

## Section A: International

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### American Indians Higher Education Before 1974: From Colonization to Self-Determination<sup>1</sup>

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Although Europeans and Americans involved American Indians in their educational systems almost from first contact, it was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the United States government made a full scale assault and took control of virtually all aspects of American Indian education, with the purpose of forcing or encouraging assimilation. This assault began with treaty-based support for education in government schools run by both federally hired schoolteachers and missionaries, paid for directly with money the tribes received for their lands. By the late nineteenth century the federal government, recognizing the failure of day schools in the assimilation process, turned to the use of boarding schools, on-reservation and off, through which Indians were trained in vocational and domestic skills and which were intended to sever children's ties to their cultures. During this time few Indians were educated at a college level. The English and later Americans expected those who were educated to use their educations to help in the assimilation process. These educational systems, while disrupting (though not destroying) reservation life and culture, focussed almost exclusively on industrial and domestic, not intellectual, training. The quality of education provided was so low that even Indian students wishing to attend college were often academically ineligible for entrance.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s, when Indian communities were finally able to begin the arduous (and still-continuing) process of retaking control of their educational systems and institutions, from the grade school through the college levels, that the situation began to seem at all promising. From the pre-school and grade school levels to the founding of the Tribal Community Colleges and private Indian-run colleges such as NAES College, there were the beginnings of an attempt to infuse tribal cultural knowledge into teaching and learning systems in ways in which Indian communities could adapt curriculum to their specific needs, and ultimately control the standards for education.

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#### Colonial North America

American Indians were the first people to establish institutions of higher education in the western hemisphere. The Maya, for example, built higher education training structures, where leaders were trained, such as the one at the ruins in Copan, Honduras. The Aztec empire was ruled by political and religious leaders "who had first been trained in schools under rigid priestly supervision." The Incas had established a university in Cuzco before Spanish arrival.<sup>2</sup>

Although most North American Indian nations and tribes did not have formal educational institutions which we would recognize as schools in the years before European contact, all those nations had internal

