

Excerpt from a 1928 report, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, on the impact of government policies on Native peoples, written by Lewis Meriam, pp. 3-4, 6-7, 11-14, 22.

An overwhelming majority of Indians are poor, even extremely poor, and they are not adjusted to the economic and social system of the dominant white civilization.

The prevailing living conditions among the great majority of the Indians are conducive to the development and spread of disease.

The housing conditions are likewise conducive to bad health. (p. 3-4)

The economic basis of the primitive culture of the Indian has been largely destroyed by the encroachment of white civilization. The Indians can no longer make a living as they did in the past by hunting, fishing, gathering wild products, and the extremely limited practice of primitive agriculture.

Several past policies adopted by the government in dealing with the Indians have been of a type which ... would tend to pauperize any race. Most notable was the practice of issuing rations to able-bodied Indians. (pp. 6-7)

The survey staff finds itself obliged to say frankly and unequivocally that the provisions for the care of the Indian children in boarding schools are grossly inadequate.

The outstanding deficiency is in the diet furnished the Indian children, many of whom are below normal health.... At the worst schools, the situation is serious in the extreme. The major diseases of the Indians are tuberculosis and trachoma. Tuberculosis unquestionably can best be combated by a preventive, curative diet and proper living conditions.

The boarding schools are crowded materially beyond their capacities.

The toilet facilities have in many cases not been increased proportionately to the increase in pupils, and they are fairly frequently not properly maintained or conveniently located. The supply of soap and towels has been inadequate.

The medical service rendered the boarding school children is not up to a reasonable standard.

The boarding schools are frankly supported in part by the labor of the students. Those above the fourth grade ordinarily work for half a day and go to school for half a day. The question may very properly be raised as to whether much of the work of Indian children in boarding schools would not be prohibited in many states by the child labor laws, notably the work in the machine laundries.

The discipline in the boarding schools is restrictive rather than developmental. Routine institutionalism is almost the invariable characteristic of the Indian boarding school.

At several schools the laundry equipment is antiquated and not properly safeguarded. To operate on a half-work, half-study plan makes the day very long, and the child has almost no free time and little opportunity for recreation. Not enough consideration has been given the question of whether the health of Indian children warrants the nation in supporting the Indian boarding schools in part through the labor of these children.

The medical attention given Indian children in the day schools maintained by the government is also below a reasonable standard.

Although the problem of the returned Indian student has been much discussed, and it is recognized that in many instances the child returns home poorly adjusted to conditions that confront him, the Indian Service has lacked the funds to attempt to aid the children when they leave school either to find employment away from the reservation or to return to their homes and work out their salvation there. (pp. 11-14)

The Indian Service has not appreciated the fundamental importance of family life and community activities in the social and economic development of a people. The tendency has been toward weakening Indian family life and community activities.... The long continued policy of removing Indian children from the home and placing them for years in boarding school largely disintegrates the family and interferes with developing normal family life. The belief has apparently been that the shortest road to civilization is to take children away from their parents and insofar as possible to stamp out the old Indian life. The Indian community activities particularly have often been opposed if not suppressed.... [T]he action taken has often been the radical one of attempting to destroy rather than the educational process of gradual modification and development. (p. 15)

Both the government and the missionaries have often failed to study, understand, and take a sympathetic attitude toward Indian ways, Indian ethics, and Indian religion. The exceptional government worker and the exceptional missionary have demonstrated what can be done by building on what is sound and good in the Indian's own life. (p. 16)

Although the Indian Service has rendered much valuable service in conserving Indian property, it has not gone far enough in protecting the individual Indian from exploitation. The exploitation of Indians in Oklahoma has been notorious, but this exploitation has taken place under the state courts and the guardians appointed by them. Recent legislation ... has wonderfully improved the situation. (p. 18)