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HEALING AND JUSTICE: NATIVE AMERICAN BOARDING SCHOOL COALITION STARTS CARLISLE REPATRIATION PETITION FOR TRIBES

BY NATIVE NEWS ONLINE STAFF / CURRENTS / 08 APR 2016

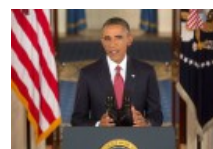
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BOULDER, COLORADO — The Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) recently started an online petition on behalf of the Northern Arapaho and the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Nations citing The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The Tribes are requesting repatriation of the remains of Native American students buried at the Carlisle Boarding School Cemetery. Under NAGPRA, the Army War College is required by law to complete an inventory of the remains and to comply with these requests for repatriation.

Carlisle: The Icon of an Era

In 1879 the first American Indian children arrived at Carlisle Boarding School. The school would



remain open for 39 years and some 12,000 children would be sent there for forced assimilation. This was the beginning of the US Boarding School Era—the federal government’s policy of dealing with the “Indian problem” by using education as a weapon. The intent was to remove all traces of tribal cultures—language, spiritual traditions, family ties, etc. and replace them with European Christian ideals of civilization, religion, and culture. “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” was the slogan and cultural genocide was the result.

“Our children were taken. Our language beaten out of them. Their hair cut off without ceremony. And our families torn apart” said Christine Diindiisi McCleave, Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, Executive Officer of the NABS Healing Coalition.

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“Generations later, our tribal communities bear the soul wound of this loss. Grieving and inter-generational trauma are the legacies of the US Boarding School Policy. And Carlisle Industrial Indian School was at the genesis of it all. So as the flagship school—the icon and model of all boarding schools—it makes sense that Carlisle would also be the model for healing and the genesis of the truth, reconciliation, and healing process” added McCleave who is also the descendant of a boarding school survivor.

Tribes Request Repatriation

In 2007, Yufna Soldier Wolf, Director of the Northern Arapaho Tribal Historic Preservation Office and a relative of a student who died at Carlisle Boarding School, requested to have the child’s remains returned home. The Carlisle School, now the Army War College, sent back a condescending letter stating that the cemetery had become part of their community and a historic site. They wrote that the Boarding School graveyard was “one of the most beautiful tributes to the Native American people” with daily visits from Native “people as well as other local inhabitants and even several foreign visitors.” Soldier Wolf was infuriated and devastated. It wasn’t until 2015 that she brought the request back to the Army War College and added more students’ names to the list.

This time, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe also joined the request for their ancestors’ remains with names of Rosebud students who died and were buried at Carlisle. The two tribes are now calling other tribes to join in the Carlisle repatriation request. They hope to engage in government to government conversations which will result in the return of their children—the repatriation of remains from Carlisle. But more importantly, the Army War College is under obligation by US law, NAGPRA, to complete an inventory of the remains and to comply with these requests for repatriation.

The Call to Action

The NABS Healing Coalition is in support of the

requests from the Rosebud Sioux, Northern Arapaho, and any other tribe who might request the repatriation of their relatives' remains that are interred at the Army War College in Carlisle, PA.

"We join the 'Call to Repatriate' the children buried at the Carlisle cemetery who deserve to go home and to receive a proper, culturally-relevant burial. The relatives of these children are entitled to have the remains returned so that they may grieve and heal from their loss in whatever way they choose and not have to travel all the way to Carlisle, PA to visit them. Nor should they be subjected to any further grieving resulting from having their loved ones identified as a tourist attraction for the Army War College" wrote NABS in their letters of support and in the petition they drafted on behalf of the tribes.

NABS believes repatriation is a small yet essential part of healing the trans-generational wounds inflicted upon families and individuals through the US Boarding School experience. Read the full petition online at boardingschoolhealing.org.

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