

By the Kansas Historical Society

Newspapers and Public Perception

Haskell Indian Nations University is located in Lawrence, Kansas. It was opened in 1884 as the United States Indian Industrial Training School. It was an off-reservation boarding school for American Indian youth from across the country. Initially serving students younger than 14 years of age, Haskell soon served as a high school as well. By the 1970s the school dropped all lower grades and provided two-year associates degrees as a junior college. In 1993 it was renamed Haskell Indian Nations University in recognition of the school's four-year college degree programs.

Haskell's history reflects changes in American Indian educational policy and racial relations between American Indians and the government. The following primary documents are provided as evidence to explore those issues.

Document B

Jeffersonian Gazette article from 1900

The World's Civilizing Wonder-Worker

A policy of "benevolent assimilation" has been pursued against the Indians from the time Columbus first put foot upon the New Continent . . .

Time has wrought many changes and the advent of the white man has driven the wild Indian, happy, independent, fearless and contented to live in his own way, the "happy hunting ground" and he has gone to join the buffalo. In their stead you see on this plain, hundreds of dark skinned boys and girls, neatly clad and unless you are apprised of the fact, you scarcely can tell them [Haskell students] from the pupils of other schools.

Education and Christianity may rescue them from the extermination that the greedy white race has so nearly accomplished. The Indian of the future will be as different in appearance, habits, culture and thought if he is to remain a factor in the affairs of the world, from the Indian that Columbus first met, as day is different from night.



Photograph of a Haskell classroom taken between 1884 and 1909.

Document F

Lawrence-Journal World article from 1978

Cultural Aspects Set Haskell Apart

The Native American culture program instituted at Haskell in the fall of 1973, signals the school's official commitment to preservation of Indian culture and a move away from assimilation, aimed at bringing Indians into white society.

... the Haskell program seeks out experts from tribal communities to teach students Indian languages ... religion, law, philosophy and crafts. Don Ahshapanek, a Haskell instructor with a doctorate in biology and an active interest in Native American culture, developed the program, directed it for two years and sees it as essential to Haskell.

"It's equally as important as giving the students skills to get a job," he said. "If Haskell doesn't allow them to learn or express their wealth of history, beliefs and aspirations, we're doing them great harm psychologically and socially."

... "It's the heart of the institution," he [Bill Burgess, former Haskell dean of instruction] said. "A person has to be proud of what he or she is, relate to one world first, then to a dominant society. That's what Haskell ought to be about."