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Education beyond the Mesas: Hopi Students at Sherman Institute, 1902-1929 (Indigenous Education)

Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert

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Education beyond the Mesas is the fascinating story of how generations of Hopi schoolchildren from northeastern Arizona “turned the power” by using compulsory federal education to affirm their way of life and better their community. Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, one of the largest off-reservation boarding schools in the United States, followed other federally funded boarding schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in promoting the assimilation of indigenous people into mainstream America. Many Hopi schoolchildren, deeply conversant in Hopi values and traditional education before being sent to Sherman Institute, resisted this program of acculturation. Immersed in learning about another world, generations of Hopi children drew on their culture to skillfully navigate a system designed to change them irrevocably. In fact, not only did the Hopi children strengthen their commitment to their families and communities while away in the “land of oranges,” they used their new skills, fluency in English, and knowledge of politics and economics to help their people when they eventually returned home.

Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert draws on interviews, archival records, and his own experiences growing up in the Hopi community to offer a powerful account of a quiet, enduring triumph.

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