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Missionary Work and Assimilation

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Missionary Work and Assimilation

FREDDY MORAN

Is religion the bane of assimilation? How do you gauge assimilation and if it is working or if it is detrimental to those being assimilated? Assimilation is something that cannot be truly measured but there are ways to gauge assimilation, first it needs to be determined who is assimilating who and how do they assess assimilation. If missionaries saw success as converting every Native American to Christianity, then they may not have been nearly as successful as desired. If they were basing their success solely on the adoption of English and adding them into the fold of the world economy, then they were more successful. Native Americans were forced onto reservations which consolidated their work and made the process of assimilation machine like in nature. According to a journal article written in the *Econometrica* by Christian Dippel “many countries and other, smaller jurisdictions today are ‘artificial’ in the sense that their political boundaries do not coincide with those desired by the people inside them.”¹ This paper will look at just what kind of job missionaries may have done in regards to assimilating the Native American population and if they created an artificial world around the Native Americans. To gauge how “successful” missionaries were at assimilating Native American populations missionaries wanted to teach their own language to the Native American, incorporate Native American into the western economic model, and snuff out their religious practices and replace them with Christianity. Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying “Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the perfection of civility;

¹ Dippel, Christian. “Forced Coexistence and Economic Development: Evidence From Native American Reservations.” *Econometrica* 82, no. 6 (2014): 2131–65. https://www-jstor-org.excelior.sdstate.edu/stable/43616909?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

They think the same of theirs.²” How do you give civility to someone who already possesses it? The missionaries were unsuccessful in their mission to bring civility to the Native American people for the Native Americans believed, and rightfully so, that they had already possessed all that was needed in order to be considered civilized. Did they bring the Native Americans into the fold of the world economy? Yes. Did they convert them to Christianity? No. Were they successful in teaching the Native Americans trades and skills that they would otherwise not need or learn? Yes. But, was any of this important? Did it help at all? With the ability of hindsight and analysis of newspapers from the 19th century such as the “Dakota Friend” and the “Oglala Light” and other various scholarly books and articles it will be evident that while missionaries were able to check the boxes that they required for ‘civilization’ they remained largely unsuccessful in forcing upon the Native Americans their idea of civility. Assimilation is defined as the ability “to absorb into the cultural tradition of a population or group” in this case the people doing the absorbing are the Native Americans and the cultural tradition seeking to assimilate the Native Americans was the missionaries. It was not well enough that Native Americans learned the language or became a contributing member of the workforce, but they were also expected to become Christians. Missionaries wanted all the aforementioned to happen at all costs, because it would be worth it in the end for all parties involved... so they believed.

Make no mistake assimilation through acculturation was always the goal and this is clear in the *Annual Report (1903) of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes* when they write:

² “Benjamin Franklin: Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America.” The Wampum Chronicles. Wampum Chronicler. Accessed December 29, 2019. <http://www.wampumchronicles.com/benfranklin.html>.

The object of congress from the beginning has been the dissolution of the tribal governments, the extinguishment of the communal or tribal title to the land, the vesting of possession and title in severalty among the citizens of the tribes, and the assimilation of the peoples and institutions of this territory to our prevailing American standard.³

The first thing that will be looked at for assimilation is the adoption of the English language for one cannot be apart of or assimilate to a nation if they do not speak the language. The task of teaching English was a rigorous one and one that would require the process of acculturation which is the forced assimilation of a less dominant people to the more dominant group/region. The process of acculturation was one that could have far reaching impacts physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually that went unnoticed by missionaries or that they simply did not care. According to Suzanne Moranian reservation schools and their attempts to assimilate Native American "Their schools embodied the determination of the missionaries to make Indian culture extinct by initiating the process of acculturation."⁴ The goal has always been to erase Native American culture for, the accepted and preferred, Christian dominated white culture. There were many difficulties in teaching the Native Americans English and so some of the first missionaries wanted to first translate the Bible into the Native Americans own language so they could produce it in mass and 'save' the Indians. In the book "The Peace Seekers" Dr. Elden Lawrence writes about Samuel and Gideon Pond who were two missionaries

³ Heatwole, Joel Prescott. Annual report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes. February 26, 1903. -- Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed, Annual report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes. February 26, 1903. -- Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed § (1903).

⁴ Suzanne Elizabeth Moranian. "Ethnocide in the Schoolhouse: Missionary Efforts to Educate Indian Youth in Pre-Reservation Wisconsin." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 64, no. 4 (1981): 242-60.
www.jstor.org/stable/4635546.

who helped to lay the foundation for missionaries to come. Dr. Lawrence writes about the two perceived accomplishments stating:

Foremost among their accomplishments was the development of a written Dakota language. they set out to learn the words and phrases and develop a phonetic alphabet and vowel sounds. This work of the Ponds allowed Stephen Riggs to complete a dictionary, which he later published. The Ponds' work led to the translation of the Holy Scriptures into the Dakota language. the work of the Pond brothers is not given as much recognition as is the work of some of the others, yet, if not for them, the Christian roots among the Dakotas may not have been established.⁵

Creating a written alphabet for the Dakotas was a necessary step for the acculturation process. By developing the first written alphabet for the Dakotas they were now ushering them into the fold of the civilization that they, the Pond brothers, were from. The Pond brothers may not have been complicit of anything or any wrongdoing when they created the alphabet but through that very act, creating the alphabet used today, they were facilitating the erasure of the Native American culture. The Bureau of Indian Affairs would coheres Native American families into sending their children to day schools and boarding schools. *The Last Days of the Sioux* describes some tactics used to fill the schoolhouse;

Designed to bring education to the Indian, boarding schools were established at each agency, and day schools were started at population centers scattered around the reservation. Parents exhibited scarcely less reluctance to send their children to schools

⁵ Lawrence, Elden. *The Peace Seekers: the Indian Christians and the Dakota Conflict*. Sioux Falls, SD: Pine Hill Press, 2005. p54.

on the reservation than off. But the agents eternally pestered them to fill the schoolhouses; finally, with the authority of the Bureau, they shut off the rations of families that refused to cooperate. Trying to fill a 100-pupil boarding school at Standing Rock, Mclaughlin assigned a quota to each band and stopped issue of rations to those who failed to meet their quota.⁶

Holding entire communities' hostage to fill the schoolhouse and still the irony was lost on most as they believed they had the moral high ground. Still, up to this point in Dakota history they had felt no need to write any of their own language down, over the course of hundreds of years Dakota have not felt the need to create a Latin alphabet or equivalent. The two brothers saw, what they apparently believed to be a deficiency in the way the Dakota were doing things and decided to 'help them out.' So, by this measure of success the Native Americans were successful. The Dakota language has now been created in the standard Latin variant for the sole purpose of translating the Bible into the Dakota language and thus making the Dakota that much more civilized. missionaries thought so little of the language that they would compare English to Dakota as they would a bark canoe to an ocean steamer. This comparison shows up in the *Dakota Friend* in an article about Indian languages and the first half of the article praises the complexity and completeness of the Native American language and then turns right around and levels an insult geared towards the Native Americans one such exchange reads; "in the Dakota language, and probably in all other Indian languages, the verb exhibits remarkable ingenuity in its formation, and is extremely elaborate and complex in its inflection⁷" only to

⁶ Utley, Robert M. *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2004.p 36.

⁷ "The Indian Languages." *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin*. February 1, 1851.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93099999/1851-02-01/ed-1/seq->

later declare, “but though the philologist may find much in the Indian languages that is interesting, and even admirable, he must at once perceive their great inferiority to the languages spoken by civilized nations.”⁸ *The Dakota Friend* was a newspaper created by Gideon Pond near St. Paul, Minnesota and according to the Minnesota Historical Society “the main purpose of *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin*, or, *The Dakota Friend* was to advance the cause of the Christian mission⁹” and this “Christian mission” was one of acculturation. Mark Twain had asked General Grant, and it was transcribed in the *Albany Register* in 1869, a question that came to fruition as if it was almost spoken into existence and one the Pond brothers, the founders of the *Dakota Friend*, seemed to, by their actions, agree with:

Sir, do you propose to exterminate the Indians suddenly, with soap and education, or doom them to the eternal annoyance of warfare, relieved only by periodical pleasantries of glass beads and perishable treaties?¹⁰

Soap and education. That is the means missionaries subscribed to in their quest to acculturate the peoples of the Great Plains. The *Dakota Friend* required a Dakota alphabet for it to be put to press. Even those in power knew that “the Indians would never surrender by consent what they did not want to give up at all.”¹¹ knowing that the Native Americans would never allow

[4/#date1=1789&index=0&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=sn93099999&words=English+learn+learning&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=learning+english&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1.](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93099999&words=English+learn+learning&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=learning+english&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1)

⁸ “The Indian Languages.” *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin*. February 1, 1851. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

⁹ “Dakota Tawaxitku Kin, or, The Dakota Friend.” Minnesota Historical Society. Accessed December 30, 2019. <http://www.mnhs.org/newspapers/hub/dakota-friend>.

¹⁰ “Mark Twain’s Visit to General Grant.” *Albany Register*. February 6, 1869.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84022643/1869-02-06/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1868&index=0&rows=20&words=exterminate+Indians&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1869&proxtext=exterminate+indians&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

¹¹ Heatwole, Joel Prescott. Annual report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes. February 26, 1903. -- Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed, Annual

themselves to fall in the names of assimilation and acculturation missionaries knew they had their work cut out for them. Tribe by tribe, day by day, Indian by Indian, all in the name of God they taught English. So, by this measure the missionaries were successful and the numbers today tell a sad and chilling story that states “there were once more than 300 indigenous languages spoken in the United States, and approximately 175 remain today. They also estimate that without restoration efforts, there will be at most 20 still spoken in 2050.¹²” the *Dakota Friend* or *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin* was the vessel used to integrate English into the everyday life of the Dakota. Through out the newspaper they will have Dakota to English samples showing that Mihihna means My Husband and descriptions of, seemingly, otherworldly creatures such as a particular article titled “*The Ostrich*” these are purposefully placed to intrigue the potential readers of the newspaper. What appears often in the *Dakota Friend* are letters to the editor which read more like testimonials on the power of white establishments such as agriculture, education, and cleanliness. One such reads as a cautionary tale and speaks on the importance of education. This particular piece is addressed to the editor and it ends, as follows:

“You see before you the consequence of our young men spending their time idly. How much better would it have been if these young people, and all of you, had been at school, learning something good, this accident would not have happened. But I speak not to the young men alone. You, young women, would be sure to do much more good

report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes. February 26, 1903. -- Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed § (1903).

¹² Lesson Nine GmbH, Steph Koyfman. “What Was, And What Is: Native American Languages In The US.” Babel Magazine, October 4, 2017. <https://www.babel.com/en/magazine/native-american-languages-in-the-us>.

if you would go to school and learn to read and work, instead of wasting your time in foolishness.” As this is the first instance, (as far as I know,) in which any of the Indians have openly approved of education, I think it important to make it known, as it may have good effect upon other Indians, and must be gratifying to all the Dakota Tawaxitku.¹³

This piece of propaganda reads some what like a folk lore that would have been common in Native American culture and shows a level of subversive appropriation that the editors of the newspaper were not ignorant to. Success, according to the *Dakota Friend*, was clear and concise with the newspaper declaring that “what we feared for it has not arrived, and what we hoped for in its favor has been more than realized ... [and] to excite in the Dakota themselves a desire for education.¹⁴” the missionaries saw what they were doing as a complete success and treated it as such. Still Native Americans were not naïve to the attempts to wage war against their culture and language. the juxtaposition of the two sides waging a cultural war, one side attacking and the other side defending and holding on at all costs. Yes, if measured solely by English language learned then missionaries were successful but, the age-old question remains when talking about any conflict, at what cost?

¹³ “The Ostrich.” *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin*. St. Paul, MN. August 1, 1851.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93099999/1851-08-01/ed-1/seq-4/#date1=1789&index=1&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=sn93099999&words=Civilization+civilized&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=civilized&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

¹⁴ “To Subscribers.” *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin*. St. Paul, MN. October 1, 1851.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93099999/1851-10-01/ed-1/seq-3/#date1=1789&index=16&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=sn93099999&words=Board+education&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=education+school+boarding+religion+&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

With Native Americans well on their way to becoming an English-speaking nation they would now need to be incorporated into the Western Economic Model. Native Americans used a traditional economy that relied on hunter, gathers, fishing, and the like and these resources are used and then bartered between other tribes. Native Americans did not use money to acquire the things they needed instead they would exchange (goods or services) for other goods or services without using money. Through the use of the traditional economic model and barter tribes have survived for centuries, yet this was still seen as primitive and counter intuitive and the white god fearing man should enlighten the Native Americans. Arrogance is the antithesis of humility and modesty and there is an important lesson to be learned that even today has not been taught to the leaders of this nation. Different does not mean worse. But in the nineteenth century different was too different for the US government, the missionary, the soldier, the settler, and the well intentioned. You should be compensated for your time and work and this compensation should resemble what the western economic model deemed acceptable. Traditional and western economic models will clash, and one is the Titanic and the other a bark canoe, gone are doing things for the we instead the focus shifts to the me. President Grant would spare no expense in his peace policy and he “will favor any course toward them which tends to their civilization and ultimate citizenship.¹⁵” the famous saying by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux rings true in President Grants words “the road to hell is paved with good intentions” and good intention they were, they would end up having far reaching consequences. Robert M. Utely would write that the Sioux, and most Native American tribes subjected to the same good

¹⁵ Waltmann, Henry G. "Circumstantial Reformer: President Grant & the Indian Problem." *Arizona and the West* 13, no. 4 (1971): 323-42. www.jstor.org/stable/40168089.

will gestures as the Sioux, “suffered two conquests: a military conquest and a psychological conquest. It was the latter that destroyed them as a nation and left emotional scars that persist today.” And the forced participation in the western economic model played a part in that psychological conquest which took the form of boarding schools and the enrolment into trade schools, trades that they did not create nor did they desire, this conquest is written about in the book titled *Lakota Sioux Missions in South Dakota* and describes a school week for the Native American children:

Students enrolled in the boarding schools received intense instruction seven days a week. In addition to the academic curriculum, pupils were taught various trades. The girls learned domestic skills such as sewing, cooking, cleaning, and laundering. The schools taught boys shoemaking, farming, carpentry, gardening, and blacksmithing. Every student above fifth grade performed three hours of manual labor a day.¹⁶

These trades are important when examining whether missionaries were successful in their combined efforts to assimilate the tribes. Trade and employment are the measuring sticks of the west and that was the case when missionaries were trying to assimilate the Native American tribes. Native Americans cherished the earth and everything that she gave to them and as David Humphreys Miller writes in *Ghost Dance*:

The white men, of course, believed differently. They had no understanding of the Earth Mother when they dug up the ground and plowed under the rich grasses. Worse yet, the white agents and missionaries were doing everything possible to get the Indians

¹⁶ Cerney, Janice Brozik. *Lakota Sioux Missions, South Dakota*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2005. P 59.

themselves to engage in agricultural pursuits. Farming was fit, perhaps, for the womanish Arikaras and soft-living Gros Ventres but hardly suited for the warrior Sioux.¹⁷

Getting all the tribes to throw away their nomadic lifestyles and adopt a sedentary agriculturally based life was paramount to saving the Native Americans, at least that was the thinking of the good intentioned missionaries and government workers. The *Dakota Friend* also espoused the same rhetoric found everywhere else and in one particular article titled “*Be Industrious*” the readers, Native American subscribers to the newspaper, the editor writes

Let children learn to work, as well as to read; and there will be no need of fears that they will suffer want or come to disgrace in after life. It is well to educate the mind; for ignorance is the mother of superstition and many errors. It is equally important to train the body; for slothfulness is the mother of poverty, disease, and crime. Every boy and girl, should early acquire the habit of useful labor.¹⁸

The language used in the above quote is important to note and some of the more obvious, not so, subtleties include “for ignorance is the mother of superstition and many errors.¹⁹” this is aimed at Native American religion and is implying that they only worship the things they worship due to ignorance and stupidity and if they just were educated this would not be the

¹⁷ Miller, David Humphreys. *Ghost Dance*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985. p 5.

¹⁸ “Be Industrious.” *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin*. St. Paul, Minn. May 1, 1852.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93099999/1852-05-01/ed-1/seq-4/#date1=1789&index=0&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=sn93099999&words=educate+learn&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=teach+learn+educate+assimilate&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

¹⁹ “Be Industrious.” *Dakota Tawaxitku Kin*. St. Paul, Minn. May 1, 1852.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93099999/1852-05-01/ed-1/seq-4/#date1=1789&index=0&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=sn93099999&words=educate+learn&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=teach+learn+educate+assimilate&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

case. The ignorance of the missionaries shows, and it was assumed that the missionaries thought little of the Native Americans way of life thinking them lazy and slothful which led to their poverty-stricken way of life. Therefore, bringing them into their way of life would be the only way to show the Indians that the way they have been living, for centuries, was wrong and they had the answers. And teaching a trade was paramount to the success of the Indians it was seen that they needed to adapt to a way of life that was inevitably heading their way. The *Oglala Light* was a newspaper that was designed to specifically help Native Americans learn certain trades such as operating a printing press and writing. It was a newspaper run at, and by, the United States Oglala Indian Training School in Pine Ridge, South Dakota and the students at the school would spend half the day learning inside the classroom and the other half learning a trade. Just below the title of the *Oglala Light* was an inscription that read “For The Education And Civilization of The Sioux Indian²⁰” civilization is something that is being gifted to the Sioux and the sub-title implies that they are far from civilized and that the missionaries are continuing to work in their favor to civilize them. The *Oglala Light* was still more impartial of a newspaper than the *Dakota Friend*, where the *Dakota Friend* would lament the ways of the Indian the *Oglala Light* attempts to understand and shed light on the Native American way of life. One particular article that appears in the *Oglala Light*, and would never be printed in the *Dakota Friend*, is based around the perception of Native American education. The article is titled *Educating The Indian* and centers around “recognizing the fact that the Indian in his tribal state

²⁰ “For the Education and Civilization of the Sioux Indian.” *The Oglala Light*. April 15, 1920.
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/2017270500/1920-04-15/ed-1/seq-1/>

was not without a system of education suited to his needs²¹” this article highlights the way the Native Americans lived and the reasons for their education system. The article argues that the skills learned through the tribal teachings were important because of the world they lived in and now things had changed, and they needed to adapt to the encroaching whites and their ways of life. This would include agricultural pursuits, which was seen as a way to make the Indians self-sufficient and allow them to stand on their own two feet. Since the allotment act carved up land and forced Indian families to give up tribal ownership in favor of private these Indian families had to learn how to work their own lands. Forcing agricultural pursuits onto the Native Americans was always a governmental policy and was seen, according to the *Oglala Light*, as a “more effective means to stay the white man’s invasion than delegations to congress; industry and self-support surer safeguards against the intrigues of the grafter than the court of law.²²” agriculture was being painted as a way to fight the white mans encroachment and not only was it effective, it was more effective than actual warfare. So, were the missionaries successful in teaching the American Indians the white mans way of agriculture by todays standards, yes. Native Americans today comprise roughly 1.6% of the entire population of the United States and 1.8% of all farms are operated by American Indians a trend that has increased, by 5%, between 2007 and 2012 when the rest of the United States saw a

²¹ “Educating The Indian.” *The Oglala Light*. December 1, 1918. P 12.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/2017270500/1918-12-01/ed-1/seq-14/#date1=1789&index=6&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=2017270500&words=skill&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=money+currency+barter+trade+skill+&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=2>

²² Abbot, F.H. “Agricultural Progress Among Indians.” *The Oglala Light*. February 1, 1913. P 12.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/2017270500/1913-02-01/ed-1/seq-10/#date1=1789&index=6&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=2017270500&words=Agricultural+agricultural+agriculture+farm+FARMS&proxdistance=5&rows=20&ortext=agriculture+agricultural+farm+farming&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

decrease in total number and percentage.²³ It seems that Native Americans have thrived in this type of environment still at what costs and was it worth it.

A nation founded on religious tolerance would end up outlawing most Native American religions and religious practices. Religion was central to both the missionaries and the American Indians during their times together. One side wanted to save the other from eternal damnation and the other wanted to be left alone. Religion was supposed to bring the Native Americans and the whites together, instead it did what they did not want to happen and that was divide the two. Dr. Elden Lawrence writes about this division;

The government made Christianity both confusing and misleading when they used the missions to further their own cause. By emphasizing and pressuring the Indians to become like them, they created Indian Christians rather than Christian Indians. An Indian Christian is first an Indian and second, a Christian. Many regards the Indian as a second-class citizen and therefore a second-class Christian. The ultimate racism is to deny the Indian equality in Christ.

Religion was going to be the great equalizer and allow people to see a Christian first instead it created further labels and division among the whites and Native Americans. All of these restrictions and prejudices would lead to hate and disdain for Native American religions. The whites were misunderstanding a lot of these traditional dances and customs, claiming them to be the works of the devil and ill-informed and uneducated American Indians. The First

²³ United States Department of Agriculture. "American Indian Farmers." *American Indian Farmers*. Census of Agriculture Highlights, 2014.

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2014/Highlights_American_Indian_Farmers.pdf

Amendment failed to apply to Native Americans and their religion, that is until August 11, 1978 when the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was signed into law by President Carter. The Native American Rights Fund writes about the history between the US Government and Native American religion writing that;

it is a bleak history of disrespect, ignorance, suppression and attempted eradication of Native beliefs and practices. Such treatment by the White society could not have been so much the result of a conviction of the righteousness of their faith – for the respect or at least tolerated other faiths in both the Old and New world. It must surely have rested in the belief that the “barbarism” and “savagery” of the Natives rendered their religious beliefs unworthy of any respect or consideration. The White people have given tolerant respect to other religions, cults, and creeds existing in this country and the world over. But the religious beliefs of the Native American have been subjected to suppression and persecution from the very first and continues to this day.²⁴

The ignorance surrounding Native American religion led Christians to want to ‘save’ Native Americans and begin a crusade to do so ‘for the Redman.’ While the tally of how many Native Americans were ‘successfully’ converted to Christianity is hard to count it is important to assess the damage done to Native American religion as a whole. While missionaries may have deemed their efforts worthwhile and somewhat successful by today’s standards it was a disaster. Today only 66 percent of Native Americans identify as some form of Christianity compared to 79

²⁴ Native American Rights Fund. “‘We Also Have a Religion’ The American Indian Religious Freedom Act and the Religious Freedom Project of the Native American Rights Fund.” *Native American Rights Fund* 1, no. 1 (1979): 1–19. <https://www.narf.org/nill/documents/nlr/nlr5-1.pdf>

percent of non-Hispanic whites and 85 percent of African Americans.²⁵ These numbers are a far cry from the missionaries works in Latin America and with slaves coming from Africa. In short if missionaries were able to measure the successfulness of their efforts by seeing conversion rates and percentages that would exist in 2015 they would see that their efforts were not as successful as they were elsewhere.

English, education, agriculture, and Christianity. The measuring sticks of assimilation for the missionaries and their work. If they were around today would they consider themselves successful? With hindsight and a more liberal culture would they think they were successful? While missionaries were unsuccessful in converting large swaths of Native Americans to Christianity they were successful in obtaining the goals of the US government, who appointed the missionaries due to the corrupt morality of Bureau of Indian Affairs agents, by forcing the Native Americans into the world economy, teaching them a trade, and demonizing and destroying their culture and religion. Judging the success of anything as complex as the missionary work of assimilating a population, an indigenous population at that, is difficult. But, today we have the benefits of accurate census projections that tell a terribly sad story of acculturation that was successful in creating a systemic system of pervasive inequality, even 200 years after the fact. The numbers of today make a mockery of the efforts the Bureau of Indian Affairs, missionaries, and do-gooders put towards assimilating the Native American population. 83 percent of American Indians obtain a high school diploma compared to 93 percent of non-Hispanic whites and the gap only grows when referencing a bachelor's degree which has only 19 percent of Native Americans with a bachelor's and 36

²⁵ Garroutte, Eva Marie, Janette Beals, Heather Orton Anderson, Jeffrey A. Henderson, Patricia Nez-Henderson, Jacob Thomas, Calvin Croy, and Spero M. Manson. "Religio-Spiritual Participation in Two American Indian Populations." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 1 (March 4, 2014): 17–37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12084>.

percent of non-Hispanic whites. This leads to whether the missionaries were able to demonstrate the value of an education to Native Americans or make it so that it is an obtainable goal and just as easy for them as it is for non-Hispanic whites. Are Native Americans thriving in trade and obtaining currency? No. In fact 22 percent of Native Americans live at or below the poverty line, again, compared to non-Hispanic whites who sit at 9 percent. On average non-Hispanic whites earn 20,000 dollars more a year than Native American households.²⁶ These numbers only show half of the damage that acculturation has done. No, missionaries were not successful in their attempts to assimilate Native Americans and if it is possible to give an entire culture PTSD and force them into a centuries long system of systemic poverty and racism then they also achieved it.

²⁶ "Office of Minority Health - Profile: American Indian/Alaska Native." American Indian/Alaska Native - The Office of Minority Health. Office of Minority Health, March 28, 2018. <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=62>.

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