

## Straight from the Horse's Mouth

“Straight from the horse's mouth” is a saying you may or may not be familiar with. Back in the day when horse racing circles wanted or shared tips they would ask someone in constant contact with the horses, such as a trainer, stable hand or caretaker. These individuals would know better than anyone the condition of the animal because of the time they spent with their specific horse. What source would you believe when being told a story or when looking for information?

Brenda J. Child argues in her book *Boarding School Seasons* that letters written between American Indian students conversing with their families gives us a more accurate understanding of American Indian's points of view on their experiences with boarding school life. Unlike publications by the U.S government that more appropriately serve historians for federal policy purposes, these letters open up a raw, first hand account at what their perspective were which in turn brings the reader a better understanding of the American Indian child and their reality.

Throughout the book Child's shows us letters written by students expressing homesickness, their workloads, schoolwork, illness and rebellions. She gives us examples of parents, who express fear for their children, writing letters in response or demanding improvements for their children and their living conditions at school. “In part it is the history of people who experienced forced assimilation, and who to a varying degree lost control over important aspects of their own lives.” (7) She does take time to bring up small triumphs from time to time explaining that this was the resiliency of the American Indian people; they were not defeated, the U.S government failed at the goal to “assimilate” or stamp out their culture.

Child's has found the “horses mouth” so to speak. Her willingness to take a back seat lets the reader dive into these private letters. These letters are written freely with no concern of “political correctness”; they pull on our emotions something debated back and forth on its ability

to connect the human race. It is in these moments of emotion we get to see on a clearer level the mindset of these individuals, whereas anything outside of this is interpretation through a denser lens at best. She also argues that American Indians managed to create “positive” experiences from their time at boarding school due to their resiliency as a people. Some examples including Pan-Indian culture, the Moccasin telegraph and star quilts are used. I would caution Child’s willingness to attribute every situation’s outcome as credit to the American Indians resiliency but that is my only critique. I would argue that Pan-Indian culture cannot be fully accredited to American Indians but more as a culmination and result of their situation.

*Boarding School Seasons* is a powerful tool for understanding there is more than one “truth” to history. The black and white aspect of facts on paper cannot display the emotions of a people and how they felt. Child’s has shown us the importance of understanding and uncovering how American Indians felt by searching for new perspective. In doing so we have a chance at healing the wounds of the past that are very alive today by creating new understanding.