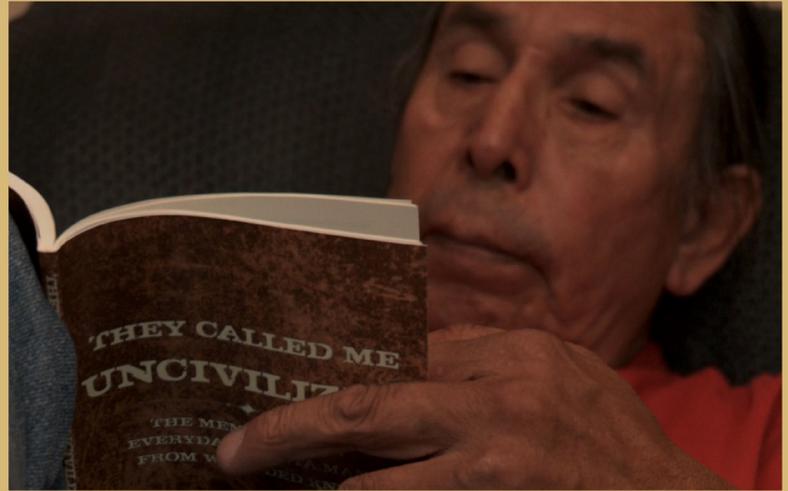


• VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE •

The Thick Dark Fog



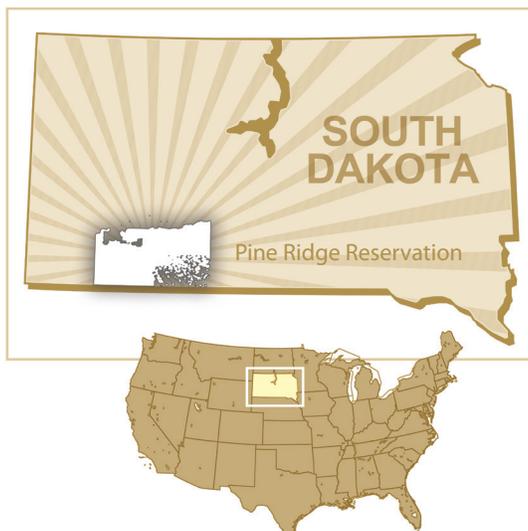
The original girls' dormitory building at Oglala Community High School. Image courtesy of Kahlil Hudson.



Walter Littlemoon reads from his book, *They Called Me Uncivilized: The Memoir of an Everyday Lakota Man from Wounded Knee*. Image courtesy of Kahlil Hudson.

“Like so many, I have lived a life blocked by fear, led by fear and governed by fear that was created in those childhood days.”

— Walter Littlemoon (Lakota)



At age 58, Walter Littlemoon wanted to reach out to his estranged children by writing his memoirs and explaining the reasons for his challenges as a parent. But when he came to his government boarding school days, beginning at age five, he reached a block. The mission of many of these schools had been to “kill the Indian and save the man.” Children were sometimes beaten, humiliated and abused if caught speaking their Native language, expressing their Native identity in any way and for resisting acts of forced assimilation. Memories of having his Lakota identity attacked and the forced separation from his family and culture had been buried deep inside of Walter. He realized that he had been living in a “thick dark fog” of unresolved trauma. Could he do the work necessary to heal himself by facing these demons?

PRODUCER'S NOTES



Randy Vasquez

Image courtesy of Kahlil Hudson

RANDY VASQUEZ, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR:

"I first read about American Indian boarding schools in 2003. Before this, I was suspicious that the drunk Indian stereotype was a purely genetic phenomenon or physical weakness. The widespread and various unresolved childhood traumas brought on by the boarding school experience was profound stuff, and that it was so little known was alarming to me, especially in comparison to how Canadian Native people have forced the issue onto their front pages. It made sense to me that someone would drink in order to suppress unspeakable childhood memories. Through a series of introductions in the medical field, I met Walter and his wife Jane. Their work of making public the impact of the boarding schools through their attempts to get Walter's memoirs published coincided with my desire to follow up on my first documentary, *Testimony: The Maria Guardado Story*. *Testimony* tells the story of a Salvadoran woman who survived kidnapping and torture by that country's notorious death squads in 1980. After viewing *Testimony*, Walter decided to move forward with me on a documentary of his survival story.

I can't talk about *The Thick Dark Fog* without mentioning Maria's story because one naturally led to the other. I identified strongly with these individuals as folks who have had to deal with the disadvantages of having brown skin in this world. Walter and Maria had suffered horrible traumas for being targets of U.S. government policy, in Walter's case domestic policy, in Maria's case foreign. In both films, I focused on their trauma but more importantly on their recovery and its inherent inspiration. Their stories of survival were beyond my middle-class understanding and thus my attempt to understand them through telling their stories on film. At the time we met, both of them were yearning to get their experiences out to larger audiences as much to heal as to educate."

BY THE NUMBERS

Beginning in the **19th century**, the U.S. government established **hundreds** of Indian Boarding Schools as a way to "assimilate" Native People into the mainstream culture.

Although the records are unclear, it is estimated that over **100,000** Native American children were sent to boarding schools from the years **1879-1920**. It was mandated by the U.S. government that all Indian children would attend.

Today, **four** BIA boarding schools are currently in use. They are the Chemawa Indian School at Forest Grove, OR; Sherman Indian School at Riverside, CA; Flandreau Indian School at Flandreau, SD; and Riverside Indian School at Anadarko, OK.

Richard Henry Pratt founded the **first** off-Reservation boarding school, Carlisle Indian School of Pennsylvania, in **1879**. A former U.S. Colonel, Pratt based the school on a military model designed to, in his own words, "kill the Indian and save the man."

Early efforts to educate Native children were accomplished through **both** boarding schools and day schools that were run either by the government, religious organizations, or religious organizations with government support.

Until **1924**, Native American people were not legal citizens of the United States. The Curtis Act finally conferred full citizenship to all Native Americans.

Successful education of Native students continues to be a challenge in Indian Country. Although the data varies from state to state, it is estimated that close to **50%** of all Native American students drop out of high school before receiving their diploma.

In **1978**, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the **first** Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act to support communities in developing culturally supportive college programs for their Tribes. The law remains an authorization for the schools under the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Today, there are more than **30** Tribal colleges that serve more than **30,000** students who represent more than **250** Tribes from across the U.S., Mexico, and Canada.

On **December 2, 2011**, President Obama signed a new Executive Order on Improving American Indian and Alaska Native Educational Opportunities and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities. The order provides for an Interagency Working Group to facilitate the order and increase educational opportunities for Tribal colleges and universities. The Order also calls for increasing American Indian and Alaska Native outcomes including Native language and culture.

DELVE DEEPER

1. In the film, we can see that Jane was a key ally in helping Walter to heal. We have all had helpers who got us through the tough times. Who in your life helps get you through hard times?

2. Many of us have experienced trauma either individually or as a community. How would you define trauma? What's the difference between personal trauma and trauma to an entire community and how does their healing differ?

3. How do you think the boarding school experience has affected today's Indian communities? Take a moment to consider what you have just learned from Walter's story.

4. Do you think that the federal government accomplished its goal of assimilating Indians into American society? Why or why not? Is it likely that a person's cultural background can be totally erased? What aspects of your own culture do you feel most connected to?

5. Many educators feel that Native American History, including the boarding school era, is not included in our American History textbooks. Do you feel that Native American History is adequately taught in our public schools systems? What do you think should be done differently?

IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. By telling his story, both in his book and in this film, Walter was able to heal from the abuses he experienced from his early separation from his family and the treatment he received at the boarding school. What role does storytelling play in your life? Tell a classmate or a member of your group a story about something difficult that happened to you. Notice how you feel about your story once you have told somebody else. Did it help you to speak about it? Do your feelings about it change in any way?

2. At Carlisle Indian School, photographs were taken of the Native children "before" and "after" as a way of showing how the children could be assimilated into mainstream culture. Either on the internet or in books, study a dozen or so photographs that have been collected from the boarding school years. Look at the children's faces. Look at their before and after pictures. Discuss in what ways clothing, hair styles, etc. are connected to a person's sense of identity. Also, as you study the photographs, consider what the pictures are not telling us. Who was taking the pictures and for what reason(s)? How does this affect what we can learn about the schools? What are some other sources from which we can learn more about the boarding school experience?

3. Either in your group or in your classroom, create a skit using ribbons, hats, masks, or some other identifying item to create two or more groups of people. Have each group create their "identity" through discussion of language, homelands, etc. Now, have one group encircle the other group and take those items away from half of the group. Follow with a discussion about how it felt to be "removed" from your group and stripped of your identifying items.

4. Each culture has a history, a home land, and identifying markers such as language, religion, ways of being and doing, types of work, specific foods, etc. that both set them apart from other cultural groups and at the same time creates a sense of belonging within the chosen group. Individually or as a group explore what makes your own culture unique. How do you feel about those unique qualities of your personal cultural group? Do you feel like you have a cultural group? How would it feel if something outside of the group insisted that you change?

5. Either on the internet or in books and articles, learn more about what type of work the students performed at the boarding schools? Which jobs were assigned to boys and which to girls? Look at the photographs for clues. Did these students work harder than young people today? What would they learn from their daily jobs? Do you think these work assignments helped them after they left school?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERNET ARTICLES AND SOURCES

www.bie.edu/Schools/index.htm

www.amazon.com/They-Called-Me-Uncivilized-Everyday/dp/1440162786/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1328210445&sr=1-1

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2012/01/30/bias-impact-on-indian-education-is-an-education-in-bad-education-75083>

www.merrietherald.com/community/136980008.html

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/11/22/american-indian-film-festival-honors-the-thick-dark-fog-63682>

www.easternecho.com/index.php/article/2011/11/film_shows_native_american_struggles

www.huffingtonpost.com/stephanie-woodard/post_2300_b_925071.html

<http://labloga.blogspot.com/2011/08/thick-dark-fog.html>

www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/American_Indian_School_Records

<http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/marr.html#mission>

http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2004161238_boardingschool03m.html

<https://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~rnelson/asail/JRA2.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_American_boarding_schools#List_of_Native_American_boarding_schools

www.pbs.org/indiancountry/history/boarding.html

www.claihr.ca/projects/addressingIndianResidential.html

www.paherald.sk.ca/Local/News/2012-02-03/article-2885724/A-shared-residential-school-experience/1

<https://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~rnelson/asail/JRA2.html>



Walter Littlemoon and friends in Wounded Knee, South Dakota.
Image courtesy of Kahlil Hudson.

BOOKS

They Called Me Uncivilized: The Memoir of an Everyday Lakota Man from Wounded Knee, Walter Littlemoon and Jane Ridgway

Trauma and Recovery, Judith Herman

Boarding School Seasons, Brenda Child

American Indian Education: A History, Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder

ORGANIZATIONS

The Boarding School Healing Project: www.boardingschoolhealing-project.org/

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation: www.ahf.ca/

Boarding School Survivors: www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk/index.htm

RECOMMENDED FILMS

Rabbit Proof Fence

Older Than America

The Magdalene Sisters

Where the Spirit Lives

All content in this Viewer Discussion Guide may be reproduced in whole or in part for educational use.

Major funding for *The Thick Dark Fog* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting & Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc. (NAPT). Additional funding provided by the Major League Baseball Association's Player's Trust.

This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including public radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

Funding for this Viewer Discussion Guide was provided by Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT). NAPT shares Native stories with the world through support of the creation, promotion and distribution of Native media. For more information, please visit nativetelecom.org.



The Littlemoon family circa 1950.
Image courtesy of Walter Littlemoon.

To find out more, please visit:

nativetelecom.org/thick_dark_fog