

Knowledge and Contemporary Effects of Historical Trauma on American Indian and Alaska Native People

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Previous generations of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people endured traumatic events that continue to affect current generations. These traumatic events are remembered across generations and include community massacres, rapid spreading of diseases, forced relocation, forced removal of children to Indian boarding schools, and illegalization of spiritual and cultural practices.⁵ Additionally, the historical trauma response manifests in feelings of sadness, grief, and anger when Indigenous people remember the historical losses their group has experienced.⁶ However, the study of historical trauma is new in understanding what these effects are and how they impact individuals, families, and communities.

This research examines the knowledge and experiences of historical trauma by American Indian and Alaska Native college students at a four-year college in the Mountain West that has a history of being an Indian Boarding School from 1891 to 1911. Students were asked to tell their stories of how historical trauma has impacted them, and their communities, and how historical trauma influences the way they see the world. Findings within these interviews suggest an impactful journey through storytelling of how each participant conceptualized historical trauma for themselves, their families, and their communities; the initial impact of first learning about historical trauma; connecting the past events to current events, the importance of talking and sharing this information with others; the process of hurting and healing; and the feeling of realization, empowerment, and acceptance of historical trauma.

⁵ Stannard, D. E. (1992). *American holocaust: Columbus and the conquest of the New World*. Oxford University Press; Thornton, R. (1987). *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492*. University of Oklahoma Press.

⁶ Duran, E., Duran, B., Brave Heart, M. Y. H., & Yellow Horse-Davis, S. (1998). Healing the American Indian soul wound. In *International handbook of multigenerational legacies of trauma* (pp. 341-354). Springer.