutions have attributed it to the disparities faced by AI/AN students. These disparities arise due to various barriers that many underrepresented individuals encounter in higher education. Native students specifically face challenges such as juggling non-traditional student lives and negative college experiences. These barriers are in addition to the achievement gaps experienced by all underrepresented students, which include factors like lack of adequate academic preparation, family expectations and self-efficacy, campus climate, financial concerns, academic experiences, college navigation, and policies and procedures. These factors encompass elements such as access to college preparation programs, diversity among teachers, access to higher education, segregation, disciplinary experiences, parental expectations, resilience, sense of belonging, inclusivity, treatment, access to resources, perception of costs, ability to afford education, need to work, food and housing insecurity, grading systems, representation in curriculum, registration processes, study habits, understanding terminology and procedures, financial aid, housing, compliance, and academic calendar.

It is important to note that in both of these interpretations, the institutions have conducted interviews or surveys with present-day students in higher education. However, it is worth considering that if AI/AN individuals who decided not to pursue further education were interviewed or surveyed, they might provide different reasons for their choice. Additionally, it is also important to note that the challenges outlined above are not new. AI/AN students have faced these same challenges ever since they started attending post-secondary education. Thus, there may be other factors that are causing the decline in enrollment.

## **HISTORY OF AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER ED**

The history of Native American higher education is divided into three distinct periods. The first era, known as the colonial period, involved various attempts to establish Indian missions within colonial colleges. The second era, referred to as the federal period, was characterized by a lack of attention towards higher education for AI/AN people, with only occasional tribal

and private initiatives. Finally, the self-determination period emerged, marked by the establishment of tribally controlled colleges in recent times.

## COLONIAL PERIOD

During the American colonial period, three out of the nine original U.S. colleges considered educating Native Americans as a significant part of their mission. Although the College of New Jersey (Princeton) did not explicitly state Indian education as a priority, it did enroll a small number of Native American students at the time. These nine colleges, including Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), Princeton, Columbia (King's), Brown (Rhode Island), Rutgers (Queen's), and Dartmouth, laid the foundation for what would become the country's largest, diverse, and arguably the best higher education system on earth. Given this early involvement and keen interest in Native American higher education, one might assume that it had subsequently developed and grown to similar levels. However, the evidence does not support this claim. Despite the stated goals and the construction of specific buildings for Indian colleges at William and Mary and Harvard, the number of Indian students attending and graduating from these colleges during and after the colonial period is not impressive. Dartmouth, which has the strongest history of an "Indian college," only had 25 Indian students, with three graduating, before 1800. Even more extraordinary is the fact that up until 1973, Dartmouth records show only 187 Native students enrolled, with 25 graduating.

Looking at some basic statistics, it is clear that the colonial era had a poor track record in providing higher education for AI/AN individuals. Prior to the American Revolution, these three colleges claimed to be dedicated to educating Native Americans. However, their official records show that only 47 AI/AN students attended, and only four graduated. In reality, the colleges' claims of supporting Native higher education during the colonial period were primarily utilized as tools for fundraising or to access funds granted to Indian missions.

When looking at the activities and records of Native American higher education during the colonial era, it is evident that there are many flaws and shortcomings in colonial Harvard, William and Mary, and Dartmouth. Most of their writings tend to highlight their achievements and religious devotion as it pertains to educating Indians, but it is clear that in reality there was also a lot of deception involved. It could be argued that securing English donations intended for Indians and using those funds in a broader manner can be justified as a necessary evil. The founders of the colleges needed funds, but there was little available locally while the efforts in England to support the colonial endeavors were uninterested. Only when it came to the Indians was there a sufficient interest to prompt donations. The founders saw this as an opportunity to take advantage of that interest in order to establish their schools, while maintaining that they would eventually benefit the Indians, even if not immediately. Although people with different opinions may debate the appropriateness of these defenses, it is undeniable that no individuals with clear corrupt intentions personally benefited from these actions.

## **FEDERAL PERIOD**

Although the colonial period did not prioritize higher education for Indians, it did display an interest in and effort toward Native American higher education, which would not be matched until the 1960s. After the Revolutionary War, the focus drastically shifted from higher education to religious and vocational training. Until the 1960s, Native American higher education was largely overlooked, while agricultural, industrial, and domestic training, as well as religious instruction, took precedence. Religious missions funded by the government played a significant role in Indian education for about a century until the 1870s. Subsequently, the government established a relatively extensive system of boarding schools, day schools, and reservation schools, but there was little change in curriculum, except for a possible shift toward vocational training over religious instruction.

The choice to prioritize agricultural, mechanical, and domestic skills in Indian education was the most enduring aspect of the federal Indian education program. The historical record only partially explains why this was the case. The argument that limited results in AI/AN higher education justified focusing solely on a peasant lifestyle appears overly simplistic. Native Americans were primarily trained for a lifestyle that had little connection to American society. Even if this choice was reasonable at the country's inception, it does not justify maintaining this objective throughout the 19th and well into the 20th centuries, despite the United States' shift toward an industrial, market economy. The primary concern seemed to be gaining access to Native American lands and offering minimal retraining for them to subsist on the land that was returned to them. This intentional and pervasive educational approach toward Native people could very reasonably be considered the origins of institutionalized racism.

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was a crucial moment in federal Indian Education. It represented a shift towards valuing and preserving Indian cultures instead of trying to eradicate them, which had been the approach for the previous 150 years. In terms of higher education, the act introduced a \$250,000 loan fund specifically for Native American college students. However, it was not until after World War II that there was a substantial increase in Native American representation in higher education, paralleling the broader trend of increased college access and attendance for the general population. During the late 1950s, various tribes began providing support for higher education, including the establishment of scholarship funds using tribal or federal funds that were designated for this purpose.

## **SELF-DETERMINATION**

For almost 200 years, the federal government's control over education for Native Americans not only failed to meet educational goals, but also hindered progress for long periods of time. During the 1960s, a wave of civil rights, anti-war, and movements advocating for political, social, and economic reforms swept across American society. This broader movement played a crucial role in paving the way for the Indian self-determination era.

The Kennedy Report, also known as *Indian Education: A National Tragedy - A National Challenge*, exposed the failure of government-run Indian education. It revealed that the facilities were overcrowded and poorly maintained, the teachers were ill-prepared and showed a preference for not teaching Indian students. The academic preparation provided was minimal, and the curriculum undermined Native culture while the goal of assimilation had not been achieved. Additionally, life on reservations was characterized by extreme poverty, high unemployment rates, and a tragically high infant mortality rate. The report emphasized the crucial need for Indian participation and control in Indian education.

As a result of the Kennedy Report, several important changes were implemented regarding AI/AN higher education. Firstly, there was an increase in scholarship support. Secondly, American Indian studies programs were established in various non-Indian institutions. Most notably, funding was allocated for Tribally Controlled Community Colleges, signifying a significant step forward.

## **TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (TCUs)**

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are seen as a promising solution for Native American higher education and play a crucial role in preserving AI/AN heritage. These institutions provide students with the opportunity to study and learn about Native culture, customs, and language. Additionally, TCUs effectively serve as platforms for fostering economic progress and betterment among Native Americans.

Although the concept of tribal colleges was first proposed in 1911, it wasn't until 1968 that the first TCU, Navajo Community College, was established in Tsaile, Arizona. Currently, there are 32 fully accredited TCUs in the United States, all of which are members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) — an entity created in 1973 as a support network to collectively advocate for tribally controlled higher education at the federal level.

Currently, TCUs offer a total of 358 programs, ranging from apprenticeships to diplomas, certificates, and degrees. These programs consist of 181 associate degree programs at 23 TCUs, 40 bachelor's degree programs at 11 TCUs, and 5 master's degree programs at 2 TCUs. There are also Native-serving colleges and universities that are not under tribal control, like Haskell Indian Nations University, but they are still funded directly from the federal government. Other private institutions like the Institute of American Indian Art do not rely on federal funding.

In 1989, the presidents of TCUs created the non-profit American Indian College Fund (AICF) with the goal of raising money from the private sector to provide scholarships for AI/AN students and financial support for tribal colleges. Their aim was also to increase awareness about these colleges and the work of the College Fund itself. The AICF plays a crucial role in helping Native students access higher education by offering scholarships and various programs. Furthermore, they continue to support students once they are enrolled in college by providing them with the necessary tools and assistance to succeed. The AICF is based in



Denver, CO, and every year they distribute \$20 million in scholarships to approximately 4,000 Native Americans.

TCUs play a vital role in their communities by creating environments that foster Native American culture, languages, and traditions. They are often the only higher education institutions available in some of the most economically disadvantaged rural areas in the country. TCUs cater to a diverse range of individuals, including young adults, senior citizens, and both AI/AN and non-Indian students. Additionally, they act as valuable community resources, providing important social services and offering hope to communities that face significant poverty and unemployment challenges. In terms of academic achievements, TCUs have implemented successful programs that have resulted in high student success rates. According to AICF, 86 percent of TCU students successfully complete their chosen program of study, which is significantly higher than the completion rates of less than 10 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native students who directly transition from reservation high schools to mainstream colleges and universities to obtain a bachelor's degree.

## OTHER IMPORTANT HISTORICAL HIGHER EDUCATION CONSIDERATIONS

### **DESCREATION DISGUISED AS SCHOLARLY PURSUITS**

The United States places a strong emphasis on respecting the deceased, with both societal and legal institutions supporting this belief. Laws exist in every state to safeguard burials and prevent grave robbery, regardless of the individual's background. However, throughout American history, these laws have not been extended to adequately protect the burial grounds of Native Americans. Tragically, there have been numerous instances where the remains of Native Americans have been excavated and put on display at museums, government agencies, universities, and even tourist attractions. Every tribe in the United States has been affected by these practices. It is estimated that anywhere from one hundred thousand to two million Native American individuals have been subjected to this desecration.

Driven by years of U.S. government policies that portrayed them as a disappearing inferior race, Native Americans faced displacement, massacres, and cultural obliteration. In parallel, the field of anthropology emerged to document and save the "disappearing" Native American cultures, often coinciding with the United States' colonial expansion. Consequently, countless sacred human remains and burial objects were taken from tribal lands without tribal consent, sometimes even stolen directly from the deceased. Despite claiming to promote scientific progress, scholars predominantly viewed Native Americans as mere commodities for collection and sale. These practices endured for decades until they began to face significant scrutiny, particularly during the 1960s, as Native Americans and other groups vocally challenged these commonly accepted scholarly approaches.

During the mid-20th century, there were significant changes in how scholars treated Native

Americans. Previous racist theories about their inferiority were no longer considered relevant. Instead, archaeologists started to recognize and appreciate the long-term cultural changes and connections with past populations among Native Americans. As a result, some scholars started to focus more on identifying different types of artifacts and establishing their chronologies. This shift in focus helped establish archaeology as a subfield of anthropology but also led to a disconnect between archaeologists and sociocultural anthropologists, as well as the Native American communities they were studying.

The trend in archaeology continued to gain traction in the 1960s and 1970s. During this time, scholars recognized that Native groups exhibited cultural change and creativity. However, their interpretations of the past were still limited by a Euro-American perspective. Native beliefs and concerns when it came to presenting their own history were given little, if any, consideration. In essence, archaeologists had shifted from justifying Euro-American prejudices against Native people in the 19th century to simply disregarding them altogether. As a result, contemporary Native Americans continued to be sidelined in archaeological discussions.

Despite several decades of protest and pressure by tribes and the AI/AN community, Native Americans and their deceased relatives did not have sufficient protection for their ancestral remains or cultural and sacred objects until the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed in 1990. NAGPRA prohibits the taking of Native American cultural items from federal and tribal lands, unless specific conditions are met, and it establishes a procedure for federal agencies and federally funded museums to return certain Native American cultural items, such as human remains, funerary objects, and sacred objects, to the appropriate tribes.

Since the passage of the legislation, around 32,000 human remains have been given back to their respective tribes. Additionally, about 670,000 funerary objects, 120,000 unassociated funerary objects, and 3,500 sacred objects have also been returned. However, the repatriation efforts under NAGPRA are slow and burdensome. This has resulted in many tribes having to put in a lot of effort to document their requests and submit them repeatedly. It is quite common for institutions, including institutions of higher ed, to reject these requests and to also claim that they are unsure of the tribal origins of the objects and/or human remains they possess — which becomes the justification to not return the objects, and even worse, to not return these ancestors for proper burial.

Museums, universities, and federal agencies currently still possess the remains of over 110,000 ancestors belonging to Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native populations. Approximately half of these remains are held by ten institutions, including esteemed museums that obtained collections from ancestral lands shortly after Native Americans were forcibly displaced, as well as state-operated institutions that accumulated artifacts from burial mounds that had previously safeguarded the deceased for centuries. Of note, two of these institutions are under the purview of the U.S. government: the Interior Department, respon-

sible for administering relevant legislation, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, the largest federally owned utility in the country. Among U.S. higher education institutions, the University of California - Berkeley, Harvard University, and Indiana University at Bloomington still hold the most substantial collections of Native American remains. One of the most significant shortcomings of the NAGPRA is that these institutions retain ultimate authority in determining whether an object or human remains are affiliated with a specific tribal group. Consequently, if these establishments are disinclined to repatriate the artifacts, they have the ability to assert that the cultural origins are indeterminable.

Colorado has been seen as a leader in following Congress' NAGPRA law, with the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and the University of Colorado's Museum of Natural History being among the first institutions in the U.S. to return their entire collections. 95.6% of the more than 5,000 Native American remains that were in possession of Colorado institutions, including federal agencies operating within the state, have been made available for repatriation, which is double the national rate. However, more than 500 ancestral remains taken from Colorado are still housed in collections across the country. Additionally, according to a ProPublica database, twelve Colorado museums and university collections still hold at least 230 Native American ancestors, all of which are considered "culturally unidentifiable." This classification is commonly used to avoid taking action, according to experts.

As of February 2023, the Colorado institutions that are still holding on to ancestral remains include the following universities: Western Colorado University CT Hurst Museum (67 ancestral remains); Trinidad State Junior College (62 ancestral remains); University of Colorado at Denver, Department of Anthropology (15 ancestral remains); Metropolitan State University of Denver, Department of Anthropology (13 ancestral remains); and Colorado College (4 ancestral remains).

## **NON-INDIAN SCHOLARS AS NATIVE AMERICAN EXPERTS**

As outlined above, in the United States, the discipline of anthropology, along with its subfields such as archaeology, established its foundation by studying Native American communities. In 2021, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) apologized "for the field's legacy of harm," acknowledging the discipline's history of conducting research that exploited these communities. Further, AAA acknowledged that this body of research created an abusive dynamic, wherein anthropologists positioned themselves as authorities, shaping and prioritizing their own interpretation of AI/AN knowledge over the perspectives of Native communities themselves.

In his renowned 1969 publication, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, esteemed Native American philosopher Vine Deloria, Jr. (Hunkpapa Lakota), contended that anthropology has long been an instrument of colonization, characterized by the dominance of Euro-American scholars. Deloria further argued that although the discipline has expanded its scope to encompass cultures beyond Native Americans, anthropologists continue to forge connections with Native

peoples, exploiting them for personal, professional, and institutional gains, acts which are especially disparaging.

Unfortunately, this issue persists today, with many anthropologists seeking not only to study Native Americans, but also to mimic, assimilate, and speak on their behalf, as if to define their identity and narrative. It is crucial for anthropologists to acknowledge that they can never truly comprehend the experiences and worldviews of Native Americans as they themselves do. Deloria proposed that more AI/AN scholars should engage in anthropological research, a development that has occurred to some extent over the past four decades, but more needs to be done.

## **NATIVE AMERICANS AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN COLORADO**

Statewide ethnicity and race data for Colorado higher education institutions does not seem to be readily available; however, according to media reports, between the years of 2010 and 2019, the number of Native American students in 2- and 4-year colleges decreased by 21%. In response, the Colorado State Legislature passed Colorado American Indian Tribes In-State Tuition in 2021. This law mandates that a state university or college must establish a policy to provide discounted tuition rates to students who do not meet the criteria for in-state rates; however, this only applies to students who are officially recognized members of a federally recognized American Indian tribe with historical connections to Colorado. The specific tribes eligible for this benefit are determined by the collaboration between the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs (CCIA) and History Colorado. Due to an apparent lack of statewide student demographic data, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not this new law has caused a significant increase in the enrollment of Native Americans. However, at least one institution, CU Boulder, is reporting that they have seen an increase in Native student enrollment over the last two years which they attribute to this law.

## **COLORADO HISTORY**

Just as K-12 Indian Education history is predicated upon cultural genocide, much of the history of Native Americans and Higher Education has its origins in stolen land. This is particularly true in Colorado where, due to the absence of TCUs in the state, all Native college/university students attend private or state public institutions.

Prior to 1848 there were very few non-Native people living in what is now Colorado. The Utes lived primarily in the mountains, the Cheyenne and Arapaho lived along the front range, and over 20 other major tribal groups (48+ bands) lived and hunted in various parts of the region. Two events in particular drastically changed this landscape. The first was the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which effectively marked the end of the Mexican American War. One significant outcome of that treaty was the alteration of the United States' southern border, as it was shifted from the Arkansas River to the Rio Grande River. This essentially paved the way for the federal government to open up the region for Euro-American

settlers. The second event was the discovery of gold near present-day Denver in 1858, which drew thousands of people to the area — ultimately resulting in the designation of the region as a territory by the U.S. government, and serving as a precursor to its eventual statehood.

Three other significant events occurred in the same time period, impacting the lives of Native people and having direct connections to higher education institutions in Colorado. The first of these was the Treaty of Fort Wise. In February 1861, the Colorado Territory was established by the U.S. Congress, incorporating portions of Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal lands, which had been relinquished to the United States as per the Treaty of Fort Wise. This treaty, endorsed by a select few Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders, gave rise to the Fort Wise Reservation (later referred to as Fort Lyon Reservation). Nevertheless, the majority of the Cheyenne and Arapaho populations, including all of the northern bands, rejected the treaty and refused to vacate their ancestral territories.

This treaty was negotiated under duress and included several questionable articles. The introduction stated, “Arapaho and Cheyenne Indians of the Upper Arkansas River, they being duly authorized by said Tribes,” making it clear that the treaty was made with only the southern bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho. Without the signatures from the northern bands, the land north and south of the South Platte River could not be ceded. There is consistent evidence that the needed signatures were never secured and that compensation for the land was never paid. There is also consistent evidence that the U.S. government was aware that the land had not been lawfully ceded.

The second consequential event was the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862. This act provided an opportunity for adult citizens, or those intending to become citizens, who had not previously taken up arms against the U.S. government, to claim 160 acres of government land that had been surveyed. In order to secure ownership, claimants were obligated to reside on the land and enhance its value through cultivation. Upon completing a five-year period of residence, the original applicant was granted full ownership rights to the property, with the exception of a nominal registration fee.

Despite the primary aim of providing individuals the opportunity to possess land, the majority of these lands were ultimately acquired by speculators, cattle ranchers, miners, lumber companies, and railroad corporations. Out of approximately 500 million acres that were distributed by the General Land Office between 1862 and 1904, only around 80 million acres were allocated to homesteaders.

The third significant event was the enactment of the Morrill Land Grant College Act in 1862. This legislation enabled states to establish publicly funded colleges through the utilization or disposal of federal land grants associated with such establishments. Over the course of this process, Native communities had approximately 10 million acres expropriated from their tribal lands. The stated purpose was to establish land-grant institutions primarily focused on agricultural and mechanical arts education, thereby providing access to higher education for numerous farmers and laborers who were previously marginalized.

The allocation of land in accordance with the provisions of the Morrill Act varied between 90,000 and 990,000 acres, depending on the representation size of individual states in the Congress. Those eastern states that lacked public land, as well as some Southern and Midwestern states, were provided with vouchers, colloquially known as scrip, enabling them to choose specific parcels within the surveyed public domain. Conversely, western states and territories were granted the opportunity to select land within their borders once they attained statehood. The text of the Morrill Act, much like numerous other U.S. land legislation, overlooked a crucial element: the fact that these grants inherently relied on the dispossession of Native lands.

It is imperative to acknowledge that land-grant universities were established not solely on Native land, but with Native land. It is a prevalent misconception that the Morrill Act grants exclusively facilitated the establishment of physical campuses. In reality, the extent of these grants often matched or exceeded the size of big cities, and their geographical locations were frequently situated hundreds or even thousands of miles away from their intended beneficiaries. By the early 20th century, the grants had collectively generated \$17.7 million for university endowments, with the remaining unsold lands being appraised at an additional \$5.1 million. When adjusted for inflation, the total value of these grants amounted to approximately half a billion dollars.

### **COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

The implementation of the Morrill Act involved the transformation of land formerly belonging to tribal nations into initial capital for the advancement of higher education. The availability of this land resulted from three distinct methods: through formal treaties comprising 73% of the acquired land, unratified treaties accounting for 23%, and outright seizure contributing to the remaining 4%. In the early 1900s, the grants had generated a total of \$17.7 million for university endowments. In addition, there were unsold lands that had a value of \$5.1 million. Taking inflation into account, the grants were estimated to be worth approximately \$500 million in total.

The Morrill Act grants are tainted with profit gained through land dispossession. Colorado State University (CSU), as an example, acquired almost half of its grant on land that was forcibly taken from the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes. This seizure of land occurred less than a year after the brutal Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, where U.S. forces mercilessly killed over 200 members of these tribes.

In total, the Northern Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho (of the Upper Arkansas — the terms used in 1861) gave up 20,825 acres of land that was not legally ceded to the U.S. government at that time (or any time since). The date listed for the transaction is the date the Treaty of Fort Wise was approved. The Northern Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho never signed this treaty. Further, the Cheyenne and Arapaho of Oklahoma contributed 44,406 acres of land. The treaty listed for this transaction was in 1865.

Up until the last 10 to 15 years, it does not appear that CSU did much in the way of acknowledging the way in which lands were acquired to start the university. However, since 2011, that has changed to a certain extent. For the last thirteen years, CSU has been providing eligible Native students with in-state tuition rates through the Native American Legacy Award (NALA). An eligible student is a person who is enrolled in a federally or state-recognized tribe or who is the child of an enrolled member or who possesses 1/2 or more Native American blood quantum.

CSU's land acknowledgment statement, which was published in 2019, acknowledges the university's utilization of territories that were originally inhabited by Tribal Nations and the tragic events that had been inflicted upon those same Native people. Furthermore, the statement acknowledges CSU's obligation to provide an education that is accessible and inclusive to all individuals, which aligns with the underlying objectives of the Land-Grant College Act, even though, historically, its implementation has predominantly benefited white students.

According to the university website, CSU stands apart from other land grant universities as it has retained ownership of its original parcels of land. The university acknowledges that it garners substantial revenue from these lands, which were initially granted to the institution, through various activities such as leasing for mineral extraction and grazing purposes, all of which are managed by the State Land Board. In January 2023, CSU adopted a revision to its Real Estate Investment Funds policy, wherein it committed to channeling a maximum of \$500,000 from the earnings generated by the aforementioned lands to provide support for individuals belonging to federally- and state-recognized Native American tribes. Moreover, CSU established the position of Assistant Vice President for Indigenous and Native American Affairs with the primary responsibility of formulating recommendations concerning the optimal utilization of the funds to benefit the Native American community.

We do not yet know what kind of impact this newly allocated fund or this new executive leadership position will have for CSU Native students or the broader Native American community, but we do know that CSU's AI/AN student population is increasing. Currently, for the 2023-2024 academic year, there are 908 students — which is approximately 3% of the total student population — that identify as Native American. In the past, the AI/AN student population was typically below 1%.

## **ARE THESE EFFORTS ENOUGH?**

According to investigative reporting by High Country News in 2020, CSU received 89,001 acres of land under the Morrill Act. By 1914, 55,807 acres had been sold yielding \$185,956.34 at the time. After adjusting for inflation, the endowment principle raised from the original grant totals at least \$11 million. Setting aside the fact that at least 20,825 acres of this land was illegally seized, the endowment returns on payments made to tribes stands at 130 to 1.

Out of the remaining 33,200 acres (that hadn't been sold as of 1914), it has been reported, although not confirmed, that CSU still has 19,000 acres of land from the original grant. It has

also been reported but not confirmed that this land is generating \$5 million annually from oil and gas leases.

The action taken by CSU to commit \$500,000 per year to address the land grant issue is commendable; however, and justifiably, there are questions about its adequacy, given the resources that have been generated by the endowment created by selling and/or leasing stolen land. The following are recommendations for CSU to address its unique circumstances on a more suitable level:

- Public accounting (and subsequent accounting annually) of the endowment and/or any original land-grant holdings;
- Affected Tribes have a direct role in the allocation of these funds and assets;
- Free tuition, books, and living stipend for every eligible AI/AN student attending CSU at every level, including graduate and professional degrees;
- Create opportunities for 10 Native students to enter the Veterinarian School as cohorts every year; and
- A determination of land held by CSU that lies within the boundaries of the land taken illegally by the Fort Wise Treaty of 1861, with the intent to create future economic opportunities for the displaced Tribes returning to their homelands.

## **UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER**

The University of Colorado at Boulder is not a land-grant university. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that, based on the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, the area where Boulder, Colorado is located originally belonged to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. This treaty specifically identified all lands north of the Arkansas River as tribal land. Although the Colorado Territory proceeded to enact legislation regarding those lands in 1861 and beyond based upon the 1861 Fort Wise Treaty, the northern bands of Cheyenne and Arapaho (referred to as the Upper Arkansas bands) did not sign that treaty. Thus, these lands were acquired and transferred unlawfully.

In the year 1877, the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU) was opened, approximately a year after Colorado was declared a state in August of 1876. The initiation of CU was made possible through legislation passed by the Colorado territorial legislature in 1861, which allocated resources for the establishment of three state schools, with CU being intended as a comprehensive university to supplement existing institutions focused on agriculture, mining, and education in the state. Boulder and Canon City vied for the privilege to house CU, but ultimately Boulder emerged as the chosen location. On January 8, 1872, three individuals contributed the initial tracts of land (likely acquired through the Homestead Act) for the CU campus, measuring 21.98, 25.49, and 3.83 acres, respectively.

Historically, CU Boulder has an impressive record of overt anti-discriminatory actions. In 1922, the university president resisted extensive pressure from the Ku Klux Klan, a significant



force in Colorado at the time, to terminate all Catholic and Jewish faculty members. Notably, he also championed opposition to other forms of anti-Semitism. Furthermore, CU Boulder served as a ground-breaking institution by appointing a female professor, Mary Rippon, who commenced her instruction of German and French in 1878 and maintained a distinguished presence within the campus community until her retirement in 1909.

## **OYATE INDIAN CLUB**

In the 1960s, the university administration allocated funds towards the implementation of a financial aid program specifically for Native American students, with the aim of facilitating their enrollment and academic success. Concurrently, student activists joined forces to establish the Student Crusade for Amerind Rights (SCAR), a temporary organization formed as a response to the prevailing climate of protest. SCAR sought to advocate for Native American rights by fostering Native representation in student enrollment, curriculum development, and protection of student rights. The group also sought to establish an inclusive and welcoming environment for future Native American students.

In 1973, the Oyate Indian Club emerged as a recognized entity in the University of Colorado Student Directories. It appears that Oyate was established partly to carry on the work initiated by SCAR. However, the club also aimed to support Native American students in their transition to the university environment and foster their engagement with the AI/AN community on campus. Over time, Oyate, now called the Oyate Native American and Indigenous Student Organization, has continued to operate as a resource center providing guidance and assistance to Native American and Indigenous students.

## **AMERICAN INDIAN UPWARD BOUND**

In the year 2021, CU Boulder Upward Bound (CUUB) commemorated four decades of providing assistance to Native pre-college students through its comprehensive year-round initiatives. Upward Bound, one of the TRIO pre-college outreach programs supported by the federal government, was established during the tenure of President Johnson in 1965 as part of the “War on Poverty” with the aim of facilitating high school graduation and college attendance for first-generation and economically disadvantaged students. CU Boulder’s Upward Bound program for AI/AN students holds the distinction of being the institution’s longest-standing pre-college outreach initiative. It is one among numerous programs offered by the Office of Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement (ODECE) that cater to middle and high school students, catering to approximately 1,400 low-income, first-generation students and their families from locations within and beyond the state. Since securing its initial federal Upward Bound grant in 1981, CU Boulder’s program has collaborated with over 4,000 Native high school students hailing from various tribal nations across the United States. Currently, the program is engaged with six tribal nations situated in Colorado, New Mexico, South Dakota,

Arizona, and Utah, encompassing the Jemez Pueblo, Navajo Nation, Pine Ridge Reservation, Ramah Navajo Reservation, Southern Ute Reservation, and Ute Mountain Ute Community.

The impact has been substantial, with CU Boulder Upward Bound students demonstrating an impressive graduation and college enrollment rate of approximately 76%. In comparison, the overall national statistics indicate that approximately 74% of AI/AN students graduate from public high school; however, only 24% of this group attend college, as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics.

### **EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS**

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 brought about three programs that received federal funding: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. Together, these programs became known as TRIO. Throughout the years, TRIO has been enhanced and expanded in order to offer a greater variety of services and assist a larger number of students in need.

In 1972, the Education Opportunity Centers (EOC) were added to the TRIO programs. The Educational Opportunity Centers programs offer counseling and valuable information about college admissions to individuals who are interested in pursuing or furthering their education. Additionally, the program helps participants enhance their financial and economic knowledge. A key aim of the program is to guide individuals in understanding their financial aid options, including important skills for financial planning, and to provide support during the application process. Ultimately, the EOC program aims to boost the number of adults who enroll in post-secondary education institutions.

CU Boulder was one of the first higher education institutions in Colorado to fully embrace the implementation of Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP). In the year 1970, the university introduced its first American Indian EOP and Asian American EOP. Following suit, the University of Colorado at Denver also established similar programs in the year 1972. The primary objective of these programs was to provide mentorship and comprehensive academic support to these students, specifically targeting first-generation students who were at risk of dropping out. Over the years, these programs have demonstrated that a well-structured combination of challenging academics and intensive support can propel vulnerable students towards success, particularly during their initial year in college. As a result, these students often achieve higher graduation rates than their peers. Over the course of time, numerous Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP) have evolved to extend their scope from offering solely student support services to incorporating specialized coursework in disciplines such as Ethnic Studies, Native American Studies, and African American Studies, among others.

At present, the Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies (CNAIS) at CU Boulder serves as an academic and social hub for Native students and faculty. According to the CNAIS website, the center engages in collaborative research endeavors that focus on regional and global Indigenous knowledge, promoting a diverse array of projects designed to foster

meaningful dialogues within Colorado and on a global scale. As part of its offerings, CU Boulder CNAIS provides the option to pursue a graduate or undergraduate level certificate in Native American and Indigenous Studies.

## **CURRENT DATA**

Historically, CU Boulder has faced challenges in achieving a significantly diverse student body. This is also reflected in its endeavors to implement programs that support Native students, which have resulted in a notably low representation of Native students at CU, typically staying at below 1% of the total student population. However, there are indications of a potential shift in this trend. As of the 2023-2024 academic year, CU Boulder's student enrollment stands at 37,153, with 27% of the students identifying as students of color. This breakdown is as follows: 1.5% American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN); 9.5% Asian American; 2.7% Black/African American; and 12.6% Hispanic/Latino.

Another noteworthy change over this past year has been the creation of a new leadership position, Associate Vice Chancellor of Native American Affairs. According to the university, the main purpose of this position is to improve relationships with Native American communities and contribute to the growth and development of Native and Indigenous communities and studies on the Boulder campus. The university asserts that this newly formed position is a direct result of acknowledging the diverse and complicated tribal history of the area.

## **WARD CHURCHILL**

In 2007, Ward Churchill, a professor who held a tenured position at CU Boulder and was acknowledged as Native American, was fired after being found guilty of plagiarism, as well as fabricating and falsifying evidence to support his claims that the United States government played a part in the genocide of Native Americans. What brought attention to Churchill was his essay written on September 12, 2001, in which he referred to the victims of the World Trade Center attack as "little Eichmanns." This particular essay, titled "Some People Push Back," went unnoticed for four years until 2005 when faculty and administrators at Hamilton College in New York discovered and shared it. From there, it gained widespread attention, going viral and sparking continuous media commentary for months.

Starting in February 2005, there was an intense and widespread debate among the public. Politicians, media figures, and ordinary citizens voiced their strong opinions, demanding that Churchill be fired by the University. They even threatened to stop providing both state funding and private donations. The University, however, recognized that Churchill had the right to express his views, as protected by the First Amendment. Therefore, they couldn't dismiss him solely based on his publication of what many considered to be an offensive comment about innocent Americans. In 2007, after a university investigation, Churchill's employment was terminated based upon the findings that he engaged in fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism in his published works.

Although Churchill lost his appeal to have his employment with CU Boulder reinstated, a civil jury in 2009 did find that he had been unjustly terminated. Additionally, a 2011 investigation by the Colorado Conference of the American Association University Professors concluded that the allegations against Churchill for fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism are almost entirely false or misleading and that he had been fired more for his controversial political views than anything else.

During his time at CU, Churchill was highly successful in his academic, teaching, and service pursuits, surpassing any other faculty member in terms of publications and recognition. Additionally, he was instrumental in raising funds for the university, bringing in an impressive \$10 million in federal funds between 1978 and 1986. However, Churchill also faced controversy in the field of American Indian Studies, with some Native scholars expressing both admiration and disapproval of his work. Several Native educators at other universities raised concerns about the legitimacy of some of Churchill's writings on Native history, while other Native community members questioned his Native American heritage, accusing him of being a "fake Indian" — meaning that not only was Churchill not an enrolled member of a tribe, but that he had no connection to any tribal community in which he also had ancestry.

In 1994, the chancellor of CU Boulder, James Corbridge, responded to a formal complaint about Churchill's ethnicity by stating that the university's policy had always been that a person's race or ethnicity could be self-proven. Additionally, he mentioned that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission believed that the most reliable way to determine someone's racial group is through observation and self-identification. Therefore, Churchill's ethnicity did not affect his employment.

When the "Some People Push Back" controversy first started, the current CU chancellor, Phil DiStefano, accused Churchill of "ethnic fraud," claiming that he misrepresented his Native American heritage. Although the university did not pursue this accusation further, it quickly caught the attention of the media. Many news outlets published stories questioning Churchill's Native American ancestry, and he was asked repeatedly to prove his heritage. Tribal officials also had to get involved in the discussion. The controversy had a detrimental effect on the University of Colorado system as a whole, especially for other Native American faculty and staff members, who felt as if they were under scrutiny and being viewed with suspicion as well.

## **BROADER IMPLICATIONS**

Determining who is considered a genuine Indian is complicated and difficult to navigate. The federal government defines an Indian as someone who is officially acknowledged as being a member of a federally recognized tribe. This definition is primarily political in nature, as it involves formal enrollment and citizenship within Native Nations. Moreover, for federally recognized tribes, this definition is an acknowledgement of those rights that were retained as the original inhabitants of this land; affirms tribal sovereignty; and confirms the govern-

ment-to-government relationship between tribal governments and the U.S. government.

There is another perspective that believes the political definition is too restrictive. It argues that it leaves out a majority of Americans with Native ancestry who did not grow up within their tribal community. These individuals have lost their connection to their roots due to deliberate federal Indian policies spanning 200 years. These policies were intentionally designed and implemented to uproot families, sever familial bonds, and erode the cultures, languages, and belief systems of Native Americans. This perspective points more toward the broader term of identity as it relates to community relationships and connections.

This matter is highly complex and possesses the capability to cause profound consequences not only for individuals but for institutions as well. The increasing presence of individuals who self-identify as Native Americans has raised concerns related to both ethnic fraud and cultural appropriation. Ethnic fraud or race shifting is characterized by the use of fictional ancestry in order to benefit from identifying as an Indian, whether it be for personal, economic, cultural, or professional gain. This deceptive practice is well-documented among non-Native individuals, most commonly of Euro-American descent. Further, cultural appropriation occurs when non-Native individuals appropriate and use the artifacts, ceremonial rituals, social expressions, and knowledge of Native peoples without obtaining permission. Some have argued that race shifting is the ultimate form of cultural appropriation.

Since the 1960s, there has been a significant proliferation of individuals asserting their descent from Native American or First Nations Canadian ancestry, particularly in the disciplines of arts, education, and politics. A considerable number of individuals, whose Native American ancestry raises doubts, are presently employed as educators, researchers, and authors in various colleges and universities in Colorado, including the University of Colorado system. Although many of these individuals may frequently mention anecdotes about their Native American heritage from their upbringing, they are often unable to identify a single ancestor who was officially recognized as a citizen of a tribal nation. The biggest concern lies in the fact that these same individuals are engaged in research activities, assuming authoritative roles on matters related to Native American issues and profiting from their self-proclaimed Native American identity through speaking engagements and the publication of scholarly works. Additionally, for every one of these individuals who is hired into these positions, that is often one less space available for an actual Native American professional.

In the past, Native communities have been responsible for exposing and warning others about individuals pretending to be part of their community. However, as Native Americans and their issues have become more understood by the wider world there has been an increased awareness and recognition of the destructive nature of ethnic fraud.

## **UNIVERSITY OF DENVER**

The University of Denver (DU) is a private research university located in Denver, Colorado. It was established in 1864, making it the oldest independent private university in the

Rocky Mountain region of the United States<sup>1</sup>. DU is known for its high research activity, being classified as an “R1: Doctoral University”<sup>2</sup>. The university enrolls around 5,700 undergraduate students and 7,200 graduate students<sup>3</sup>. Situated on a 125-acre main campus, which is also an arboretum, the university is located about five miles south of downtown Denver. Additionally, there is a 720-acre Kennedy Mountain Campus in Larimer County, approximately 110 miles northwest of Denver<sup>4</sup>.

In March 1864, John Evans, a former governor of the Colorado Territory and appointed by President Abraham Lincoln, founded the Colorado Seminary in Denver<sup>5</sup>. At that time, Denver was a mining camp. Evans, who was also the governor and superintendent of Indian affairs for the Colorado Territory, held co-responsibility for the Sand Creek Massacre in November 1864<sup>6</sup>. The massacre was carried out by Colonel John Chivington, who later became a member of the university’s original board of directors<sup>7</sup>. Initially, the school was planned to be called the Denver Seminary, but the name was changed before the charter was obtained<sup>8</sup>.

When it was established, the seminary was not affiliated with any specific religious group and was managed by the Methodist Episcopal Church<sup>9</sup>. It faced difficulties during its early years. In 1880, it was renamed the University of Denver. The initial buildings of the university were in downtown Denver during the 1860s and 1870s. However, concerns arose that the chaotic atmosphere of Denver’s frontier town was not conducive to a proper educational environment<sup>10</sup>. As a result, the university moved to its current campus, which was constructed on land that was donated by a local farmer (who most likely acquired the land through the Homestead Act). This new location was situated around seven miles south of downtown. The university thrived and expanded alongside the city’s growth, mainly attracting students from the surrounding region before World War II<sup>11</sup>. The post-war era saw a significant increase in enrollment, thanks to the large number of G.I. Bill students. This surge in students pushed the university’s enrollment over 13,000, the highest it has ever been, and also helped to enhance the university’s reputation on a national scale<sup>12</sup>.

According to the university’s website, beginning in 2013, DU pledged to learn about and acknowledge its complicated past, as well as the role of its founder, John Evans, in the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre<sup>13</sup>. This dark history still affects the university’s connections with Native American communities. A team of DU faculty members established the John Evans Study Committee, despite receiving limited support from the university<sup>14</sup>. The committee conducted research, wrote reports, and reached out to others to delve into the university’s history, specifically the events surrounding its establishment<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, they offered valuable suggestions on how DU could enhance its involvement with and assistance to Native American and Indigenous community members<sup>16</sup>.

In 2016, DU established the Native American Inclusivity Task Force. This task force provided a detailed plan to expand on the recommendations of the John Evans Committee. In early 2017, the university formed formal partnerships with the Northern Cheyenne, Southern Cheyenne, and Arapaho Nations through the Native American Community Advisory Board<sup>17</sup>.

These partnerships led to their national flags being raised in the Driscoll Student Union in April 2018.

DU has continued its efforts to support Native American and Indigenous communities. These initiatives aim to increase access to a DU education through financial aid and support<sup>18</sup>. The university is also working on addressing the recruitment and retention of Native American and Indigenous faculty and staff<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, they are planning to build a Sand Creek Massacre memorial on campus and to create a permanent interior exhibit with curricula on DU's history<sup>20</sup>. Additionally, DU is exploring the possibility of establishing a Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies.

Despite the university's continuous initiatives to address its historical origins and to create a more inclusive environment to attract a more diverse student population, an enrollment disparity persists at DU with regards to Native American students. In the year 2021, out of a total student body of 14,130 individuals, incorporating both full-time and part-time students, a mere 88 students (.6%) identified themselves as American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian<sup>21</sup>. However, once AI/AN students are there, especially female Native students, they have demonstrated that they can do well. In 2021 there was a 100% graduation rate of AI/AN female students, the highest of any other demographic (subgroups with five or more graduating students)<sup>22</sup>.

## **FORT LEWIS COLLEGE**

The first Fort Lewis army post was built in Pagosa Springs, Colorado in 1878, but it was moved to Hesperus, Colorado on the southern slopes of the La Plata Mountains in 1880. It was decommissioned as a fort in 1891 and transformed into a federal off-reservation boarding school. In 1911, the land and buildings of the fort in Hesperus were given to the state of Colorado by the federal government to create a high school focusing on agriculture and mechanical arts. The deed had two conditions: 1) the land had to be used for an educational institution; and 2) Native American students had to be admitted for free and treated equally with white students in perpetuity. The school has followed these conditions for the past century. In the 1930s, the high school expanded into a two-year college, and in 1948, it became Fort Lewis A&M College, which was controlled by the State Board of Agriculture. The college offered various courses including agriculture, forestry, engineering, veterinary science, and home economics<sup>23</sup>.

Fort Lewis experienced a period of growth and changes in 1956. It relocated from Hesperus to its current location, Reservoir Hill in Durango. This move allowed Fort Lewis College (FLC) to become a four-year institution and award its first bachelor's degrees in 1964. During the same year, Fort Lewis College became separate from the State Board of Agriculture and abandoned the name "A&M". Later on, in 1995, the college joined the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges and in 2002, it became independent from the Colorado State University system by establishing its own Board of Trustees. In 2005, the admission standards for Fort

Lewis College were raised by the Colorado state legislature, making it a “selective” college — meaning that only a certain percentage of applicants are accepted<sup>24</sup>.

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education recognized Fort Lewis as one of the six non-tribal colleges serving Native Americans. The college has a distinctive history, starting as a military fort and later becoming an Indian boarding school and state public school. Since 1911, it has been committed to offering a free education to qualified Native American students. As a result, Fort Lewis College now leads the nation in awarding degrees to Native American students. Approximately 26% of all degrees granted by the college are earned by Native American students<sup>25</sup>.

Typically, approximately half of the Native students enrolled in Colorado colleges/universities attend Fort Lewis College<sup>26</sup>. In 2023, Fort Lewis had a total student population 3,320 and 27% (897 students) were Native American<sup>27</sup>. FLC is recognized as the top baccalaureate institution in the country for granting STEM degrees and baccalaureate degrees to Native American students<sup>28</sup>. Additionally, the college is ranked second in the nation for the number of Native American students attending a non-tribal college or university, as well as the percentage of American Indian students who successfully obtain bachelor’s degrees<sup>29</sup>.

### **NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAMMING**

Fort Lewis offers both a major and minor in Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS). According to their website, the NAIS program confirms that Indigenous Peoples are the original inhabitants of the land<sup>30</sup>. The curriculum is based on the perspectives and beliefs of Indigenous communities. Students learn the historical and current U.S. policies that influence tribal sovereignty, governance, and tribal self-governance<sup>31</sup>.

Additionally, the Native American Center (NAC) has academic, cultural, social, and transitional support for students<sup>32</sup>. Fort Lewis also has initiatives focused on issues that are important to Native Americans like the All Our Kin Collective, which was started by the college to help address the loss of Native languages<sup>33</sup>.

### **NATIVE AMERICAN TUITION WAIVER**

As mentioned above when Fort Lewis was turned over to the state of Colorado by the federal government, it was under two conditions: 1) that the land would be used for an educational institution; and 2) “to be maintained as an institution of learning to which Indian students will be admitted free of tuition and on an equality with white students” in perpetuity. In response, since 1911, Fort Lewis has always been an educational institution and has always offered a tuition waiver to all eligible Native American students.

Up until 2022, Fort Lewis used the federal definition to define who was eligible for a tuition waiver. The federal definition is as follows:



Federal statutory definition found at U.S.C. §25-14-479 — “Indians” is “all persons of Indian descent who are members of any recognized Indian tribe now under Federal jurisdiction, and all persons who are descendants of such members who were, on June 1, 1934, residing within the present boundaries of any Indian reservation, and shall further include all other persons of one-half or more Indian blood. For the purposes of this Act, Eskimos and other aboriginal peoples of Alaska shall be considered Indians. The term “tribe” wherever used in this Act shall be construed to refer to any Indian tribe, organized band, pueblo, or the Indians residing on one reservation. The words “adult Indians” wherever used in this Act shall be construed to refer to Indians who have attained the age of twenty-one years<sup>34</sup>.”

Thus, anyone who is an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe or anyone who is a descendant of an enrolled member who was living on a reservation on June 1, 1934, or who is one-half of more Indian blood is considered eligible for the tuition waiver.

Following the federal definition seems to make sense for two reasons: 1) in recognition of the special trust relationship that tribes have with the federal government; and 2) in recognition of meeting the conditions of the contract between the state of Colorado and federal government that was signed in 1911.

In 2022, Fort Lewis enacted a changed definition of eligibility for the tuition waiver. According to their public statement<sup>35</sup>, it was a decision made by the FLC President’s cabinet, Board of Trustees Chair, and Admission and Diversity Affairs Offices after receiving input from the college’s Tribal Advisory members and after reviewing other institutions’ tuition waivers and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) documents.

The statement asserts that the Native American Tuition Waiver’s “revised criteria require admitted students to be enrolled citizens or the children of an enrolled citizen of an American Indian Tribal Nation or Alaska Native Village recognized by the U.S. federal government.”<sup>36</sup>

The statement indicates that the decision was determined by two factors. Primarily, that the federal definition of “Indian” uses outdated and offensive terminology. Secondly, employing such criteria does not align with Fort Lewis’s dedication to maintaining and enhancing mutually beneficial connections with tribal nations and respecting their inherent right to self-governance by inadvertently imposing a narrow definition of Native American identity.

This public statement is dated January 2, 2024, despite the policy being implemented in 2022. The reason for this two-year delay is mostly likely due to opposition from a handful of stakeholders who are challenging both the policy itself and the way it was put into effect<sup>37</sup>. These stakeholders are raising concerns about whether Fort Lewis has the authority to modify the definition, especially in light of a past federal court case that Fort Lewis lost in 1971 (please refer to the details below). They are also questioning the lack of transparency during the decision-making process. While Fort Lewis argues that they engaged in discussions with

various tribal leaders, tribal members, and community members, these stakeholders argue that there was no opportunity for public comments, announcements, explanations, or publication before the policy change was made. They further claim that the policy was never discussed during any public Board of Trustees meeting.

Although the approximate 500 word statement by FLC repeatedly mentions honoring tribal sovereignty and the right of tribes to determine their own citizenship, there is more likely a financial reason behind this change in policy than anything else. Back in 2018, it was estimated that the state of Colorado was paying around \$13 million per year to cover the tuition waiver, which was exacerbated by the fact that 85% of the Native American student body was made up of students who were from out-of-state<sup>38</sup>. Meaning that Colorado was having to cover out-of-state tuition for the majority of these waivers. This has been the case for a long time and continues to be the case.

The state of Colorado has been struggling with this particular issue for quite some time. Since the early 1970s, both Fort Lewis and the state have made multiple efforts to escape their responsibility of providing tuition waivers. In 1971, the state legislature passed a law that restricted the tuition waivers exclusively to residents of Colorado<sup>39</sup>. However, two out-of-state students disagreed with this law and took the matter to federal court, suing the state of Colorado and Fort Lewis<sup>40</sup>. The U.S. District Court sided with the students, stating that all Indian students who were qualified should be admitted without paying tuition<sup>41</sup>. As a result, the law was repealed.

The next attempt came in 2010, when the former president of Fort Lewis made an aggressive effort to promote a federal law requiring the U.S. Department of Education to cover tuition expenses for out-of-state Native American students at the current approved level<sup>42</sup>. Meanwhile, the state would still be responsible for covering tuition costs for Native American students who are residents. This tuition waiver bill, supported by Colorado Sens. Michael Bennet and Mark Udall, and Rep. Scott Tipton of Cortez, was introduced in both houses that year and had 21 co-sponsors. It also received support from the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) and other Native organizations<sup>43</sup>. Despite multiple revisions since its initial proposal, this law has not been passed yet. As of 2022, the federal government has not provided any support for covering the tuition waivers for Native American students at Fort Lewis.

Throughout the process, numerous individuals and organizations such as student groups, faculty members, tribal officials, and legal experts have expressed their opposition to these proposals. Their argument is that Colorado's contractual obligations to provide free admittance to Native American students should be seen as separate from the federal government's responsibility to educate Native individuals<sup>44</sup>. Nonetheless, both the state of Colorado and Fort Lewis appear to be determined to continue their efforts. As recently as 2019, Colorado state representatives and the current president of Fort Lewis introduced a bill urging the federal government to contribute a portion of the Native American tuition waivers' expenses<sup>45</sup>.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

### THE ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

In 1970, a group of trailblazing Native American philosophers, writers, researchers, scholars, traditional historians, artists, and educators came together at Princeton University to discuss, analyze, and provide recommendations for the development of Native American Studies in higher education institutions<sup>46</sup>. This powerful group included Dr. N. Scott Momaday, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Vine Deloria, Jr., Beatrice Medicine, Dr. Alfonso Ortiz and others. The primary objective of these deliberations was to affirm that Native Americans are not solely the victims of historical trauma, but also the beneficiaries of extensive repositories of knowledge pertaining to this continent and the universe<sup>47</sup>. These stores of knowledge, previously disregarded within the larger context of European colonization and education, lay dormant, waiting to be acknowledged.

These Native scholars believed that for an academic discipline to exist, the intellectual knowledge possessed by the Native people must be organized, regulated, and shared within the community<sup>48</sup>. This knowledge, which is found in the oral traditions of the Native cultures, is closely tied to language and geography. It encompasses ancient cultures that have a strong belief in not exploiting nature for personal gain. It is believed that the origins of everything can be traced back to the oral traditions of the First Nations and other Indigenous societies, as well as Mother Earth and specific geographical locations<sup>49</sup>. Within these traditions, there is an underlying theory present in the mythologies of origin. This knowledge gives rise to principles, general concepts, and factual information that form an implicit ideology<sup>50</sup>. If properly defined, this ideology can bring unity and motivation to the people who possess this knowledge. Therefore, the development of Native American Studies as an academic discipline is driven by the need to protect tribal sovereignty within the United States<sup>51</sup>.

This approach is considered a significant shift away from the anthropological and ethnological methods that have traditionally examined cultural materialism and viewed other cultures from an external perspective using the scientific method<sup>52</sup>. This departure has played a crucial role in the ongoing efforts to establish autonomy within the discipline.

The development of disciplinary principles such as sovereignty and Indigeneity should be influenced by theories focusing on specific tribes, nation-to-nation relationships, and Pan-Indian unity<sup>53</sup>. Different types of knowledge, including general, specialized, and applied, should be incorporated into specific course designs<sup>54</sup>. The discipline should be aimed at studying American Indians from an internal perspective, specifically focusing on the cultures and history of First Nations. By using the term “endogenous”, which refers to what originates, grows or develops from within<sup>55</sup>, the discipline seeks to differentiate itself from others by emphasizing that it emerges from within Native communities, encompassing their diverse enclaves, languages, and experiences. It also aims to challenge the approach of seeking truth through separation that has traditionally been followed by disciplines that have focused on

studying Native Americans<sup>56</sup>.

It was articulated during this gathering that simply having a collection of courses does not constitute an academic discipline. Additionally, studying “cultural conflict” from an interdisciplinary perspective should not be the sole focus of this work<sup>57</sup>. It was also understood that focusing on the study and comprehension of the history of Indian education among Native peoples in the United States is also not sufficient<sup>58</sup>. Furthermore, a basic set of undergraduate courses in Native American Studies, including Introduction to Native American Studies, Federal Indian Policy, and Contemporary Indian Issues, Language and Literature(s), with electives in history, anthropology, religion, sociology, and art, is not comprehensive enough to encompass the vast knowledge, experiences, and understanding that Native Americans possess about this continent and the universe<sup>59</sup>.

## ENDNOTES

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