

Early Education and Civilization

In the mid 1870s, assimilation in the form of education was now the focus of government policy. The agent declared that families who did not send their children to school would have rations (government annuities of food) withheld. Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish children at Fort Berthold were attending school at Fort Stevenson boarding school or C. L. Halls' Congregational mission school. Many children were taken forcibly from their homes and sent off to schools such as Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, and Hampton Institute in Virginia. According to oral historians, the children were forced to wear uniforms and carry wooden guns. They were given Christian names and in some cases, lost their original names completely.

Elders say many of the Indian people's ancestors became confused because the government agents were careless in keeping records and assigned names randomly. Many children ran away from the schools because the environment, food, clothing, language, and school personnel attitudes were unfamiliar to them. They were often caught and returned to the schools. They were not allowed to speak their own languages. If they did, they were severely punished. As a result of this, parents were afraid to allow their children to speak their own language. Very little English was spoken which hampered the children's ability to learn in school.