



Photographs by John N. Choate, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives, #53,599 and #53,599-A

Pictured on the left is a Navajo boy named Tom Torlino as he entered the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. On the right, Tom is pictured again a short time after his assimilation education had begun. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the United States government implemented various assimilation policies in an effort to force Native communities to abandon their traditions and beliefs and adopt the practices of Western society. Boarding schools were one of the most widespread mechanisms for eliminating American Indian cultures. In boarding schools, Indian students were forced to cut their hair, dress like U.S. citizens, and were not allowed to speak their Native languages. These educational practices had a major impact on individual identity and the ability of Native communities to retain their own languages. Although most American Indian people today speak English, they still consider their traditional languages to be extremely important for cultural identity.