

2-15-1898

Letter from the Acting Secretary of the Interior, transmitting certain petitions and communications, with recommendations in regard to the education of white and negro children in the Indian Territory.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>



Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

H.R. Doc. No. 310, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1898)

This House Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [darinfox@ou.edu](mailto:darinfox@ou.edu).

EDUCATION OF WHITE AND NEGRO CHILDREN IN THE  
INDIAN TERRITORY.

---

LETTER

FROM

THE ACTING SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TRANSMITTING

CERTAIN PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS, WITH RECOMMENDATIONS IN REGARD TO THE EDUCATION OF WHITE AND NEGRO CHILDREN IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY.

---

FEBRUARY 16, 1898.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

---

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
*Washington, February 15, 1898.*

SIR: A most extraordinary and anomalous condition has been brought to my attention, relating to the education of children of white and colored residents of the Indian Territory.

All the lands in that Territory belong to the Indians of the Five Civilized Tribes, and the United States can not make any provision for educational purposes therein, except by direct appropriations from the public Treasury. No appropriations for the purpose have ever been made, consequently no provision for the education of white and colored youth exists.

The white and negro residents are there by sufferance only, having no voice in the government under which they live or ownership in the soil on which they reside.

It is represented to me that there are at this time at least between 250,000 and 300,000 white residents in the Indian Territory, to which large accessions are made each year. Of this number there are believed to be not less than 30,000 children of school age, all of whom are shut out from the schools supported by the governments of the five nations of Indians who control the Territory, as well as from those supported by the United States for the benefit of Indian youth. Besides these, the children of the entire colored population, said to number 25,000, are little, if any, better off. In the Chickasaw Nation they are disowned and cast off by the tribal government. The other nations have nominally admitted their colored populations to citizenship, but practically their children are not better provided for than those of the whites. It appears, therefore, that there is a mass of more than 50,000 children

of both races, of school age, for whose education, either industrial or literary, there is absolutely no provision whatever—children who are growing up without any of the advantages possessed by those in all other parts of the vast domain of the United States.

Petitions signed by white residents of Vinita and vicinity have been received by the Department, asking Congress to make an appropriation to educate the white children of the Indian Territory, and making a specific request for the appropriation of land scrip covering an area equal to the number of acres given other Territories, the same to be sold and the proceeds devoted to the establishment of free schools for the education of children in the Territory.

Believing the subject to be of vital importance to the future welfare of the Territory, as well as to the surrounding States, I have caused the matter to be laid before the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Commissioner of Education, and the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes for an expression of their views, and herewith transmit copies of the said petitions and of the reports of the officials named for the information of the Congress and for such action as it may in its wisdom deem proper and necessary to take in the premises.

In submitting this matter I can not too strongly urge the importance of the subject to the welfare of the persons whose educational interests seem to have been wholly lost sight of. Attention is also respectfully invited to the application for some provision for the blind of all races within the Territory, referred to by the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes and in the inclosed copy of a communication which accompanied their report.

Very respectfully,

THOS. RYAN,  
*Acting Secretary.*

The SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

---

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, January 17, 1898.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt, by your reference, of a petition from Joseph Hunt and others, Vinita, Ind. T., asking Congress to make an appropriation to educate white children of Indian Territory. Inasmuch as the question of the number of whites in Indian Territory and their children appears to be discussed in the President's message to Congress, I respectfully return the papers, with the recommendation that the same be considered in connection with the report of the Dawes Commission upon the affairs of this Territory.

Respectfully,

A. C. TONNER,  
*Acting Commissioner.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

---

BUREAU OF EDUCATION,  
*January 26, 1898.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt, by reference from the chief clerk, of a petition purporting to be signed by citizens of Vinita, Ind. T., and vicinity, asking Congress to make an appropriation to educate the white children of Indian Territory, the said petition

being headed by another petition purporting to be signed by four persons representing the Grand Army of the Republic for Indian Territory, and making a specific request for the appropriation of land scrip equal in number to the acres given other Territories, the same to be sold and its proceeds used for the purpose of educating children in free public schools in said Territory.

I have within the past three or four years heard more than once a statement of the conditions existing among the white and colored population settled in Indian Territory outside of the Indian tribes. If my information is correct, it seems that the youth of both races are growing up not only without proper school education, but also without proper industrial training. With industrial training the youth can look forward to bettering his condition, even if he is illiterate. Without it he can not hope to obtain an honest living.

A population that can not acquire title to land and which can not enter manufacturing or commercial establishments certainly is not receiving an education in self-respect and is not preparing itself for a useful citizenship. This is a difficulty which appeals to the National Government as the only authority able to remedy it. It is too much to expect that 51,000 Indians will look after the wants of 130,000 white or colored people (census of 1890) who have no claim on them. Meanwhile the surrounding States—Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Colorado—can do nothing to help the matter, for it lies beyond their jurisdiction. And yet all these surrounding States will suffer through the existence of a population near their borders which has neither industrial nor literary education. It is likely to form a vast slum into which that dangerous class of people known as train robbers, looters of village banks, and other marauders may escape and hide itself from pursuit. The existence of such a population is a menace to the civilization of the States surrounding the Territory.

The only efficient remedy for this evil is a provision on the part of the National Government for the industrial education for the youth of both races, colored and white, now resident in the Indian Territory. With industrial education in the common arts and trades carried on in Western States, and with instructions in the elementary English branches, a means of self-support will be furnished to the children whose unfortunate parents have settled there. It is not likely that they will ply their trades and occupations within the Territory, although there may be some opportunity to do this. It is more likely that they will migrate to the surrounding States and become worthy members of civilized communities. So long as the anomaly exists of a patriarchal society or a village community in the midst of a modern industrial civilization, protection is due from the General Government to misguided people of whatever race that migrate into the circle of its influence.

The question of administering the schools provided for this class of people is already settled by the existence of the educational division of the Indian Bureau. The office that has charge of the distribution of the annual appropriation for the benefit of Indian youth can manage with smallest embarrassment the schools adapted to white and colored youth resident in the vicinity of the Indian tribes. Any other office that should undertake this would have constant questions of adjustment to make with the Indian Bureau, and besides it would have to establish a "plant" or incur office expenses that would be entirely unnecessary if the whole matter were left to the Indian Bureau to manage.

To sum up these reflections, I would say:

(1) That it seems to be a matter of sufficient importance to commend itself to Congress for immediate action;

(2) That provision that should be made in the form of industrial schools ought to lay some stress on the elementary English branches; and

(3) That the administration of the fund appropriated for the purpose should be placed with the Indian Bureau, which already has charge of schools in that section of the country.

I return the petition referred to me with these suggestions, all of which are respectfully submitted.

Your obedient servant,

W. J. HARRIS,  
*Commissioner.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

---

COMMISSION TO THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES,  
*February 12, 1898.*

SIR: The Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes has the honor to acknowledge the receipt, by reference "for early consideration and recommendation," of sundry petitions from persons residing in Vinita and vicinity, in the Indian Territory, praying for an appropriation in money for the education of white children in said Territory, and also a petition of persons representing the Grand Army of the Republic in said Territory, asking that land scrip equivalent to the 16th and 32d sections devoted to educational purposes in other Territories may be devoted to the education of white and colored children in said Indian Territory.

These petitions find their origin in the peculiar political conditions by which both white and colored residents in that Territory are surrounded, and their legal status therein, contrasting, as they do, sharply with the political and legal conditions in any other of the Territories of the United States, which have enabled the Government to make in those Territories ample provision out of the public domain therein for educational purposes.

The United States has no public domain in the Indian Territory, and can not, as in other Territories, therefore, make any appropriation therefrom to educational purposes. Whatever is done must be by direct appropriation from the public treasury. Besides, the government of this Territory has until recently been altogether in the hands of a portion of its people, of whom those for which this appropriation is asked form no part, and in whose administration of affairs they have no voice. Although much of this government has been resumed by the United States since January last, still these people remain without any voice therein. The presence of all the white persons alluded to in these petitions, and that of some portion of the colored people, has no recognition in the laws governing the Territory. Not only have these people no voice in the government under which they live, but they have no ownership in the soil on which they reside. Their home is on the land of another, and they are there by permission of the owner only, and under existing law they can obtain no more permanent abode within the limits of the Territory.

These are conditions, both of government and tenure, which pertain to no other Territory of the United States. If, therefore, anything is done by the Government for the people in behalf of whom these peti-

tions pray, it is apparent that it must be done by methods altogether exceptional, and for reasons that do not exist elsewhere. No one acquainted with the conditions and needs of these people can hesitate to express the opinion that, notwithstanding the difficulties these novel conditions involve, the necessity for relief in this regard is so immediate and pressing that it must be undertaken by the Government, and with as little delay as possible.

It is estimated that there are at this time between 250,000 and 300,000 of these white residents of the character and of the unrecognized political existence heretofore spoken of now in the Territory, to which number there are large accessions every year. Of this number there are believed to be at least 30,000 children of school age. Now, all these children are shut out from all the schools supported by the government of these five nations, and not a dollar of their public money derived from any source goes to the education of a single one of these 30,000 children. The door of every public school is closed against them all. No one of them can obtain the least education, except the few whose parents can find means to hire private teachers. This, in the nature of the case, is very rare among pioneer settlers under the most favorable circumstances.

In addition to this vast number of white children utterly shut out from opportunity for education, the children of the entire colored population, estimated at 25,000 in all, are little, if any, better off. In the Chickasaw Nation they are disowned and cast out by the tribal government. The other nations have nominally admitted them to citizenship, but practically they are hardly better provided for than white children.

There is just as little opportunity for these children to acquire knowledge of any industrial pursuit as of any other kind of education. There are graduating from this mass of ignorance and idleness into the citizenship of that community every year thousands of these youth without the slightest preparation for its duties or knowledge of any means of self-support, while the ranks they leave are kept more than full by new-born raw recruits.

It needs no argument to make it plain that without some means of education these children may become an army of ignorant, idle, homeless tramps, and a menace to good order, and that where it exists there can be no security to either person or property, or orderly respect to law and government. An honest livelihood is to such men an impossibility, and the peril of their presence can not be exaggerated. Unless checked this evil will go on increasing at an alarming rate until it will involve the community which tolerates it in irretrievable ruin. Delay is fraught with utmost danger. The initiative in checking it ought to be undertaken at once. If a permanent system of relief can not, in the present unsettled condition of affairs, at this time be formulated, it is to be hoped that a beginning may be had by placing an appropriation in the hands of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to be expended in aid of outside influence to establish schools among the white and colored population of that Territory.

There has been started recently a school of this character, supported entirely by private means, which at this moment is appealing to the Government for aid. It is established for the benefit of the poor and unfortunate blind in the Territory, open to all races. It is in charge of a Miss Lura Rowland, who is herself blind, but has been educated at the institute for the blind at Little Rock, Ark., and is herself highly indorsed by the State authorities. It is held in a room in what was

the United States building at Fort Gibson, Ind. T. Some of the most worthy men of the Territory, known to be of the highest character by members of the commission, have consented to act as trustees, and Miss Rowland has with heroic devotion traversed the Territory, becoming conversant with the needs of such a school. In a letter to a member of this commission, which is respectfully referred with this report, she states that she has found 35 poor blind children already, who are without any possible chance of education, except through such a school as she is attempting to maintain. Her plea in this letter for aid is an appeal that can not fail to meet with favorable consideration, and the commission earnestly indorse it.

The commission refrains from expressing an opinion as to the methods by which aid can best be rendered in response to these petitions, beyond concurrence generally in the views upon that point expressed in the report of the honorable Commissioner of Education, which is found included in this reference, to which they take the liberty to refer.

The papers referred are herewith returned.

Respectfully submitted.

HENRY L. DAWES,  
TAMS BIXBY,  
FRANK C. ARMSTRONG,  
A. S. MCKENNON,  
*Commissioners.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND,  
*Fort Gibson, Ind. T., February 2, 1898.*

DEAR SIR: I write to ask you if you will now kindly begin to use your influence (as you promised some time since) to aid me in my endeavor to obtain an appropriation from the present Congress for the support of a school for the blind in the Territory. This school is to include all of the blind who are of school age, both Indians and whites, who reside within the limits of the Indian Territory.

I have interested myself in this work, have in person traveled over the Territory to ascertain the need of such a school, have found that it is badly needed. In my travels I have heard of more than 35 young blind persons, about one-half of whom are Indians of different tribes, the rest whites; and as my traveling has been almost entirely along the different railroads, I conclude that there must be numbers of others scattered about through the country of whom I have not heard, and whom I have not been able to reach.

I have succeeded in raising a few hundred dollars by private subscription from the various towns of the Territory, which has enabled me to organize a school for the blind at this place, and I hope to have a sufficient amount of money to be able to continue the school until the close of June. But it will be a very difficult matter to keep the school running after that time if we can not obtain an appropriation from Congress.

Will you please lay the matter before the Committee on Indian Affairs, or take whatever steps you may deem necessary to get a bill through the present Congress, asking for not less than \$10,000 annually for the support and maintenance of a school for the blind? This amount is to cover all of the necessary expenses of the school, including teachers' salaries, etc.

Colonel Wisdom, Indian agent, has promised to do all he can for this cause. Perhaps if you would write him you can together agree upon some plan that is best to pursue.

Will you please interest yourself in this cause and befriend me enough to take the matter in hand; to frame a bill and to see that it is properly pushed through? It is necessary that I have some one in Washington upon whom I can depend, and who will not let the matter rest until some action is taken. Will you please be my representative and put forth your very best efforts to obtain the appropriation we so much need? Will you also please write me as to what course you think best for me to pursue, to whom I had best write, etc.? Please also give me your views in regard

to the possibility of my securing these grounds and buildings for the permanent use of this school in case the country should be allotted.

Hoping that you will do all you can to help me in this work, and trusting to hear from you at your earliest convenience, I remain,

Yours, respectfully,

Miss LURA A. ROWLAND.

Hon. A. S. MCKENNON,  
Washington, D. C.

---

*To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:*

Your petitioners would respectfully represent and state that the Indian Territory has a population of about 250,000 or 300,000 citizens, white and colored; that by the conveyance heretofore made to the Five Civilized Tribes all the land situated in said Territory has been conveyed by the United States Government to the Indians; that the Government has no contract or right to any of said lands; that Congress can not grant the sixteenth and thirty-sixth sections to said Indian Territory for school purposes, and that there are no funds obtainable from said lands or the sale thereof to educate the rising generation.

We therefore ask that the amount of land scrip equal to the number of acres given other Territories be issued by the Government for the purpose of educating our children; that the said scrip be sold and that provisions be made in granting the same to secure the principal of said amount, and that the interest be used to sustain a free school system.

We further state that our children are growing up in ignorance, without the benefit of an education; that our people are too poor to pay for the education of the children, and we feel that it is the duty of your honorable body to make suitable provisions for the maintenance of free public schools.

We further state that the Indians have suitable provisions to educate their children, but that they do not allow the white or colored children, where parents are the citizens of the United States, to attend their schools; therefore we look to your honorable body for relief.

Given under the hand and seal of the Grand Army of the Republic for the Indian Territory.

G. W. TAYLOR.  
S. K. HALL.  
G. S. WHITE.  
WM. CLERENGER.

VINITA, IND. T., *January 1, 1898.*

We, the undersigned, citizens of Vinita and vicinity, respectfully ask Congress to make an appropriation to educate white children of the Indian Territory:

Joseph Hunt.	H. Gould.	J. O. Cook.
G. F. Clark.	D. C. Boswell.	James McCanish
Hueston Smith.	S. Clinton Scott.	N. J. Graves.
H. E. Hunt.	John Palmier.	P. W. Craig.
Isaac Mode.	Homer Gay.	H. B. Dennis.
Eli Reynolds.	E. M. Ungly.	J. H. Gibson.
G. M. Davis.	(Illegible.)	D. Taylor.
J. B. Robinson.	W. P. Sherer.	George Bills.
Robt. Klaus.	R. M. Fisher.	J. H. Nosing.
J. H. Harmon.	N. E. Foster.	Richard Deal.
J. K. Taylor.	G. W. Cook.	J. W. Johnson.
N. B. Chamberlin.	A. C. B. Allen.	J. C. Michael.
E. J. Dixon.	John Hawkins.	F. E. Warren.
H. C. Barrett.	John Robinson.	W. D. McDowell.
A. J. Caughron.	D. N. Dickerson.	J. A. Jackson.
A. C. King.	Ish. Davis.	D. F. Olmstead.
S. K. Hall.	R. L. Beets.	J. B. Myrell.
T. J. Jordun.	H. A. Blackmer.	A. W. Forman.
L. Wade.	G. M. Riley.	C. C. Waddel.
H. Balentine.	S. M. Booton.	S. J. Jordan.
S. J. Riley.	E. D. Jackson.	Wm. A. Jones.
J. J. Spencer.	A. D. Wheeler.	D. A. Pinkston.
T. Wyman Thompson.	S. S. Bluejacket.	G. W. Taylor.
J. E. Inman.	J. H. Wartman.	Lee Marshall.
J. H. West.	Jos. P. Scott.	J. R. Hall.
W. E. McPherson.	A. G. Hood.	W. C. Satton.
R. W. Ballard.	A. M. Haward.	C. York.
M. W. Franklin.	R. E. Herff.	M. L. Blakemore.
G. G. Hendricks.	F. M. Hix.	S. A. Hughes.
W. Winegelvee. (†)	H. Cornatzer.	J. H. Dixon. Com. G. A. R.
W. C. Sartin.	S. W. Bond.	Post, No. 19.
W. C. Chamberlin.	J. T. Ratcliff.	L. B. Hitchcock (Pedagogue).
Homer Andrews.	S. Jackson.	V. A. Scott, Vinita.
J. W. Hunt.	Frank Boyce.	D. Bouck.
F. E. Burns.	A. Murphy.	N. Heithly.
C. J. Johnson.	O. Q. Newland.	I. N. Fitzpatrick.
L. P. Ishell. (†)	J. M. Sims.	J. R. Bivin.
N. P. Wilbur.	J. J. Carney.	J. F. Mesner.
Ben Turk.	John Douglas.	F. N. McCoy.
J. T. Wheat.	J. F. Ledbetter.	J. S. Hargrove.
Sid Belin. (†)	O. L. Leso.	J. L. Richardson.
G. M. Baird.	A. N. Gwin.	L. W. McCoy.
W. W. Ward.	John W. Webb.	John W. Williams.
W. T. Davis.	Jno. W. Sumner.	A. A. Barton.
M. M. Wright.	F. Downing.	L. R. Bishop.
John Davis.	Ed. Hamback.	J. M. Crump.
John L. Dameron.	James Howles.	Ferdinand Bollin.
Chas. N. Martin.	D. P. Warren.	J. T. Taylor.
J. N. Toller.	C. M. L. _____	S. M. Whitside.
W. Lemaster.	A. Ryan.	Ed. A. Stanley.
R. Barnes.	J. D. Booton.	George Williams.
John H. Bailey.	H. Rook.	H. C. Skilley.
T. P. Allen.	N. N. Gooher.	J. F. Warren.
E. Hendricks.	S. R. Glenn.	T. Selinkenbard.
A. Hendricks.	Wm. Simms.	Henry Taylor.
J. S. Martin.	W. Battles.	Thomas McCoy.
A. T. Etter.	Jake Walters.	J. W. Johnson.
B. C. Burnett.	James McCone.	Wm. H. Daniel.
Wm. McCullum.	Chas. Ferguson.	J. H. Hoover.
J. I. Morning.	John E. Henneger.	Wm. McClendon.
H. M. Harriman.	G. W. Wilkens.	Wm. E. Taylor.
W. L. Jeffries.	Hasen Carrico.	H. W. Simerson.
C. W. Geo.	J. P. Teataman.	J. H. Ward.
J. T. Gunter.	Lomas Jack.	Wm. McCain.
A. Foster.	John Mershon.	Chas. Wright.
W. R. Thompson.	Jas. S. Alexander.	
R. F. Williams.	W. D. Custis.	