

Analysis of the called it prairie light essay

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It is clear that most of the people that were involved in setting up the first Indian boarding schools, thought that assimilation and acculturation of Indian youth would indeed broaden the youth's horizons. Indians were thought to be uncivilized and primitive heathens.

Hence, the crusade began to make the Indians more civilized by taking them away from their tribal families while they were young, and sending them away to boarding schools to learn the ways of civilized Americans.

Broadening their horizons by having them absorbed "into our national life, with all the rights and privileges guaranteed to every other individual, the Indian to lose his identity as such, to give up his tribal relations and to be made to feel that he is an American citizen" (Loamier, 5). This all sounds quite noble if you were born white in the sass's and raised as a Christian, Protestant, or Catholic, after all, you were the supreme beings of the era, and everyone should behave like you, including the Indians. Well, as noble as it might have sounded to the white society at the time, history would paint a different picture in the proceeding decades. The Indian boarding schools were plagued with issues. The facilities lacked sanitary conditions, were overcrowded, and had low quality teaching staffs. The children that lived in them lacked proper medical care and were under nourished, over worked, poorly clothed, and harshly disciplined. Specifically, at Chocoholic, there was a "military regiment, manual labor and enforced uniformity" (Loamier, 7 & 8).

Ironically, even though Chocoholic had a strict regiment and a host of issues, many of the former students kept up correspondence with school officials that revealed an attachment and a high regard for the school. They wrote to

let the school staff know of their employment, how their families were doing, or just to tell them that they missed the school. Many of them expressed that they would like to go back to the school(Loamier, 25).

One would think, based on these letters, that Chocoholic was successful in assimilating some of the Indian students or maybe it was a really nice school. Why did some of the students wish to return to Chocoholic after they left? It's obvious that the conditions at the school were not very good, yet some of them spoke of returning to the school. The youths that attended Chocoholic came from poor families so the conditions at home were probably not very good either. In many cases Chocoholic was the only choice they had to get an education. Some of them actually wanted to go to Chocoholic for the reason of obtaining an education, although, most certainly they felt that it was their only choice and they had to go. Many of them spoke of being homesick and missing their families at first. But they soon built relationships with the other students and the other students became like family to them(Loamier, 44). These bonds were, no doubt, a contributing factor to why some of the youths wanted to return to the school.

A larger contributing factor was the regimental life the students were subjected to while at Chocoholic. Many of the youths wrote about the military like regiments that they were subjected to day in and day out. One student wrote " There were schedules all over the place. You had to have a schedule or you never would know where you belonged. It was hard when I left there because there were no schedules, there were no bells ringing and no whistles blowing, I didn't know what to do"(Loamier, 28).

So after being in an environment with a strict regiment for many years it's obviously going to be hard to adjust when that regiment no longer exists. The students of Chocoholic had basically been institutionalized, similar to convicts adjusting to life outside of prison, the students had to adjust to live outside of Chocoholic. Convicts often find themselves wanting to return to prison once they are out, because they can not adjust to life outside the prison walls. This institutionalizing was not an effective way to assimilate the Indian youth into the American culture. The use of the military like regiment and harsh disciplinary tactics at Chocoholic was a way to control the students and to render the students powerless. Another way that the school attempted to take power away from the Indians was by breaking family ties between the students and their families. Chocoholic would purposely recruit Indians from very far and remote places.

This made it difficult and most times impossible for the youth to see their families during the years that they were enrolled at the school. This allowed the school to have more control over the students and took the power away from the parents. Another way the school sought to take power away from the Indians was to teach the Indian youths to be subservient and euphemism to authority. This was the underlying agenda of the manual labor requirements at the school(Loamier, 81). Another thing the school attempted to take away from them was their Indian identity. In the early days of the school, they would use harsh discipline if the students spoke in their native tongue, performed any rituals of their tribes, or wore any of their native garments. The school didn't want the students to identify with their Indian

heritage and culture, as part of their plan to have the Indian youth absorbed into the American way of life.

Many of the Indian youths resisted the school's attempts to take away their Indian identity as well as resisting authority at the school. They rebelled by displaying their Indian-ones when they were able to escape supervision(Loamier, 130). The narratives of many of the youth speak of escaping to the outdoors during their unsupervised time, " the open prairie, creek, and woods"(Loamier, 135). The boys would go hunting with bow and arrows, and occasionally a rifle, if they could get one. They also trapped, fished, and cooked outdoors on a homemade stove.

They would even make little tom-toms out of tin cans and have stomp dances around a fire at night. Stomp dances held the boys together in a shared cultural context. " They also parched corn which symbolized united tribes, group belonging, and solidarity. These activities were a way for the students to " retain ties to their home cultures"(Loamier, 135-137).

These " narratives from the Chocoholic alumni revealed the ways that tribal identity remained central or took on new significance for students"(Loamier, 129-130), as demonstrated by the social activities that the youth spoke of. The school didn't succeed in taking away the youth's Indian identities. Chocoholic didn't succeed in taking away the youth's tribal ties but did they succeed in broadening the youth's horizons? Were the Indian youth assimilated and absorbed into our national life, with all the rights and privileges guaranteed to every other individual, after attending Chocoholic?

They did partially assimilate many of it's students by teaching them skills that they could use in a modern society.

The boys were taught trades such as construction, masonry, painting, and electrical.