

House Committee on Natural Resources,
House Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States

H.R. 5444 / S. 2907, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the US Act.

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Thursday, May 12, 2022

In support of H.R. 5444 / S. 2907, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the US Act

I. Introduction:

My name is Crystal Cavalier, I am an enrolled citizen of the Occaneechi Band of Saponi Nation in Burlington, North Carolina. I am the founder and executive Director of Missing Murdered Indigenous Women Coalition of North Carolina (MMIWNC) a 501c3 nonprofit. I am submitting my written testimony in support of H.R. 5444 / S. 2907, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the US Act.

Our tribes on the East Coast are first contract tribes. Our tribe is only state recognized because we do not meet the criteria for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to become federally recognized. Our treaties were made with England, and the United States (US) does not recognize those treaties as valid. We have been systematically erased, and our race has been changed on the US Census from Indian to colored, to mulatto to eventually either black or white in the last 400 years.

II. Content:

Citizens of the US, Indigenous people and mainstream society need to understand, learn, and heal from the trauma placed upon all indigenous people from boarding schools. Especially on the land that is now known as the United States, from when the English first arrived to all the horrific stories in name of Christianizing and Anglicizing. You can't begin to heal unless you start at the beginning. There are known boarding schools from the 1800s, but the very idea of boarding schools started in Virginia at William and Mary. Not much history is known about East Coast Boarding Schools. The reason I am taking this position is that our tribes were put together on a reservation even before the formation of the United States. I will speak on two schools the one on Fort Christanna and the one at William and Mary, Brafferton. My family has been affected by this boarding school and the laws that came from it in North Carolina and Virginia. We had to hide who we were, not speaking of our heritage, our ways, and our language. We had to assimilate and blend into a dominant mainstream society. Our family like many families have suffered from anti-blackness to the intergenerational trauma of the Jim Crow South. Our

generation of people who are in the 60s, 70s and 80s, have suffered harms that lead them to leave the area and not look back, leaving our communities suffering and dwindling. Many people are no longer tied to the land, and have no cares about the environment, animals, and their own health. Further effects are children and grandchildren of this generation is suffering from alcohol and drug abuse. This is a cycle effect and I am taking a stand to stop this generational curse from moving further in our families.

Let me begin with Fort Christanna, this was one of the projects of Lt. Governor Alexander Spotswood, who was governor of the Virginia Colony 1710-1722 (Fort Christanna, named for Christ and Queen Anne was built). In this settlement, the Occaneechi, the Monacan, the Eno, the Tutelo and the Saponi all came together. A melting pot of tribes if you will, all Eastern Siouan speaking tribes. The surrounding reservation encompassed roughly four-square miles, with the Meherrin River running through the center. On the North side of the Meherrin River were the Nansemond since they were of different cultures and language. All the children were sent to a school devised by Governor Spotswood to teach them Christianity and English. This school was sponsored by the College of William and Mary and Mr. Griffin was solicited to teach the youths. In 1720, Governor Spotswood declared that the Fort be dispersed and the tribes to move in separate directions.

Secondly, upon the death of Sir Robert Boyle executors decided to use the funds to purchase Brafferton Manor in Yorkshire, England, and they designated part of the rents paid by the manor's tenants to be given annually to support the Indian School at William & Mary, while another part would go to the Indian School at Harvard College in Massachusetts. It was most likely in response to the Boyle bequest that language was added to the Royal Charter to list as one of the William & Mary's missions "that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians, to the glory of Almighty God...." In return for annual payments from Boyle's executors, W&M would keep "soe many Indian children in Sicknesse and health, in Meat, drink, Washing, Lodgeing, Cloathes, Medicine, books and Education from the first beginning of Letters till they are ready to receive Orders and be thought Sufficent to be sent abroad to preach and Convert the Indians."

The Virginia colonists tried several strategies for recruiting Indian boys. Governor Nicholson instructed colonists who traded with Indian tribes to look for suitable Indian students. Later, Virginia officials negotiating treaties with Indian tribes such as the Tuscarora, Chickahominy and Catawba tried to convince the native leaders to send boys to the school. Students came from both local "tributary" tribes—such as the Pamunkey, Chickahominy, and Nansemond who lived close to Williamsburg and paid tribute to the colony—and more distant tribes, including the Catawba in North Carolina, the Cherokee in the southern Appalachian Mountains, and the Delaware and Wyandot of the Ohio River Valley. Enrollment reached a height of 24 students in 1712 but declined to eight in 1754 and stayed at about that level until the school closed.

The Indian School at William & Mary cannot be counted a success by the standards of the Englishman. It failed in the goal of Anglicizing and Christianizing the native populace. As soon as the Indian students left the school, the colonists complained, they abandoned the behaviors they learned at the Brafferton and resumed Indian ways of life. Worse yet, from

the colonists' point of view, some Indians used their knowledge of English not to help the Virginians but to defend their tribes' cultures and well-being. Many Indian students never returned to their tribes, and a strange diet as well as exposure to European diseases for which they had no immunity sickened and killed several students, especially in the school's early years. This is all history written by the colonizers, we do not know how the Indians were treated, as this is just a one side historical document.

III. Closing:

I want to thank the Committee for allowing me the opportunity to submit my written testimony in support of H.R. 5444 / S. 2907, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the US Act. We must uncover the entire truth, ugly and messy as it may be. That is the only way we can heal the nation and move forward together.

References

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- Mark Kostro, with contributions by Alexandra Martin and Edward A. Chappell, "Archaeological Investigations at the Brafferton: A Final Report on the 2011-12 Excavations," Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Department of Architectural and Archaeological Research, 2013.
- Danielle Moretti-Langholtz and Buck Woodard, ed., *Building the Brafferton*, Muscarelle Museum of Art, 2019.