Michigan Indians and Assimilation

Matthew L.M. Fletcher
Michigan Indian Tribes

The U.S. government recognizes 12 American Indian tribes in Michigan by virtue of the treaties-making process. These tribes have certain reservations and privileges, such as tribal sovereignty, reserved lands and fishing rights, and services of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Their governments, rights, and privileges are protected because treaties are recognized as the "supreme law of the land" (Treaty VI, Paragraph 2, of the U.S. Constitution).
Indian Communities in 1837
What is assimilation?

Melting Pot?

Does Geronimo look like he wants to be assimilated?
Michigan Indian Assimilation
Language

Before...
• Anishinaabemowin

After....
• English
Religion

Before....
• Manitouwaag
• Midewewin

After....
• Catholic
• Protestant
Government and Society

Before....

• Ogemaag
• Persuasion
• Community Consensus
• Anishinaabekwewaag autonomous

After....

• Nothing
Economy and Work

**Before....**
- Hunting, Fishing, Trapping, Gathering, Farming
- Long-Distance Trading (Montreal, etc.)
- Local Trading Centers (Mackinac, Sault Ste. Marie, Detroit)

**After....**
- Wage Labor
- Craft Making
Most Important Tool of Assimilation

BOARDING SCHOOLS
Boarding School – Mt. Pleasant
Boarding School – Holy Childhood
Boarding Schools (1870s to 1950s)

• Involuntary
• English only!
• Farming only!
• Christianity only!
• Violence and abuse!
My long travel and the bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away.
Song about Mt. Pleasant

Six o'clock in the morning,
Our breakfast comes around.
A bowl of mush and molasses,
Was enough to knock you down.
Our coffee’s like tobacco juice,
Our bread is hard and stale,
and that’s the way they treat you
At Mt. Pleasant Indian Jail.
English was the official language of all Indian schools. Until the 1920’s use of Native American languages would be punished. An Indian caught speaking a native tongue might have his or her mouth washed out with soap or might suffer some other, more severe, penalty. Some children who spent several years at school found that when they returned home to the reservation they had difficulty communicating with their Ojibway-speaking parents.

[From the Clarke Historical Library]
Richard Pratt and Carlisle Indian School

“Kill the Indian to Save the Man”
Tom Torlino – Before (1882)
... and After (1885)
Death at an Indian Boarding School

It is with a feeling of sorrow that I write you telling of the death of your daughter Lizzie. She was not sick but a short time and we did not think her so near her end. On the evening of March 30th, I was at the girls building and the matron informed me that Lizzie had gone to bed not feeling well. I went up to her room and with the matron and found her in bed with what seemed a bad cold. ... She had quite a fever for several days and then seemed to improve, but did not rally as she ought to have done, and the doctor made a careful examination and said that she was without doubt going into quick consumption. ... Last Wednesday I was called away to Minneapolis and... I was very much surprised upon my return Saturday evening to find she was dead, as the doctor had given us no information except she might live for a number of months.
Modern Times – Post 1970s

SURVIVAL AND REVIVAL
Survival and Revival

- Modern Indian Governments: Decisions Made by Indian People
- Michigan Indian Education (1970s-present)
- Improved Tribal Economies
- Return of Tribal Languages
Indians Run Their Own Schools
Indian People *Adapt*
Hail to the Victors

Aanii bakinaagejig pane (Hail to the victors valiant)

Aanii bemnaagejig pane (Hail to the conquering heroes)

Aanii Michigan (Hail to Michigan)

Aapchigwa nishiiwag niigaanzijig (The leaders and the best)

Meg Noori, her kids, and Howard Kimewon
The Word for Pie
Baashkiminsigebiitoojishkweginiganak