

Title of Session: American Indian Studies

Moderator: Michael Wilson

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MichaelDW joined the room.

BJB2 cheers and waves hi to Michael

MichaelDW: Hi BJ. How are you tonight?

BJB2 pokes everyone to make sure they're still awake!

BJB2: doing fine, thanks. And you?

JeffC joined the room.

AngelaRP: still awake

MichaelDW: I'm great. I just finished pulling in a huge, 4 inch bass.

BJB2 grins...congratulations!

MichaelDW: The stream is beautiful, but the fish are small.

MichaelDW: Usually we begin with introductions, and then I answer any questions you might have, and then we go to the topic for the evening. Tonight it's boarding schools.

BJB2: Welcome to today's American Indian Studies discussion.

MichaelDW: My name is Mike Wilson. I'm a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I teach at the Univ. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee as an Associate Professor.

BJB2: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In. Michael has some fascinating information to share

BJB2: can you each please tell him where you are located and what you teach or hope to teach?

BJB2 . o O (Angela, I think you're the only one who's awake!)

AngelaRP: Hi, I am located in Houston TX and I hope to teach 2nd-4th grade

JeffC: I'm Jeff Cooper, also on Helpdesk here, in Forest Grove Oregon, always looking to learn something new.

AngelaRP: As in I am graduating on the 13th

BJB2: congratulations, Angela!

MichaelDW: Congratulations!

StefaniC: I am from Baytown Tx I am hop[ing] to teach 2-4 grade

StefaniC: I graduate on the 13th also

MichaelDW: Congrats to you as well.

MichaelDW: First, does anyone have any questions about anything Indian?

AngelaRP: Well, I do sort of

MichaelDW: OK.

AngelaRP: Last week we were studying about missions and my kids wanted to know why on earth the indians would have even gone to a mission to begin with

MichaelDW: That's a good question.

MichaelDW: It's related to the topic tonight.

AngelaRP: well great

StefaniC: I do, can you tell me how many different tribes are there?

MichaelDW: In some parts of the US, they were forced.

MichaelDW: Many of the California tribes, for instances, were rounded up and placed on missions.

MichaelDW: Some are called today the California Mission Band of Indians.

MichaelDW: The Californians did a merciless job of destroying tribes and cultures. California has a really terrible history with Indians.

MichaelDW: Later, the reservations were sometimes so poor that parents sent their kids to schools, hoping they would be fed and would survive.

MichaelDW: Boarding schools were always good for that -- a steady diet of good food and religion.

JeffC used to live a block away from Mission Dolores (the sunniest part of San Francisco). I remember doing a report on it in third grade.

MichaelDW: And of course many Indians came to be Christians over time, and wanted their children raised there.

AngelaRP: I was referring more to before the US was formed and the Spanish were in Texas but this is good information too.

MichaelDW: I'm not 100 percent sure about the Spaniards in Texas. In New Mexico and Arizona, they were quite controlling.

AngelaRP: Our text books don't print it that way, I think that is why my students and I are so confused

MichaelDW: So in many instances, families did send their kids to mission schools, but it's a shame that they were put in such a situation that they felt that was their children's best chance.

MichaelDW: Text books often offer a particular view of history.

MichaelDW: I think it must be said that American schools, like most schools, teach citizenship as well as the three Rs. It's not often that one finds information terribly critical of the history of the US.

MichaelDW: I think that's changing. My own kids' text books have some good information.

JeffC: Do you think that's true today as far as the treatment of American Indians is concerned? I think it's pretty common knowledge now how poorly they were treated.

MichaelDW: My own students in college are surprised and in some cases angry that they weren't told the truth in their high schools.

MichaelDW: That's interesting, Jeff. I think it is changing. But take, for instance, the idea of the conquest of America. Was it really a conquest?

JeffC: Well... I had a hard time convincing students that Vietnam and WWII were different wars held at different times (and someone recently told me that textbooks today don't cover Vietnam all that much... guess we don't like to admit defeat).

MichaelDW: I see what you mean.

StefaniC: that is very frustrating that we as teachers use the textbooks as a resource and they are not correct

JeffC: Well... if you mean by "conquest" you mean Columbus bringing syphilis to America... then... yup... I guess so.

JeffC: I think he was pretty bad with the Indians too, right?

MichaelDW: There were a number of battles between Indians and Americans, yes, but actually, the US was not conquered through battles. Westerns seem to suggest this, but that was not often the case.

JeffC: Manifest Destiny... westward expansion... James Polk if my mind serves (and it probably doesn't... it's getting pretty old).

MichaelDW: A great majority of the land was taken from Indians by treaties and acts of Congress. The threat of the military forced their hands, yes, but it was a bureaucratic conquest. That's not as romantic as John Wayne on a horse.

JeffC: Heck... I think if I were teaching about American Indians, I'd want to show "Little Big Man."

MichaelDW: Columbus was a terrible man, no doubt. I think the debate about him is whether he was a "man of his times" or whether he should have known that enslaving people was abhorrent.

AngelaRP: I have a hard time rationalizing and explaining to my students what many of the early arrivals from Europe did.

StefaniC: I have heard too many fourth graders at my school talking about how wonderful Columbus was and I really think that they should be taught the truth in school

JeffC: Well... slavery was the norm back then... wasn't it (admitting my own ignorance on the subject).

MichaelDW: It's difficult, especially for younger children. I honestly don't know what's appropriate to tell them. For instance, the history of the Pilgrims and the Indians is terrible.

AngelaRP: Well to many, yes

MichaelDW: Slavery was very much part of the times, but there were some Spaniards who understood that what they were doing was wrong.

StefaniC: It is just sad that all through public I was taught how he was a great man it wasn't until college I realized what really happened

JeffC: Personally... I think it's all relevant to what goes on in the world today. We're myopic in vision... we see things as good or evil... and the U.S. as *always good*. We know this isn't the case... why not use those facts to bring some grey area into the learning of our students?

AngelaRP: The students don't mind hearing the truth as much as the parents who complain when they do

StefaniC: exactly

MichaelDW: Bartoleme de las Casas was probably the best known for arguing against the inhuman treatment of Indians.

JeffC: http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/philosophers/las_casas.html

JeffC: <http://www.lascasas.org/>

MichaelDW: The Pilgrims are the usual example, because American text books hold them in such high regard.

JeffC: Two sites on Las Casas.

MichaelDW: They say the Pilgrims came to this hemisphere for freedom, but that's probably not true.

MichaelDW: And they emphasize the peaceful dinner with Indians, which, if it happened at all, was actually the exception to an otherwise terrible encounter.

AngelaRP: They wanted freedom to practice their own religion not the freedom of religion for all

MichaelDW: No, actually, they had religious freedom when they first moved to Holland (I think).

MichaelDW: They felt that their people were becoming too Dutch and losing contact with their culture.

MichaelDW: They came to the New World to found a separate religious colony.

AngelaRP: It is vague as to the exacts in my mind at this point but they were not open minded to others having that freedom once here

AngelaRP: yes

MichaelDW: No, not at all. Like many, they had the view that theirs was the "one true religion."

AngelaRP: maybe I am not saying it right but I am agreeing with what you are saying

MichaelDW: As such, they had the obligation to keep their religion pure, at terrible costs.

AngelaRP: yes

MichaelDW: That idea, by the way, was not an especially indigenous one. Tribes often took in parts of many different religions, including Christianity.

MichaelDW: I wonder why schools are so determined to show the dinner with Indians and Pilgrims.

MichaelDW: It's so cartoonish.

MichaelDW: I'm not saying the nice 3rd grade teacher who uses construction paper headdresses &c is a bad person, I just wonder why this history is so accepted.

JeffC: That's one way the Lakota survived I believe... one of the Lakota men actually kept the language alive by adopting Christianity, preaching it, then secretly also preaching Lakota beliefs on the side (don't remember his name).

MichaelDW: You might be thinking of Nicolas Black Elk, whose book Black Elk Speaks is well known.

MichaelDW: I wonder if the story of Indians and Pilgrims isn't a bandage on a terrible wound that still hasn't healed after 500 years.

MichaelDW: By the way, here is the address for the pictures for tonight: <http://www.e-chahta.com/~michael/tappedin/boardingschools.htm>

MichaelDW: You will probably need Internet Explorer (not Firefox) to view the powerpoint.

MichaelDW: Let me know when you've got it.

AngelaRP: got it

MichaelDW: Jeff?

MichaelDW: BJ?

BJB2: I'm good, thanks

MichaelDW: This is my own personal server, so I hope it holds up.

StefaniC: yes thank you

MichaelDW: The first slide is just a little background information on Richard Pratt, often cited as the founder of Indian boarding schools.

MichaelDW: I should put a picture of him in this powerpoint.

MichaelDW: Slide 2, more info.

MichaelDW: I guess I would point out that some of his Indian students were thankful for his efforts.

MichaelDW: He first began teaching Kiowa prisoners and found them receptive to learning.

MichaelDW: He believed he had the answer to the "Indian problems" -- kill the Indian, save the man.

MichaelDW: In other words, take the culture completely away from Indians, and you'll have Americans in their places.

MichaelDW: One of the questions in those days was whether Indians were racially inferior, or culturally inferior.

MichaelDW: (It was assumed they were inferior, I guess)

AngelaRP: That was another question my students wanted to know about

MichaelDW: Pratt saw their culture as inferior, and any attempts to keep it just weepy romanticism.

MichaelDW: What is that, Angela?

AngelaRP: the inferior question is a good one

BJB2: national geographic has an interesting article on DNA and our common ancestor

MichaelDW: Newsweek had some things to say about it as well.

AngelaRP: my students were wondering about what they must have been thinking back then

MichaelDW: We talked about this last week, but it is part of a religious, social, and scientific world view of the idea of "race."

BJB2: o O (fyi <https://www3.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/>)

MichaelDW: That's good information, BJ! Thanks.

MichaelDW: They did things like measure skulls to try to prove that one race was superior to another.

MichaelDW: It was all bogus science, but people really believed it.

MichaelDW: Slide three shows you some of the basic ideas behind Indian Boarding schools.

MichaelDW: After Pratt's model, many other government and religious organizations created boarding schools.

MichaelDW: Some believe in their hearts they were helping Indians (because of uncritical views of things like "the one true religion"); others saw boarding schools as a means of controlling Indians.

MichaelDW: Sometimes, things worked out for Indians at boarding schools, but quite often they had many difficulties, either trying to get jobs off reservations, finding no jobs on the reservations for their newly acquired skills (tinsmiths, for instance), or they did not adjust well once they got back home.

MichaelDW: Imagine what would happen if you took a Christian child from his home at the age of 5 or 6, told him for the next 8 years that Christianity was ignorant and backward. What would happen to that kid when they returned to their Christian home?

MichaelDW: Adjustment was often an issue.

MichaelDW: The next slide -- slide 4 -- shows Indian tipis outside a boarding school.

MichaelDW: This is Pine Ridge, but a lot of boarding schools had that large, frame appearance.

BJB2: I live near Carlisle, PA

MichaelDW: It's just heartbreaking to think of these Indians families staying near these boarding schools in hopes of seeing the children.

MichaelDW: Did you visit, Carlisle, BJ?

BJB2: I've driven by, but never officially visited

BJB2: there is a graveyard that is pretty prominent

MichaelDW: I've heard that the graveyard is painful to see.

BJB2 nods

MichaelDW: A lot of Indian children died during the influenza outbreaks in the early 20th c.

MichaelDW: The next slide shows a lot of little children getting their photograph taken.

MichaelDW: You notice how uniform they look -- not just because they are wearing uniforms, but also by their hair and even their expressions.

MichaelDW: Uniforms are used to keep control at schools (sometimes), the military, prisons, and insane asylums.

MichaelDW: Slide 6 shows them eating. That was important for people who sometimes did not have much to eat on reservations.

MichaelDW: Slide 7 shows them fingercounting.

MichaelDW: Once again, you notice the uniforms. Also, though, look at the wall hangings. They are being shown what's important, what's the ideal.

MichaelDW: As usual, I'm running out of time, but I wonder if anyone has questions.

AngelaRP: not at the moment

BJB2: wonderful pictures, Michael. Thanks!

AngelaRP: yes, they are great.

StefaniC: I have learned a lot

MichaelDW: Indian boarding schools still exist at places like the Navajo reservation and California.

StefaniC: I can't wait to look at the pictures

BJB2: Next week is the last American Indian Studies discussion for this school year. Don't miss it!

MichaelDW: They are run by the BIA. What does that stand for, BJ?

BJB2: May 10

AngelaRP: Do they still aim to take the Indian out or are they just their to educate at this point

BJB2: bureau of Indian Affairs or Indian Abuse?

MichaelDW: Boss Indians Around!

MichaelDW: No, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

MichaelDW: The boarding schools these days are usually run by American Indian educators.

AngelaRP: Thank you,

MichaelDW: They are trying to offer a more culturally-based experience, yet one that adheres to state standards.

MichaelDW: There are still problems at these boarding schools, but they are better.

MichaelDW: Anyway, thanks for kind attention. Jeff and BJ, thank you for those links. I appreciate it.

JeffC: thank you Michael

StefaniC: thank you

MichaelDW: Everyone have a wonderful evening. If you have any questions later on, you can email me: michael@uwm.edu

BJB2 applauds. Thanks, Michael.

AngelaRP: Thanks again, I really enjoyed it, my students will be happy to hear some of the info

BJB2: See you next Wednesday

MichaelDW: Night everyone.