

## Reading 6

# AMERICANIZING THE NATIVE AMERICAN

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*The following reading, "Americanizing the Native American," helps illustrate the concepts found in Chapter 4 of Sociology and You: socialization, desocialization, and resocialization. After the United States government subdued the Indian tribes of the Midwest, thousands of Native Americans were taken from their traditional homes and forced to relocate on reservations. Fearing future uprisings, the United States government decided to resocialize the native children by destroying traditional culture and introducing the "American" way of life. This reading is from the work of Helen Sekaquaptewa, a Hopi Indian from Arizona, and describes her experiences as a student in a reservation day school during the early 1900s.*

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**B**y the time I was old enough to go to school, there had been a day school built down off the mesa, where children up to the third grade could go to school by day and live at home. This was a concession to the Hopi parents, but still, many of them resisted even putting their children into the day school.

When we were five or six years of age, we, with our parents (Hostiles), became involved with the school officials, assisted by the Navajo policemen, in a serious and rather desperate game of hide-and-seek, where little Hopi boys and girls were the forfeit in the game. Every day the school principal sent out a truant officer, and many times he himself went with the officer, going to Hopi homes to take the children to school. The Navajo policemen who assisted in finding hidden children were dressed in old army uniforms, and they wore regular cavalry hats over their long hair, done up in a knot. This made quite a picture—especially the traditional hair style with a white man's hat. It had not been customary for Indians to wear hats up to that time.

When September came there was no peace for us. Early in the morning, from our houses on the mesa, we could see the principal and the officer start out from the school, walking up the trail to "get" the children. Hostile parents tried every day in different ways to hide us from them, for once you were caught, you had

lost the game. You were discovered and listed and you had to go to school and not hide any more. I was finally caught and went to the Oraibi day school one session, when I was about six years old, but not before many times outwitting Mr. Schoolman.

Sometimes, after a very early breakfast, somebody's grandmother would take a lunch and go with a group of eight to twelve little girls and hide them in the cornfields away out from the village. On another day another grandmother would go in the other direction over the hills among the cedars where we would play in a ravine, have our lunch and come back home in the afternoon. Men would be out with little boys playing this game of hide and seek. One day I got left behind and was sent out with a group of boys. I didn't know the man, and the boys' games were not for me, and I cried all day.

A place where one or two small children could be stowed away on short notice was the rabbit blanket. A rabbit blanket is made by cutting dressed rabbit skins in two-inch strips and weaving them into a warp of wool thread. When not in use, in warm weather, this blanket is hung by the four corners from a hook in the rafter beam, to prevent it from being moth-eaten. But once discovered, this hiding place was out. The school officer would feel of the rabbit blanket first thing on coming into the room.

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Most houses have a piki storage cupboard in a partition wall. This would be the thickness of the wall and about two by three feet. A cloth covered the front, making a good place to keep the piki supply dry and clean. One day the officers were only two doors away when my mother was aware of their presence. She snatched her young son Henry and put him curled up in the piki cupboard just in time to win the game—that day.

Our houses were two and three stories high. When a lower room became old and unsafe, it was used as a dump place for ashes, peach stones, melon and squash seeds, and bits of discarded corn; anything that could be eaten was preserved in the ashes, and the room was gradually filled. Then in time of famine these bits of food could be dug out and eaten. In the home of my childhood such a room was about three-fourths filled. One September morning my brother and I were hidden there. We lay on our stomachs in the dark, facing a small opening. We saw the feet of the principal and policemen as they walked by, and heard their big voices as they looked about wondering where the children were. They didn't find us that day.

One morning an older man took several boys out to hide. Emory, who later was my husband, was one of these boys. The man took them off the mesa where there was a big fissure in a sheer cliff with a bigger space behind it, away down in the rocks where no horse could go. The grandfather told the boys to stay there and be quiet. He then went a little way away and began hoeing in the orchard. The boys soon wanted to come out and play, but the grandfather said "no." Pretty soon they heard the sound of approaching horses' hoofs and looking up to the top of the cliff saw the Navajo policeman. He rode around out of sight, but pretty soon was seen coming up the valley toward the grandfather. The policeman couldn't get into the crack in the rock but he got off his horse looking for footprints. The boys had been careful to step on rocks and grass and left no footprints. After looking around a while the policeman got on his horse and rode away. After he left and they were sure he would not

come back, then the boys came out to play, and later the grandfather brought out the lunch.

Some boys made trouble after they were enrolled in school. At recess they would run away. They could outrun the principal. One principal, in desperation, got himself a .22 rifle with blank bullets. When he shot at the boys they stopped running.

I don't remember for sure just how I came to be "caught." Maybe both my mother and myself got a little tired of getting up early every morning and running off to hide all day. She probably thought to herself, "Oh, let them get her. I am tired of this. It is wearing me down." The hide-and-seek game continued through September, but with October, the colder weather was on the schoolman's side.

So, one morning, I was "caught." Even then, it was the rule among mothers not to let the child go voluntarily. As the policeman reached to take me by the arm, my mother put her arm around me. Tradition required that it appear that I was forced into school. I was escorted down off the mesa to the schoolhouse, along with several other children. First, each was given a bath by one of the Indian women who worked at the school. Baths were given in the kitchen in a round, galvanized tub. Then we were clothed in cotton underwear, cotton dresses, and long black stockings and heavy shoes, furnished by the government. Each week we had a bath and a complete change of clothing. We were permitted to wear the clothes home each day, but my mother took off the clothes of the detested white man as soon as I got home, until it was time to go to school the next day.

Names were given to each child by the school. Mine was "Helen." Each child had a name card pinned on, for as many days as it took for the teacher to learn and remember the name she had given us. Our teacher was Miss Stanley. She began by teaching us the names of objects about the room. We read a little from big charts on the wall later on, but I don't remember ever using any books.

A feud developed over the years as the people were divided into sides for and against

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those who came from the outside. These two factions were known as the "Friendlies" (to the government) and the "Hostiles" (to the government), and "they" came to mean anyone who represented an outside influence. Later these groups were known as the "Progressives" and the "Traditionals."

Those who put their children into school voluntarily were given an ax, a hoe, a shovel, or a rake, but stoves and wagons they had to work for. Hostile parents scornfully rejected these tools even though they would have served them better than the implements they made of wood or stone. These overtures were looked upon only as a bait or wedge that would end in no good to them. Hostile parents warned their children, when they were leaving for school, "Don't take the pencil in your hand. If you do, it means you give consent to what they want you to do. Don't do it."

The attitude of the parents carried over to their children, as was shown on the schoolgrounds. The children of the "Friendlies" made fun of us, calling us "Hostiles," and they would not let us join with them in their play, so I was unhappy some of the time. However, I do have pleasant memories of how one of my fourteen-year-old cousins used to carry me on his back down off

the mesa to school. Going back up the trail after school was often a skirmish. My older brother would carefully lead his little sister up the trails going home. The "Friendly" children often ran ahead up the trail and gathered rocks and threw them down at us when we came to the bottom of the steep rocky ledge. Sometimes we would try another way up, following little gullies, or going around and coming up on the trail on the opposite side of the mesa—the long way home—to avoid being pelted with rocks.

I liked school. It was pleasant and warm inside. I liked to wear the clothes they gave us at school; but when I learned that the kids were "hostile" to us, I didn't want to go to school. Everyone, even the principal and the teachers and employees, were more or less against us.

The Mennonites had a church in Old Oraibi, but our parents would not let us go even to their Sunday School. We wanted to go, and sometimes we went around the mesa and came to Sunday School by a back path. They would give us a little ticket each time we came, and on Christmas they gave a big prize to the one who had the most tickets. We did not understand much that they said, but it was nice to be there. I received a few tickets but gave them away. I did not dare to accept a present.

Helen Sekaquaptewa, *Me and Mine: The Life Story of Helen Sekaquaptewa* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1969), pp. 7-15.