

The Washington Post

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Highlighted work:

1. [More than 3,100 students died at schools built to crush Native American cultures](#)
2. [In the name of God: For decades, Catholic priests, brothers and sisters raped or molested Native American children who were taken from their homes by the U.S. government and forced to live at remote boarding schools, a Post investigation found.](#)

Full series:

1. [They took the children: The hidden legacy of Indian boarding schools in the United States](#)
 2. [Catholic bishops apologize for church's role operating Indian boarding schools](#)
 3. ['I formally apologize': Biden condemns U.S. Indian boarding schools](#)
 4. [Readers react to Post's investigative report on Indian boarding schools](#)
 5. [Data and documents compiled for the investigation](#)
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To the Judges:

For 150 years, the U.S. government wrested Native American children from their families and forced them to attend Indian boarding schools in an effort to systematically strip them of their cultures and languages. The hundreds of remote schools often resembled prison work camps.

Post reporters wanted to investigate this long-ignored chapter of American history to document the deaths and sexual abuse of Native American children on the government's watch. The result was a groundbreaking and visually arresting series that harnessed deep, primary-source reporting and novel storytelling techniques to illuminate generations-long government practices that had received little national scrutiny.

The Post's investigation documented [that at least 3,104 students died](#) at the schools between 1828 and 1970 — more than three times the number the U.S. Interior Department reported in its own investigation. Students died from disease, malnutrition, accidents and likely abuse. The Post also found nearly twice the number of student burial sites as documented by the Interior Department.

To humanize the numbers, reporters spent two days witnessing the exhumation of bones of three children who died 130 years ago at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. In an extraordinary four-day journey, reporters followed tribal members as they drove the remains home to Montana where they were reburied on tribal lands.

The Post's investigation also revealed [that at least 122 priests, sisters and brothers](#) assigned to 22 boarding schools operated by the Catholic Church or its affiliates were later accused of sexually abusing more than 1,000 children under their care. The Interior Department's investigation offered no details on the sexual abuse of children.

Reporters had to resolve conflicting views about what should be made public about the deaths of students. Though reporters filed Freedom of Information Act requests with the Interior Department for details from its investigation of student deaths, the agency would not release the names of children and provided no information about their causes of death or burial sites. The department cited privacy reasons, even though the deaths stretched back 150 years.

Reporters consulted with Native American leaders and researchers, survivors of the boarding schools and descendants of the children: Many wanted the children's names to be released to recognize and honor those who died at the schools. The Post team scoured through hundreds of thousands of documents in national archives, along with school records, death certificates, burial notices and oral histories, and also interviewed dozens of aging Indian boarding school survivors to document the deaths of more than 3,100 students. Of those, The Post found 1,373 names and published all of them.

The Interior Department also declined to release information about the burial sites of those who died at the schools because of possible grave-robbing or vandalism. Reporters consulted with Native American leaders, many who said they believed that transparency about these sites would help shed light on this dark, forgotten chapter of American history. Reporters found that more than 800 students were buried in cemeteries at or near the schools, underscoring how, in many cases, children's bodies were never sent home to their families. After careful consideration, The Post shared information about cemeteries where students were buried, but withheld the exact locations of individual graves.

The stories forced powerful institutions to take responsibility for the atrocities committed at Indian boarding schools. Two weeks after The Post published its story on sexual abuse at schools operated by the Catholic Church or its affiliates, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued [its first formal apology](#) for the church's role in inflicting a "history of trauma" on Native Americans.

In October, [President Joe Biden apologized](#) to Native Americans for the U.S. government's role in operating Indian boarding schools. Biden described the schools as "horribly, horribly wrong" and "a sin on our souls." He highlighted a school survivor who had been featured in The Post.

Sincerely,

Peter Wallsten
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