

Boarding School Abuses and the Case for Reparations

The boarding school system originated in the seventeenth century, when John Eliot, a Puritan missionary in Massachusetts, erected “praying towns” for American Indians. Eliot separated Natives from their communities to receive Christian “civilizing” instruction. Colonists soon concluded that children should be targeted for these efforts, because they believed adults were too set in their ways to become Christianized. Jesuit priests began developing schools for Indian children along the St. Lawrence River in the seventeenth century.

The boarding school system became more formalized under Grant’s Peace Policy in 1869. The goal of this federal policy was to turn over the administration of Indian reservations to Christian denominations, and Congress set aside funds to erect school facilities to be run by churches and missionary societies. These facilities were a combination of day and boarding schools erected on Indian reservations. They continue to exist to this day.

In 1879, the first off-reservation boarding school, Carlisle Indian School, was founded by Richard Pratt in Pennsylvania. He argued that as long as boarding schools were primarily situated

on reservations, it would be too easy for children to run away from school and the efforts to assimilate Indian children into boarding schools would be reversed when children returned to their families during the summer. He proposed a policy which mandated that children be taken far from their homes at an early age and not returned until they were young adults. By 1909, twenty-five off-reservation boarding schools, 157 on-reservation boarding schools, and 307 day schools were in operation.¹ Eventually, more than 100,000 Native children were forced into attending these schools. According to Pratt, the stated rationale of the policy was to "kill the Indian and save the man."

Within the context of the white debate at the time, Richard Pratt was actually a friend of the Indians. That is, U.S. colonists, in their attempt to end Native control over their land, generally came up with two policies to address the "Indian problem." Some advocated outright physical extermination of Native peoples. Meanwhile, the "friends" of the Indians, such as Pratt, advocated cultural rather than physical genocide. Carl Schurz, a former commissioner of Indian affairs, concluded that Native peoples had "this stern alternative: extermination or civilization."² Henry Pancoast, a Philadelphia lawyer, advocated a similar policy in 1882: "We must either butcher them or civilize them, and what we do we must do quickly."³

When Pratt founded off-reservation boarding schools, he espoused a "more sensitive" attitude. "Transfer the savage-born infant to the surroundings of civilization, and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit," he said.⁴ He modeled Carlisle on a school he developed in Fort Marion Prison in Florida from 1875 to 1878, where 72 Native prisoners of war were held. There he had developed a variety of programs designed to encourage these prisoners to assimilate into white society. From this experience, Pratt developed a plan to separate children from their parents, inculcate Christianity and white cultural values, and encourage/force them to assimilate into the dominant society through off-reservation schools.

Attendance at these boarding schools was mandatory, and children from tribes across the U.S. were forcibly taken from their homes for the majority of the year. Parents who resisted were

imprisoned. For instance, in 1895, 19 Hopi men were imprisoned in Alcatraz for refusing to send their children to boarding schools.⁵ Indian children were forced to worship as Christians and speak English at these schools. Native traditions and languages were prohibited.⁶ Around 1935, when Commissioner John Collier ushered in an era of Indian reform known as "Indian Reorganization," most of the off-reservation boarding schools closed down and those that remained became less overtly assimilationist. (Today, there are eight off-reservation boarding schools and 52 federal BIA on-reservation boarding schools still open.)⁷

Of course, because of the racism in the U.S., Native peoples could never really assimilate into the dominant society. Instead, the consequence of this policy was to situate them at the bottom of the U.S. socioeconomic ladder. For the most part, schools prepared Native boys for manual labor or farming and Native girls for domestic work. Children were also involuntarily leased out to white homes as menial labor during the summers rather than sent back to their homes. Indian girls learned useful skills such as ironing, sewing, washing, serving raw oysters at cocktail parties, and making attractive flower arrangements, in order to transform them into middle-class housewives.⁸ As K. Tsianina Lomawaima points out, very few Native women were ever in a position to use these skills or become housewives.

An economic rationale of placing Indian women in domestic employment does not account for the centrality of domesticity training in their education. An ideological rationale more fully accounts for domesticity training: it was training in dispossession under the guise of domesticity, developing a habitus shaped by the messages of subservience and one's proper place.⁹

The primary role of this education for Indian girls was to inculcate patriarchal norms into Native communities so that women would lose their place of leadership in Native communities.

Some colonists supported boarding schools because they thought cultural genocide was more cost-effective than physical genocide. During his tenure as commissioner of Indian affairs, Carl Schurz concluded that it would cost only \$1,200 to school an Indian child for eight years. Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller argued that it would cost \$22 million to wage war against Indians

over a 10-year period, but would cost less than a quarter of that amount to educate 30,000 children for a year. Administrators of these schools ran them as inexpensively as possible. Children were given inadequate food and medical care, and were overcrowded in these schools. As a result, they routinely died from starvation and disease. In addition, children were often forced to do grueling work to raise money for the schools and salaries for the teachers and administrators.

Sexual, physical, and emotional abuse has been rampant, but boarding schools have refused to investigate, even when teachers were publicly accused by their students. In 1987, the FBI found that one teacher at the BIA-run Hopi day school in Arizona, John Boone, had sexually abused at least 142 boys, but the school's principal had never investigated any allegations of abuse.¹⁰ J.D. Todd had taught at a BIA school on the Navajo Reservation for 21 years before 12 children came forward with allegations of molestation against him. Paul Price taught at a North Carolina BIA school from 1971 to 1985 before he was arrested for assaulting boys. In all cases, the BIA supervisors had ignored complaints from the parents before the arrests. And in one case, Terry Hester admitted on his job application that he had been arrested for child sexual abuse. He was hired anyway at the Kaibito Boarding School on the Navajo Reservation, and was later convicted of sexual abuse against Navajo students. According to one former BIA school administrator in Arizona,

Child molestation at BIA schools is a dirty little secret and has been for years. I can't speak for other reservations, but I have talked to a lot of other BIA administrators who make the same kind of charges.¹¹

Despite the epidemic of sexual abuse in boarding schools, the BIA did not issue a policy on reporting sexual abuse until 1987 and did not issue a policy to strengthen the background checks of potential teachers until 1989.¹² The Indian Child Protection Act of 1990 was passed to provide a registry for sexual offenders in Indian country, mandate a reporting system, provide BIA and IHS rigid guidelines for doing background checks on prospective employees, and provide education to parents, school officials, and law enforcement on how to recognize sexual abuse. However, this

law was never sufficiently funded or implemented, and child sexual abuse rates have been dramatically increasing in Indian country while they have remained stable for the general population.¹³ Sexual predators know they can abuse Indian children with impunity. According to the *American Indian Report*: "A few years ago... a patient who had worked in a South Dakota-run facility where many of his victims were Indian children... was caught and acquitted... After [he] was released, he attacked three more kids and is now serving a 40-year sentence."¹⁴

On December 6, 2003, Cindy Sohappy was found dead in a holding cell in Chemawa Boarding School in Oregon, where she had been placed after she became intoxicated. She was supposed to be checked every 15 minutes, but no one checked on her for over three hours. At that point, she was found not breathing and declared dead a few minutes later. The U.S. attorney declined to charge the staff with involuntary manslaughter. Sohappy's mother is planning to sue the school. A videotape showed that no one checked on her when she started convulsing or stopped moving.¹⁵ School administrators had been warned for 15 years by IHS officials about the dangers of holding cells, but these warnings were ignored. Particularly troubling was that she and other young women who had histories of sexual assault, abuse, and suicide attempts were put in solitary confinement.¹⁶ The Haskell Cemetery in Lawrence, Kansas, near the Haskell Institute, a boarding school in the state, alone has 102 student graves, and at least 500 students died and were buried elsewhere.¹⁷

Canada developed a similar residential school system which operated from 1879 to 1986. In 1991, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs issued a report documenting abuses in residential schools. "Children were frequently beaten severely with whips, rods and fists, chained and shackled, bound hand and foot and locked in closets, basements, and bathrooms, and had their heads shaved or hair closely cropped."¹⁸ According to students at the Mohawk Institute at Brantford, Ontario:

I have seen Indian children having their faces rubbed in human excrement... The normal punishment for bedwetters... was to have his face rubbed in his own urine, and for those who tried to escape, nearly all were caught and brought back to face the music. They

were forced to run a gauntlet where they were struck with anything that was at hand.¹⁹

In 2001, a report issued by the Truth Commission on Genocide in Canada maintained that the mainline churches and the federal government were involved in the murder of over 50,000 Native children through this system. The list of offenses committed by church officials includes murder by beating, poisoning, hanging, starvation, strangulation, and medical experimentation. Torture was used to punish children for speaking Aboriginal languages. Children were involuntarily sterilized. In addition, the report found that clergy, police, and business and government officials were involved in maintaining pedophile rings using children from residential schools.²⁰ Former students at boarding schools also claim that some schoolgrounds contain unmarked graveyards of murdered babies born to Native girls who had been raped by priests and other church officials.²¹ Since this abuse has become public, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police has started a task force to investigate allegations of abuse in residential schools. By 2000, they had received 3,400 complaints against 170 suspects. Only five people were charged. By 2001, 16,000 Native people (which is 17 percent of living residential school alumni) had begun legal claims against the churches or government. Liability could run into billions of dollars, threatening some churches with bankruptcy.²²

While the Canadian government and some Canadian churches have taken minimal steps to address their involvement in this genocidal policy, the U.S. government has not assumed responsibility for its policy of genocide. For instance, when noted Native journalist, Tim Giago of Rosebud, South Dakota, wrote a book of poetry that addressed his nine-year history of abuse in Red Cloud Indian School, the priests expunged his records from the school and denied that he had attended the institution for more than six months. They completely expunged the records of another student who had been there 12 years, denying he had ever attended that institution.²³ Only in the past two years have U.S. churches made any effort to address this problem. Both the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church have passed resolutions recognizing the harms resulting from boarding

schools. The reason for this lack of acknowledgment on the part of the U.S. government and churches is that these abuses are not as well documented in the U.S. as they are in Canada. Many of the books on U.S. boarding schools do not document the more extreme atrocities that I have heard of directly from boarding school survivors.²⁴ These include medical experimentation, sexual assaults, babies being buried behind school walls, and torture. However, some of these abuses are finally being exposed in the literature.

Indian Child Welfare

It is also important to note that the abduction of Native children from their homes has continued through the foster care system. In 1978, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), which allows tribes to determine the placement of children taken from their homes. During the congressional hearings for this act, Congress reported that 25 percent of all Indian children were in either foster care, adopted homes, or boarding schools.²⁵

In Minnesota, Indian children were 500 percent more likely to be in foster care or adoptive care than non-Indian children; in South Dakota, Indian children were 1,600 percent more likely to be in foster or adoptive care; in Washington State, 1,900 percent more likely; and in Wisconsin, 1,600 percent more likely.²⁶ The hearings also found that the reasons children were taken from their homes were often vague and generally ethnocentric. In North Dakota, physical violence was present in only 1 percent of the cases. Reasons that might be given for removal included ones such as children were "running wild."²⁷ Native families were and are often targeted because they did not fit the dominant society's nuclear family norm. For instance, when Native children reside with multiple adults and family members in their extended families, the biological parents were and are often seen as "neglecting" their children. At the time of the hearings, 85 percent of Indian

children taken from their homes were put in white adoptive families or foster homes.²⁸

Since ICWA was put into place, some of these problems have been alleviated. Nonetheless, ICWA is not consistently enforced since many case workers are unaware of its provisions.²⁹ State courts are not allowed to deny transfer of a custody proceeding to tribal court without "good cause." However, examples of "good cause" cited by states has included the distance state witnesses would have to travel to attend tribal court (which of course is the same distance tribal witnesses have to travel to attend state courts). In one case, a 15-year-old Native man was held by the court for having abandoned his son, even though the Caucasian mother's family prevented the father from having contact with the son.³⁰ In December 2002, Alaska tribes sued the state of Alaska for violating the ICWA by not protecting Alaska Native children or working with tribes to determine their tribal status. As of 2002, 60 percent of the children who are in Alaska foster care are Native, while Natives are only 25 percent of the population.³¹

In addition, many Christian rights groups, such as the Christian Coalition, continue to organize against ICWA, arguing that ICWA makes it more difficult for Native women to pursue adoption and hence encourages them to have more abortions. This abduction of Indian children into the foster care system is a continuation of U.S. boarding school policies designed to "civilize" Native children.

Boarding Schools and Human Rights Violations

Abuses in U.S. and Canadian boarding schools clearly violated a number of human rights legal standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1994), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1951), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990).

Allegations of human rights violations can be filed with the U.N. for events that take place after the relevant treaty entered into force. However, exceptions are made if the event occurred before the effective date of the treaty but has continuing effects after that date. In the case of boarding schools, it is clear that Native communities continue to suffer devastating effects as a result of these policies, including physical, sexual, and emotional violence in Native communities; unemployment and underemployment in Native communities; increased suicide rates; increased substance abuse; loss of language and loss of religious and cultural traditions; increased depression and post-traumatic stress disorder; and increased child abuse.

Consequently, the U.S. should be required to make reparations to address the continuing effects of these human rights violations. While not all Native people viewed their boarding school experiences as negative, after the establishment of boarding schools in Native communities, abuse seemed to become endemic within Indian families. For instance, Randy Fred (Tshesht), a former boarding school student at Alberni Indian Residential School in Canada, says that children at his school began to mimic the abuse they were experiencing.³² "Without parental love and without parental role models students were not adequately equipped to fit into mainstream society," he says.³³ Since Father Harold McIntee of St. Joseph's residential school on the Alkali Lake reserve in British Columbia was convicted of sexual abuse in 1989, two of his victims have been convicted of sexual abuse charges. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs made the link between residential schools and the current dysfunctionality in Native communities:

Churches...share responsibility with government for the consequences of residential schools, which included not only individual cases of physical and sexual abuse but also the broader issue of cultural impacts:...the loss of language through forced English speaking, the loss of traditional ways of being on the land, the loss of parenting skills through the absence of four or five generations of children from Native communities, and the learned behaviour of despising Native identity.³⁴

I have attended several Native wellness workshops in which participants are asked to draw a family tree that shows the generation in their family in which violence, substance abuse, and other related problems develop. Almost invariably, these problems begin with the generation that first went to boarding school. As mentioned previously, while Native peoples generally understand the relationship between the establishment of boarding schools and the onset of violence in their communities, the relationship has not been documented in the U.S. to the extent that it has been in Canada.

In 2000, the Boarding School Healing Project was founded in the U.S. in support of activists demanding reparations for boarding school abuses. This project has important implications for addressing sexual violence in communities of color, and for supporting reparations struggles internationally.

The Boarding School Healing Project

The BSHP is a coalition of several Native and allied organizations around the country, including the Tribal Policy Institute, the Indigenous Women's Network, the American Indian Law Alliance, First Nations North and South, the Seventh Generation Fund, and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. The BSHP seeks to document abuses so Native communities can begin healing from boarding school abuses and demand justice from the U.S. government and churches. The four components of the project are healing, education, documentation, and accountability.

Healing. The primary goal of the project is to provide healing resources for survivors of boarding school abuse and trauma. Gerry Oleman of the Provincial Residential School Project in Vancouver reports that 22 men who disclosed sexual abuse and filed suit against Canadian residential schools in 1998 have committed suicide. Armed with this information, the BSHP concluded that a healing apparatus had to be put in place first, so when the issue is

publicly discussed, survivors have a place to go for support. The project has started developing support groups for survivors on reservations.

Education. An education program to encourage people to participate in the documentation/accountability process must also be developed. The BSHP holds multimedia educational events in interested communities to inform them about the project, the documentation process, and resources for healing. In addition, the BSHP is organizing the Boarding School Days of Remembrance to educate the larger public about this issue.

Documentation. The BSHP relies on a research-action model to document boarding school abuses. Researchers are recruited and trained from the community. To provide participants with time to reflect on their boarding school experiences and its impact on their lives, they are interviewed in a two-step process. This project is systematically ensuring that participants from all boarding schools and reservations in South Dakota are represented. For participants who are willing, the BSHP is video-documenting the interviews so they may be compiled into educational videos for Native communities in other areas. Through this process, the BSHP has found that many survivors often do not realize that what they have suffered was a human rights violation. For instance, some survivors who say that they were not abused often add that they saw abuse happen to other people. However, having to witness abuse is itself a human rights violation and an injury one can claim in U.S. courts as well.

At the end of the documentation process, the BSHP holds a meeting for the interviewees to discuss the results and provide a venue for them to consider how they would like to move forward. Part of the documentation process entails asking participants what types of remedies they would like to see from both churches and the U.S. government, so they can be involved in the political strategy as well.

Accountability. In 2003, a class action suit, *Zephier v. United States*, was filed against the U.S. government on behalf of all persons, or their executors and heirs, who were sexually, physically or mentally abused at Indian Boarding Schools operated

under the authority and auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the years 1890 to the present.

These plaintiffs asserted breach of treaty claims on behalf of members of all nations who have entered into treaties with the U.S. government containing "Bad Man clauses,"³⁵ as well as a breach of fiduciary duty claim on behalf of *all* Native individuals who have suffered physical, sexual, or psychological abuse at a federal government-mandated boarding school. Unfortunately no tribal governments or attorneys were consulted before this lawsuit was filed, despite its potential impact on the legal interpretation of treaties and all survivors of boarding school abuses. The case was dismissed in 2004 by the Federal Court of Claims. The plaintiffs are now filing a complaint with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (In Canada, accountability for boarding school abuses has taken the form of individual lawsuits against churches. This strategy has led to individualized, rather than group, struggle. The compensation, a relatively small amount per individual, does not do justice to the oppression and injury Native peoples have suffered.)

Since Native peoples are such a small percentage of the total U.S. population, they cannot be under any illusion that they can win a successful campaign on their own. And as I have argued elsewhere, Native peoples have led some of the most significant victories against multinational corporations and governments through creative coalition building, such as the successful struggles against Kerr-McGee in Oklahoma and Exxon in Wisconsin.³⁶ Coalition building is especially essential when considering some of the tensions indigenous peoples have had with African-descendant groups in the U.S. and abroad over reparations. Consequently, the BSHP held joint strategy sessions with activists in African American reparations struggles in 2004 to begin building relations for a stronger united front.

Boarding Schools and the Global Struggle for Reparations

You can have the mule; but the forty acres are ours.
— Pamela Kingfisher (Cherokee)

Pamela Kingfisher's comment, made in a dialogue between indigenous and African-descended peoples at the U.N. Conference Against Racism in 2000, encapsulates the strain between indigenous peoples and peoples of African descent over reparation issues. Although a wide variety of demands are articulated under the banner of "reparations," indigenous peoples generally oppose the demand that the U.S. government give land to African Americans and other peoples of color. From Native peoples' perspectives, it is unreasonable to petition the U.S. for land because the U.S. has no land to give—the land belongs to indigenous peoples. This disagreement was dramatically aired in March 2001 at the non-governmental Organization (NGO) preparatory meeting for the United Nations Conference on Racism in Quito, Ecuador which I participated in. At this meeting, Roma and African-descendant groups called for "self-determination over their ancestral landbases in the Americas." Of course, indigenous peoples took issue with this demand as it implicitly denied indigenous title to these same landbases.

Native activist Sherry Wilson describes similar tensions between some Native activists and the Republic of New Afrika, a group that calls for land titles in the U.S.—specifically, the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina—to be transferred to African Americans. At a preparatory meeting for the U.N. Conference Against Racism in Atlanta in 2000, a representative of the Republic of New Afrika stood up and said: "Welcome to the Republic of New Afrika." This greeting did not please the Cherokee peoples attending the meeting who regard Georgia as the ancestral land of the tribe, despite the forced relocation of many Cherokee to Oklahoma in the nineteenth century. Said Wilson:

I don't think any other people of color would object to reparations [for people] who were victims of slavery. I certainly would support that. I just don't think it's going to be somebody else's land though. That's like participating in the oppression of another person.³⁷

Another demand often made by reparations activists — for financial compensation to individual victims or descendants of victims of slavery or other forms of oppression — presents a barrier to indigenous peoples participating in this movement. To understand why, one must focus on the history of land-based struggles of Native peoples in the U.S.

The U.S. government has often offered financial compensation to tribes to compel them to extinguish land claims. During the 1940s and 1950s, the U.S. government pursued a policy of “termination” against Native nations, which was designed to eliminate the tribal status of Native peoples and therefore end their collective control over their lands. One policy element was compensation for outstanding land claims. In 1946, the U.S. government established the Indian Claims Commission (ICC), which was designed to adjudicate land claims. The ICC's bias was clear from the start, when it became apparent that the agency could deduct money spent by the U.S. government to massacre that tribe, or kidnap its children and put them into boarding school, from that tribe's award.

Tribes have often found that simply by the act of bringing their claims to the ICC, they have given up land title in the eyes of the U.S. government. The primary goal of the ICC was to settle land claims by providing financial compensation, thereby freeing the U.S. government from any ongoing treaty obligations with Native nations. Compensation only further consolidated U.S. government control over Native lands.

For example, in 1992 the Western Shoshone tribe in Nevada filed a claim with the ICC to have title to their lands, which was guaranteed under the 1868 Treaty of Ruby Valley, respected. At stake was the 24.5 million acres of land guaranteed to the Shoshone under this treaty. The Nevada Test Site has been located on this land since 1951. There have already been at least 650 underground nuclear explosions on Western Shoshone land, with 50 percent of these underground tests leaking radiation into the

atmosphere.³⁸ A lawyer named Ernest Wilkinson encouraged the Shoshone to take the case before the ICC. The land is worth more than \$41 billion, but the ICC settled the claim for \$21 million in 1962. According to the ICC, because the Shoshone lost their land in 1872, it was appropriate to compensate the tribe at 1872 prices. Wilkinson earned \$2.5 million for services rendered.

Not surprisingly, as a result of this history, Native activists are reluctant to join a movement whose common demand is financial compensation. For no matter how large the monetary settlement, ultimately compensation does not end the colonial relationship between the U.S. and indigenous nations. The struggle for native sovereignty is a struggle for control over land and resources, rather than financial compensation for past and continuing wrongs.

Despite these tensions, it is critical that indigenous peoples be part of a global movement for reparations. If we think about reparations less in terms of monetary compensation for social oppression and more in terms of a movement to transform the neocolonial economic relationships between the U.S. and people of color, indigenous peoples, and Global South countries, we see how critical this movement could be to all of us. Activists who frame the movement to cancel the Third World debt in reparations terms, for instance, help us to see how this strategy could fundamentally alter these relations. Consequently, it is important to move beyond disagreements that may exist between Native and African Americans on this issue so we can learn from the insights of our respective struggles.

As the history of neocolonialism shows us, we cannot achieve political sovereignty without economic sovereignty. And certainly one of the primary reasons why indigenous peoples in the U.S. often do not articulate sovereignty struggles in terms of political independence from the U.S. is because indigenous peoples know that without a solid economic infrastructure, which the U.S. government has systematically destroyed for most tribes (stereotypes about Indian gaming notwithstanding), political independence in and of itself could contribute to further economic devastation for Indian peoples. A successful struggle for sovereignty must incorporate a struggle for reparations.

However, for the reparations movement to be successful, national efforts must be simultaneously internationalized and pressure must be brought to bear on the U.S. The news about our efforts to struggle against U.S. policies will not reach activists in other countries unless we get that news to them ourselves. If we can expose U.S. racist policies to international activists, they'll be better positioned to challenge the U.S. claim that it is the protector of democracy abroad. As Doug McAdam documents in his study of the civil rights movement, the successes that racial justice activists have achieved have come in large part because the U.S. government wanted to avoid embarrassment in the global arena.³⁹

And the reparations struggle has been globalized by African American activists such as William Patterson and Paul Robeson, who brought charges of genocide against the U.S. to the U.N. In 1951, Patterson and Robeson joined with Eslanda Goode, Harry Haywood, Mary Church Terrell, Robert Treuhhaft, Jessica Mitford, and Louise Thompson to deliver a petition which charged the United States with genocide. "We Charge Genocide: The Crime of the Government Against the Negro People" exposed the government-supported conspiracy to deny Black people the right to vote, and documented hundreds of cases of murder, bombing, and torture. For instance, the petitioners provided evidence of the lynching murders of at least 10,000 black people since abolition. As reparations activists, we should continue the legacy of these pioneers, remembering that white supremacy is a global problem that requires a global response.

We should also frame reparations as a human rights issue rather than as a civil rights issue; human rights are recognized under international law to be inalienable and independent on any particular government structure. Furthermore, to rely solely on a constitutional framework reifies the legitimacy of the U.S. government, which is founded on the gross human rights violations of people of color and the continuing genocide of indigenous peoples. As anti-violence activists, this is precisely the struggle — forcing the U.S. to be accountable to international law rather than its own claims to power — we must be engaged in. And while we may use a variety of rhetorical and organizing tools, our overall strategy should not be premised on the notion that the U.S.

should or will always continue to exist. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 8.)

The BSHP contributes a feminist perspective to reparations struggles. That is, the sexual violence perpetrated by slave masters and by boarding school officials constitutes, in effect, state-sanctioned human rights violations. As a result of this systematic and long-term abuse, sexual and other forms of gender violence have been internalized *within* African American and Native American communities. Thus, our challenge as reparations activists is to create a strategy that addresses an insidious colonial legacy – violence within our communities. We must also generate an analysis that frames gender violence as a continuing effect of state-sanctioned human rights violations so we can, in turn, challenge the mainstream antiviolence movement to confront the role of the state. (See Chapter 7 for fuller discussion.)

The issue of boarding school abuses forces us to see the connections between state violence and interpersonal violence. Violence in our communities was introduced through boarding schools. We continue to perpetuate that violence through violence against women, child abuse, and homophobia. Similarly, much of the sexual violence in African American communities is the colonial legacy of slavery. That is, under the slavery system, Black women were deemed inherently rapable by slave masters who could violate them with impunity. Black men were also often forced by their masters to rape Black women. As scholar Traci West documents, the colonial ideology that Black women are inherently rapable is evidenced in popular culture, public support for Clarence Thomas and Mike Tyson and public scorn for their victims, and the astronomical rates of violence that Black women continue to face.⁴⁰

No amount or type of reparations will “decolonize” us if we do not address oppressive behaviors that we have internalized. Women of color have for too long been presented with the choice of prioritizing either racial justice or gender justice. Activists should ask what would reparations *really look like* for women of color who suffer the continuing effects of slavery and colonialism through interpersonal gender violence.

This project also highlights the importance of analyzing the interrelatedness of white supremacy and Christian imperialism. While many political liberals fight for the “separation of church and state” and complain about the George W. Bush administration’s support for faith-based initiatives, the reality has been that, for Native peoples in particular, there has never been a separation of church and state. Grant’s Peace Policy of 1869 turned Indian reservations over to church denominations for administrative control. Native religious traditions were banned. Even today, Native peoples still do not have constitutional protection for their spiritual practices.⁴¹

Colonialists saw the cultural assimilation and missionization processes as part of the same project. From their point of view, Indians not only lacked the Scripture, they lacked the language that would allow them to comprehend God. Complained Jonathan Edwards: “The Indian languages are extremely barbarous and barren, and very ill fitted for communicating things moral and divine, or even things speculative and abstract. In short, they are wholly unfit for a people possessed of civilization, knowledge, and refinement.”⁴² Missionaries also complained that indigenous languages were unable to communicate the concepts of “Lord, Saviour, salvation, sinner, justice, condemnation, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, grace, glory, and heaven.”⁴³ It is not sufficient, therefore, simply to have scriptures; the scriptures must be in a suitable language—and that language happens to be English. In the colonial imagination, to truly be Christian is to be white and vice versa. Thus, any struggle to dismantle white supremacy needs to incorporate a critique of Christian imperialism in its analysis.

Today, the effects of boarding school abuses continue to play out throughout indigenous communities, largely because these abuses have not been acknowledged or addressed by the larger society. As a result, silence continues within Native communities, preventing Native peoples from seeking support and healing as a result of the intergenerational trauma. Native peoples individualize the trauma they have suffered, thus contributing to increased shame and self-blame. If boarding school policies and the impact of these policies were recognized as human rights violations,

some of the shame attached to talking about these issues would be removed, and communities could begin to heal. We are already seeing the results of such work in Canada, but Native peoples in the U.S. have yet to benefit from this movement.

Conclusion

Articulating boarding school abuses from a reparations framework can be beneficial for all peoples, not just indigenous peoples. Many African American activists have expressed reluctance to work in coalition with other oppressed groups over the struggle for reparations because of the fear that the specific demands of African Americans will diminish in importance. Native people in turn have not organized to support the struggle for reparations for slavery and the vestiges of slavery. This lack of coalition-building only keeps white supremacy and colonialism in place.

The issue at stake is whether we want to formulate reparations as a reformist, and even potentially reactionary, demand, or as a radical demand for social transformation. A variety of platforms have been developed under the rubric of "reparations," and many of these demands can actually serve to *strengthen* the demands of white supremacy. Those demands that simply call for individual payments for human rights abuses under slavery do not fundamentally challenge the economic structures that keep people of color oppressed. In fact, they suggest that by simply paying a lump sum for the injustices it has perpetrated and continues to perpetrate, the U.S. can absolve itself of any responsibility to transform these institutionalized structures of white supremacy.

Radical African Americans and Native activists, however, are formulating demands that require us to fundamentally challenge the global economic system. For example, the BSHP is asking: Can we ask for land rather than monies? Can we call for the repeal of repressive legislation that undermines the sovereignty of Native nations?

By holding the U.S. government and U.S. churches accountable for boarding school abuses, Native peoples have an opportunity to demand adequate funding for healing services. Survivors should make their demands now, because the U.S. government is cutting tribally controlled education and social services programs and state governments are increasingly supporting "English-only" laws, which threaten the survival of indigenous languages.

We could also use a reparations framework to demonstrate that "services" provided by the U.S. government (health care, public assistance, education, etc.) are not services to be taken away in times of economic crisis or otherwise. Rather, these are reparations owed to communities of color for human rights violations on the part of the U.S. To make such radical demands effectively, it is clear that we need a global reparations movement that unites all colonized peoples.