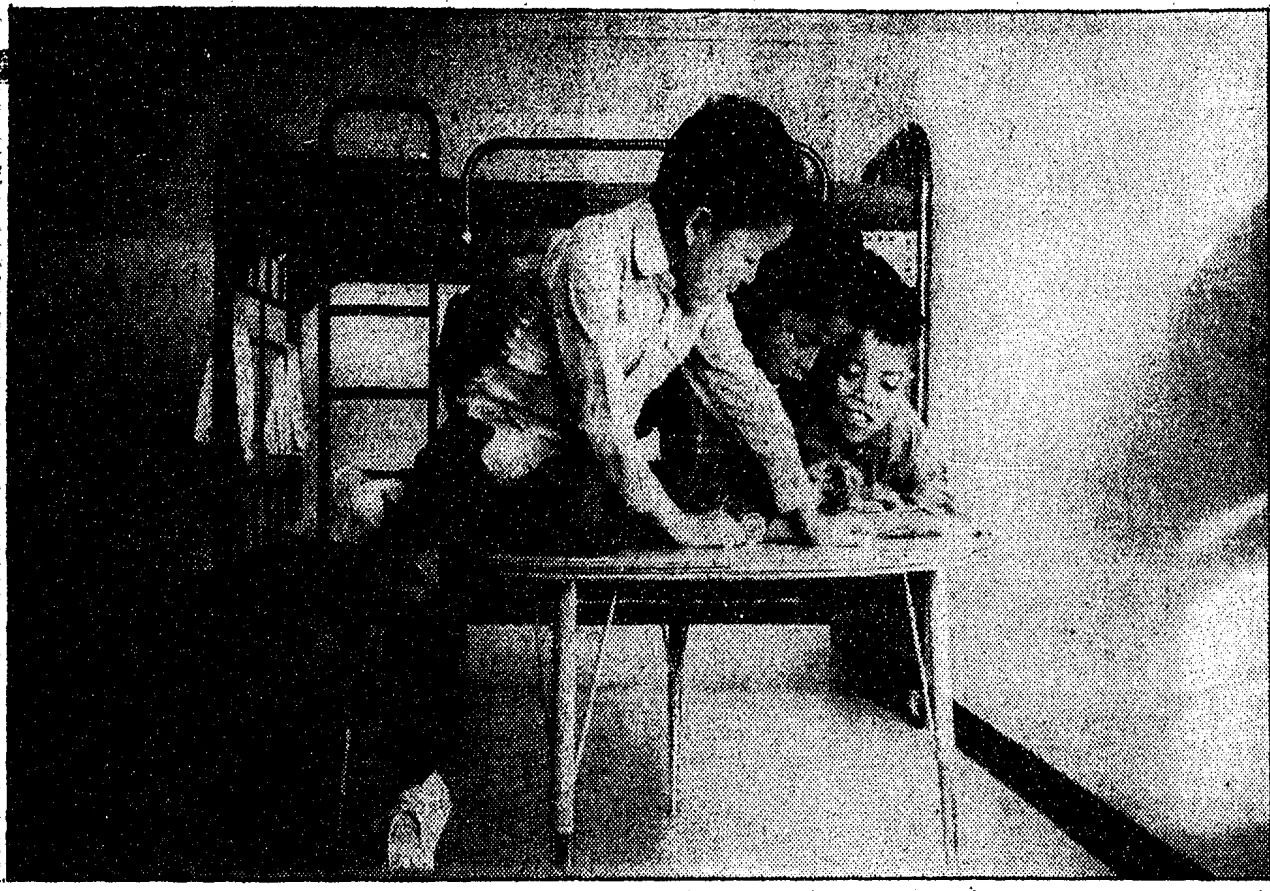


Education



Indian leaders say more Federal funds are needed to better educate their people—such as these Navajo boys at a boarding school in Arizona—but President Nixon has impounded an \$18-million Congressional grant.

Indians

'Help Me Not to Hate My Parents'

Far from the protests and gunfire of Wounded Knee, S. D., Indian leaders have been knocking insistently on the White House door. They've been trying to pry loose \$18-million which Congress last year earmarked for the education of Indian children. To date, President Nixon has refused to spend it; in fact, he has formally asked Congress to rescind the appropriation.

Accordingly, a consortium of Indian organizations—among them the National Indian Education Association and the Coalition of Indian-Controlled School Boards—is taking the Federal Government to court. The organizations are demanding not only that the Office of Education release the money, but also that the President appoint an all-Indian, 15-person advisory council to make sure the money is spent on programs for Indians.

Congress called for the creation of such a council in its Indian Education Act of 1972—which authorized the \$18-million. It also called for appointment to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare of a deputy commissioner in charge of Indian education. That slot has not been filled.

If the money is not earmarked for grants before June 30, the end of this fiscal year, it will be returned to the Federal Treasury. The Administration takes the position that the \$18-million duplicates other Federal funds already appropriated for Indian education.

At the heart of Indian frustrations about education are two questions: Who will control the system of Indian education, and how good will that education be?

One of the demands the protesting Indians at Wounded Knee are making is that the United States Senate investigate the many Indian treaties, "to show how the Government has failed to live up to the terms." In most of these old treaties, the first condition specifically asked for by the Indian tribe was education.

That subsequent efforts have fallen short of the mark was acknowledged by President Nixon in his 1970 statement on Indian self-determination. "One of the saddest aspects of Indian life in the United States," he noted, "is the low quality of Indian education."

Today, more than half of the adult Indian population is illiterate, and a majority of the nation's 200,000 Indian schoolchildren read and write at levels below the norms for their grades. Few go on to college; most drop out before high school.

Two-thirds of all Indian schoolchildren attend public schools, outside the reservations; most of the others attend schools operated by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A.), either inside or outside the reservations. In theory, Indian public-school students receive the same education as white students; in practice, they're often hampered by language difficulties, feelings of social inferiority, and prejudice on the part of white teachers and administrators.

What Indian leaders are now seeking are the dollars and the encouragement either to operate their own, all-Indian schools, or to organize special Indian programs within the public schools. "This is more than a mere power struggle," says an Indian spokesman. "We want to teach our children Indian history and culture."

The problem is that Indian education has been confused with Indian assimilation. As Senator Edward Kennedy's subcommittee on Indian education once noted, "Education was the means whereby we emancipated the Indian child from his home, his parents, his extended family and his cultural heritage. It was an attempt to wash 'the savage habits' out of his mind. . . ."

In the latter half of the 19th century, the Federal Government began to organize a network of Indian board-

ing schools operated by the B.I.A. These schools were meant to prepare red children for the white world: they trained students for menial jobs, imposed harsh discipline and proscribed any show of "Indian-ness" among the children. Students were forbidden to practice their ancestral religion or to speak their native language.

The B.I.A. system has been liberalized gradually. It is no longer wholly obsessed with the "whitewashing" of young red minds, and it now is leaning more toward the concept of Indian control of Indian education. Yet, by habit and tradition, it often continues to preach the old assimilationist doctrine. "Dear God," prayed an Indian girl recently at a boarding school in Arizona, "help me not to hate my parents."

In any case, as more and more Indians have drifted off reservations and into cities and towns, the influence of public schools has begun to eclipse that of B.I.A. schools. It was into such schools that Congress intended to channel the frozen funds.

Indian children already receive educational aid from a variety of Federal sources. The B.I.A., for example, distributes \$25-million a year in so-called

"Johnson-O'Malley funds" designed to improve the education of Indian children in public schools. But these dollars are channeled through the states and thence to white-controlled local public-school systems. Though the B.I.A. last year set up special Indian committees charged with seeing that Johnson-O'Malley funds were spent on Indian children, Hershel Sahmaunt, director of the National Indian Education Association, contends that, "We never see most of that money."

Similarly, under its "impacted areas" program, which provides extra educational funds to "any Federally connected child," the Office of Education distributed about \$30-million this year to schools with Indian enrollments. (All Indian children are considered "Federally connected.") But again, Indian parents have little to say about who gets the money or how it is spent.

From the Indian standpoint, the appeal of the \$18-million allocation is that the money would go directly to Indian groups for the kinds of programs they want in the public schools.

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