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Alex Mitchell

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University of Portland

Ignorant Educators

Chemawa Assimilation School, 1904-1914

Alex Mitchell

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Dr. Woodard

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The United States has a selective national memory that focuses primarily on the positive aspects of U.S. history, often avoiding any reference to times where citizens and leaders acted in a way that was immoral or shameful. Unfortunately, Native American people do not have the luxury of ignoring the actions of America's past. This is because many of the issues, such as racism and economic poverty, which were introduced with the arrival of white settlers, are still affecting Native Americans to this day. Official institutionalized racism within the U.S. affects several sectors, including education.

In 2017 journalist Rebecca Clarren conducted interviews with Native American students who were or had been in the 509J Corvallis school district in Oregon. She found a pattern that surfaced in the accounts of the experiences of the former and current students. In several cases, these Native American students were expelled because they had acted, sometimes violently, against racial aggression from their classmates. In most of these cases, the initial aggressor did not receive reprimand. In central Oregon, Native American students within the Corvallis school district were far more likely to receive suspension or expulsion throughout the school year when compared to white students.¹ Carina Miller, a Native American Councilwoman and graduate from the Corvallis district, addressed her opinion of the relationship between Oregon and education for Native Americans within the article. Clarren wrote the following on their conversation:

The administrators “don’t see us as people deserving the same sort of education and opportunities,” she said. Miller was suspended several times herself, once for swearing; a white student once called her a “prairie nigger.” As a student, she added, “I felt worthless—like I wasn’t worth the effort or patience to understand who I am and my history. This school district has failed us my entire lifetime, and it continues to do this today.”²

¹ Rebecca Clarren, “How America is Failing Native American Students,” *The Nation*, July 24, 2017.

² Ibid.

The slur “prairie nigger” is complex in nature in the way that it references two different distinct events in U.S. colonization. It reflects the deeply engrained white supremacy that continues to marginalize all people of color, including Native Americans. Miller had a valid point when she expressed that the education system within Oregon has made a relatively minimal effort to understand Native American people and their various cultures and histories. The frequency at which Native American children were expelled and suspended in the Corvallis area suggests a pattern of prejudice as well as a preference to the white student. In these very current examples, the schools demonstrated that they would prefer to discipline brown people that act out against the racial aggression directed towards them instead of disciplining the white student. Clarren argues that the apathy shown towards Carina Miller and so many other similar cases sends the message that the schools do not take racism against Native Americans seriously. Keeping the forgetful American national memory, it is possible that the school board and other school boards within the Corvallis area were not aware that less than 45 miles away, and less than two generations ago, Native American children were forced into an off-reservation assimilation school by the name of Chemawa.

Chemawa School is the oldest off-reservation assimilation school within the United States.³ Yet, there was a lack of historiography that focused primarily on the school. As a needle in a haystack, Sonciray Bonnell wrote a master thesis on the Chemawa School from 1880-1980. She conducted over thirty interviews from 1996 to 1997 with past students and teachers and she grounded their statements with the basic history of the school.⁴ However, her scope was limited and focused primarily on the school after the 1940s, as this was the time period from which the

³ Sonciray Bonnell, “Chemawa Indian Boarding School: The First One Hundred Years, 1880-1980,” Master’s Thesis, Dartmouth College, 1997, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

alumni she interviewed attended the school. The earlier period of the school wasn't focused on as it lacks sufficient primary sources to connect to such current interviews. As a result, this thesis will focus on a ten-year period towards the beginning of Chemawa School's history. Although those in charge of off-reservation assimilations schools, specifically Chemawa Indian Training School during 1904-1914 were possibly well intentioned, this was a whitening process that involved a forced removal of culture in order to lead the students into mainstream U.S. society.

Reservations were created prior to assimilation boarding schools in order to remove their land ownership, segregate Native American people from the white settlers, as well as to keep them away from quickly developing areas. The U.S. government began to move Native Americans from their lands on a national level in 1830, almost 40 years prior to the creation of the first assimilation boarding school. The U.S. government in the 1830's did not consider a course of action that would allow for Native American people to maintain their lands, possessions, and cultures as the United States of America grew. Once again, only two options for Native Americans seemed realistic and plausible in their narrow thinking: assimilate them into "white" society or else they would inevitably be destroyed by white civilization. They finally concluded to promote the civilizing of the Native American people. Between 1828 until 1877 over 80,000 Native Americans were moved, leading to poverty and population loss.⁵ Reservations spread throughout the country and reached Oregon as well. Due to the later arrival of white settlers when compared to central states, the unfavorable relationship between Native American people and white settlers in Oregon began to develop in the 1840's.

The initial interactions between white settlers and Native American people in Oregon established the distrust in their relationship that exists to this day. U.S. government interest in

⁵ Gregory Campell, "Indian Reservations," *Dictionary of American History*, 2003, 297.

Oregon rose only when they saw it as an opportunity to surpass the power of Great Britain.⁶ If the white settlers were to occupy and cultivate the rich land, it would lead to an increase in economic and global success. The first white Americans to arrive in Oregon territory were Christian missionaries in the early part of the middle 19th century.⁷ The most notable initial interaction between these missionaries and the Native American people was that of the Whitman group and the Cayuse tribe. After both the Whitman group and people of the Cayuse tribe broke out with measles in 1847, only the white people cared for by Dr. Whitman recovered. Seeing this as an intentional attack from the missionaries, a few Cayuse tribesmen killed Dr. Whitman, his family, and others from his group.⁸ With this news the U.S. government sent representative Joseph Lane in 1849 to go out to the land and report back on Oregon and its Native American tribes. Lane reported the following:

Surrounded as many of the tribes and bands now are, by the whites, whose arts of civilization, by destroying the resources of the Indians, doom them to poverty, want, and crime, the extinguishment of their title by purchase, and the locating them in a district removed from the settlements, is a measure of the most vital importance to them. Indeed the cause of humanity calls loudly for their removal from causes and influences so fatal to their existence.⁹

This representative and the town did not attempt to converse with Native American tribes in Oregon. Instead the decision to move the Native American people to reservations was agreed upon without the Native American peoples consent. Here it is apparent that the Native Americans were seen as an obstacle in expansion. Native American people were often referred to

⁶ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 393.

⁷ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 395.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 397.

by white settlers as people who “stand in the way of the ‘development of the country.’”¹⁰ The frontier mindset of 19th century U.S. culture placed Americans as the pioneers of a new world while viewing Native American people as negotiable. This perspective also put American settlers at the height of civilization while Native American tribes were seen as behind and savage. Lane was arguing that the removal of the Native American tribes would not only benefit white settlers, but also Native Americans themselves.

Francis Prucha argues that Lane’s comments transferred into legislation and policies that all dealt with the problem of Native American presence.¹¹ There was still a difference of opinion among white people between civilizing the native people and neglecting their existence and disadvantage. Those working in government policy that wished to help the Native American people were progressive, although their ways of assisting were often extremely culturally insensitive. A progressive and one of the main reformers during this time Carl Schurz worked in the Indian service from 1877 until 1881.¹² After he retired, he published a letter in the *North American Review* that addressed this dichotomy. He advocated that it was essential to civilize the Native American people in order to help them survive:

The circumstances surrounding them place before the Indians this stern alternative: extermination or civilization. The thought of exterminating a race, once the only occupant of the soil upon which so many millions of our own people have grown prosperous and happy, must be revolting to every American who is not devoid of all sentiments of justice and humanity. To civilize them, which was once only a benevolent fancy, has now become an absolute necessity, if we mean to save them.¹³

¹⁰ Carl Schurz “Present Aspects of the Indian Problem” in *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880-1900* ed. by Francis Paul Prucha, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1973),14.

¹¹ Francis Paul Prucha, *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880-1900* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹³ Carl Schurz, “Present Aspects of the Indian Problem,” 14.

Although well intentioned, this statement still seems to ignore the position of the Native American tribes. Schurz's argument focuses on sanctity of white morality rather than general empathy for the fate of Native American people. Schurz argues that it is more than just a white man's burden to assist the Native American people, but that it is critical to their survival. It provides the false dichotomy of civilization or extermination while ignoring Native American interests. It should be noted that an option of integrating both the native people and their culture was never expressed or introduced. Additionally, Schurz refers to Native American people as a separate race, therefore reinforcing the popular idea that these were individuals who were not of the same race of people. It is easier to detach emotions from interactions with a group of people that are deemed as the "other" and the lesser. As the "other" they needed the white savior, or the United States government, in order to continue. It is entirely plausible that both Carl Schurz and other progressives genuinely wished to help the native people. Yet, while well intentioned the progressives' methods were racist and involved cultural annihilation and forced removal of Native American children from their family and tribe.

The wants and needs of Native American people were both ignored and not prioritized as Western white expansion took place. Several Native American tribes were pressured into signing treaties that promised financial and societal rewards if they were to reside in government assigned reservations.¹⁴ This was true for the Oregon territory, which included what is today Washington and Oregon, as well as the rest of the country. Even once they began living in a reservation, the Native American people still had to fight against the system to maintain ownership of their land. White settlers took advantage of many white settlers through the Dawes Act that was passed in 1887. Through this act land allotments to Native people were to be

¹⁴ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father*, 401-402.

handled by the government so they could not be sold. Although there were progressives that wished to assist Native American people, there were also those who took advantage of the Dawes Acts in order to obtain more land from them. The loophole lay in the fact that a Native American person could manage their land if they were approved by a local Indian agency.¹⁵ As could be expected, many of those who were approved by the local Indian agency were ill equipped to take on such ownership. As a result, whether from lack of experience, funds, or profit many sold their land to the white settlers; over half of the reservation land was sold back through this Dawes Act.¹⁶ Yet, on paper this exchange was completely legal. In this series of events it would appear that the Native American landowner willingly transferred his land to a white settler. Realistically, many Native American people were set to fail in this land ownership system. In this way, the United States government disadvantaged the Native Americans of the West by chipping away at the lands they once owned.

In the 1850s the U.S. government began to remove Native Americans from their land once white settlers determined that Oregon was a profitable and habitable place. The first treaty, in which the Native American people would move to east of the Cascades, was never ratified or put into practice.¹⁷ A “Donation Land Law” was produced in lieu of a solid treaty in 1850, which guaranteed slots of land to white settlers who moved into Oregon for a few years.¹⁸ This disregard of the native land ownership is one example of how governmental proceedings plowed ahead without consent from the Western tribes. The more white settlers that arrived, the more pressing the issue of Native American presence became. These events were similar to the

¹⁵ Veronica E. Velarde Tiller, “Expansion, Wars, and Reservations” in *Encyclopedia of American Indian History*, vol 1, by Bruce E. Johansen (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 399.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 400.

interactions that took place between Native Americans and white settlers across the nation. As a result, assimilation became a prominent solution to these tensions.

Boarding schools became a critical tool in assimilating Native American students into the United States' racially homogenous society. The first governmentally funded assimilation boarding school in the U.S. was the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania built in 1879.¹⁹ The founder, Richard Henry Pratt explained the goal of the school in the following way: “[a] great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one... I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”²⁰ The final line would become popularized and reiterated as assimilation schools spread nationally, following the example that the Carlisle Indian Industrial School set. Richard Pratt would create before-and-after portraits of the students in his case in order to exemplify the success of his assimilation school. In the first picture the student would appear with long hair, dark skin, and clothing from their tribe. The after pictures, often taken less than five years later, showed the same student with short hair, lightened skin (from powder and general lighting), and a standard school uniform.²¹ The creators of off-reservation assimilation schools saw themselves as the pioneers of transformation. The goal of these schools was to remove the Native American culture from the students and to leave in place a patriotic, American culture. These schools would act as factories that would take a Native American child, strip them of their language, culture, and family, and replace what they removed with “American” identities.

¹⁹ Carla Joinson, *Vanished in Hiawatha: The Story of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians*, (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2016), 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹ Kevin Slivka, “Art, Craft, and Assimilation: Curriculum for Native Students during the Boarding School Era,” in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 52, No 3, (Stanford: National Art Education Association, 2011), 228.

In order to accomplish the goal of assimilation, government and school officials were authorized to forcefully remove Native American children from reservations. The government body in charge of these off-reservation assimilation schools was the Office of Indian Affairs. They published a set of *Rules for the Indian School Service* in 1898 that detailed the intentions of these boarding schools as well as instructions for their employees.²² The Office of Indian Affairs assigned agents to gather Native American children for these schools. The rules within the document revealed, amongst other things, how unwilling Native American families were to send their children to the off-reservation assimilation schools. The document is broken up into several sections. Out of over 250 rules, rule 19 showcased how important the creators of the document saw maintenance of power. The rule 19 reads:

The law provides that “the Secretary of the Interior may, in his discretion, withhold rations, clothing, and other annuities from Indian parents or guardians who refuse or neglect to send or keep their children of proper school age in some school during a reasonable portion of each year,” and in all cases where it is deemed advisable by the agent to so withhold rations, clothing, or annuities from parents or guardians he will report fully all the facts and reasons for his recommendations to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for his action.²³

This rule begins by granting any agent of the Indian School Service to an authority that was previously and strictly granted to the Secretary of the Interior. Instead of the power residing with a few hands, this rule would now extend the authority to several thousands who would work as agents in the Indian Service. The duty of these agents was to enter the Native American reservations and to take all children between the ages of five and eighteen.²⁴

The United States government understood that this act of removal would upset most Native American families; thus, rule 19 allowed for the Indian Service agents to provide unfair

²² Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian School Service*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

incentive through this ultimatum. This authority could be used as a weapon against Native American families who resisted recruitment. After all, if no Native Americans were willing to participate in the assimilation process, the assimilation process wouldn't be effective. This 19th rule suggests that the Office of Indian Affairs would rather have Native Americans ill supplied rather than allowing maintenance of their lifestyle and culture. There is a report written by the Office of Indian Affairs that state: "Pupils are gathered from the cabin, the wickiup, and the tepee. Partly by cajolery and partly by threats; partly by bribery and partly by fraud; partly by persuasion and partly by force."²⁵ This statement exemplifies how the Office of Indian Affairs prioritized completing the goal of assimilation over the personal interests of Native American families and individuals.

This rule forced the hand of Native American families by controlling a part of their resources. Native American families were forced to participate in the process of assimilation boarding schools or else they faced punishment from the Office of Indian Affairs. It was a coerced exchange of Native American people for basic supplies. In the minds of the Office of Indian Affairs, there was no option for simple cohabitation. If Native American people were to be submissive and obey the white settlers, they needed the native people to not have any option or hope for success and prosperity unless they sent their children to these off-reservation assimilation schools.

There is further evidence of Native American resistance upon further investigation into the 1898 *Rules for Indian School Service*. Native families and tribes appear to have been reluctant to surrender their children to the off-reservation assimilation schools. This rule also

²⁵ William A. Jones, "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the year 1901* (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1901), 1-2.

appears just a few after the 19th, suggesting its importance. The 21st rule described an agent's jurisdiction over any student of an assimilation school who ran back to their family who lived on the reservations:

Should any parent, guardian, or other person harboring the pupil fail or refuse to deliver him the agency police and school employees, or either or them, shall arrest and return such pupil under the order of the agent. Agency police and school employees are authorized and empowered to arrest and bring before the agents for suitable punishment any person or persons who may hinder them in their lawful performance of this duty.²⁶

This gave any employee of the Office of Indian Affairs, including assimilation school employees, complete authority over the entirety of Native American people. Instead of using the government or strictly a police force, an average schoolteacher working under the Indian School Service could exercise authority over an entire reservation. This undoubtedly caused tensions between assimilation school employees and Native American families. The forced removal of Native American children suggests that the U.S. government assumed that Native American parents or elders did not know what is best for their children. They removed any autonomy of choice for Native Americans and while simultaneously equating them as less than, as a people in need of white assistance. These children were attempting to return to their culture and families who most likely wished to receive and keep them.

The Office of Indian Affairs, through assimilation schools, attempted to remove Native American children from the danger and poverty; however, this government body failed to acknowledge that the problems they were solving were created partially by their doing. The United States forced the Native Americans into reservations that weren't spatially, resourcefully, or comfortably equivalent to the homes they had before. Although these schools were seen by progressives as a method to rescue the Native American people, it failed to recognize the

²⁶ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian School Service*, 6.

wrongdoings of the United States in regards to Native Americans. The language that the Office of Indian Affairs used to describe Native American people was extremely condescending in the 1898 document. They were referred to as “savages”, “half-civilized parasites”, and “barbarians” who are blinded but intrigued by education and civilization.²⁷ These terms dehumanize the Native American people and discredit the societal achievements that the many tribes had accomplished on their own. Through these statements, it can be inferred that even in the eyes of people who wish to “help” them, that they are seen as not equal to a civilized white man.

Chemawa Indian School in opened in 1880, just a few years after the first off-reservation assimilation school: Carlisle Industrial Institute.²⁸ The strict curriculum of Chemawa Indian School focused on ethnocentric, gendered subjects for assimilation. It removed the individual Native American from their home and culture and placed them in a totally new environment full of “American”. In Chemawa, and other assimilation schools, Native American children were separated by their biological sex and taught accordingly. During the 19th and 20th century, and arguably still to this day, women and men within the United States were expected to behave differently and to perform different functions within society. The Commissioner for the Office of Indian Affairs, Thomas J. Morgan, includes this gendered division in the 1889 national article that describes the ideal for each assimilation school in the U.S:

The chief thing in all education is the development of character, the formation of manhood and womanhood. To this end the whole course of training should be fairly saturated with moral ideas, fear of God, and respect for the rights of other; love of truth and fidelity to duty; personal purity, philanthropy, and patriotism.²⁹

²⁷ Board of Indian Commissioners, “Indian Education” in *Americanizing the American Indians*” by Francis Paul Prucha, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 194.

²⁸ Kevin Slivka, “Art, Craft, and Assimilation,” 230.

²⁹ Thomas J Morgan, “Supplemental Report on Indian Education,” in *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880-1900* by Francis Paul Prucha, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 228.

The religious influence of early U.S. colonizers makes reappearance in the language used here.

Morgan's various religious references create a moral high ground separating the white man from the Native Americans. He relies on a central moral compass older than the U.S. nation itself, favoring the white man. The phrase "fear of God" and "personal purity" promote self-awareness of how punishment would arise, either by white men or through God, if the Native American student were to disobey the curriculum. The call for "respect for the rights of other" and "philanthropy" is ironic because the Native American people were seen as less than their white counterparts as evident in the general lack of aid given and overall strife of Native American people throughout U.S. history. Morgan reasserts the common colonization argument that all men, but especially white men are inherently supreme and must be charged with the stewardship of their women and their children.³⁰ These schools fostered Native American men into ideas of patriarchy while simultaneously teaching Native American women of their womanly expectations. This male burden mirrors the same attitude that would be taken up when addressing racial assimilation for the white mans burden. This term, the white mans burden, became popular during the Spanish-American War in the Philippines. It refers to the justification and reasoning behind American frontier expansion as a moral obligation and a duty of the white man.³¹ Although it was created in reference to the Filipino people, the idea overflows into other aspects of U.S. imperialism. A white man's burden is to colonize the people of the land they are attempting to obtain, or have already obtained.

The curriculum of Chemawa during the years of 1904-1914 can be found through primary source documents recorded by the Superintendents, Edwin Chalcraft and H. E.

³⁰ Thomas J Morgan, "Supplemental Report on Indian Education," 228.

³¹ Gretchen Murphy, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden: U.S. Imperialism and the Problem of the Color Line*, (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 30.

Wadsworth, who worked during this time period. The Office of Indian affairs assigned each assimilation school with one superintendent who was required to report back yearly. This was also true for the Chemawa Indian School near Salem, Oregon. Although there is a lack of primary sources that identify the school's early curriculum, the available yearly superintendent reports provide detail into how Chemawa Indian School was similar to other assimilation schools in the United States. Two superintendent reports from H.E. Wadsworth between the years of 1913 and 1914 show how his opinion of Native American people echoes the attitude of Richard Henry Pratt of the Carlisle Indian school. In the intro to his 1913 report, Wadsworth wrote the following in his introduction:

[C]ustoms among the Indians are, it must be remembered, not immoral, as most of us prefer to think, but are simply unmoral, and are the natural results of the simple life led by the native races.³²

Pratt believed that you had to “kill the Indian to save the man”, and it seems as if Wadsworth agrees. Here he references Native Americans as a separate race from the white Americans. He describes them as inherently without morals, as if they were incapable of telling right from wrong without the help of the United States government. Morality here is put in the perspective of the colonizer, or the white perspective. This excerpt exemplifies how superintendents of Chemawa, such as Wadsworth, saw themselves as morally superior strictly based on the color of their skin.

Although individuals who participated in the Office of Indian Affairs were progressive figures who may have been well intentioned, their methods were based in a white, male supremacist ideology and grounded in institutionalized racism. Not only is it an assertion of moral superiority over people of color in general, but it also provides justification for forced

³²H. E. Wadsworth, *1913 Annual Report*, 2.

assimilation. Using religious and biblical language, Wadsworth argues the necessity for assimilation schools in order for a Native American child to achieve success in white society. The general consensus of the Indian States of Affairs, and Chemawa Indian School, was that the Native American children needed to be rebooted in a sense in order to become quality citizens.

Themes of ethnocentrism and sexism arise in the Chemawa superintendent reports by H.E. Wadsworth and former Chemawa superintendent Edwin L. Chalcraft's autobiography. The former wrote on his experience in leading the Chemawa Indian School twice and also his time in the Indian Service working with other assimilation schools. When Chalcraft became superintendent of Chemawa in 1894 the school was going by Salem Indian Training School; he was only superintendent for a few months before he was fired due to political disagreements until he once again assumed the position from 1904-1912.³³

In Wadsworth's superintendent reports he details the curriculum in Chemawa. For women, their school assignments included the basic reading of English books, writing and spelling, as well as a few other basic subjects.³⁴ However, domestic sciences or services, were the main aspect of their education. The goal for the girls was to civilize them into being dutiful housewives and mothers. For men, their subjects of study were broader and revolved around learning mechanical techniques and skilled-labor.³⁵ These separate skills would lead the Native American children who graduated to follow the jobs that their skills prepared them for. In this way, assimilation schools not only acted as a way of whitening the Native Americans, but also as a way of separating the Native Americans through gender roles. In Chalcraft's writings, he describes an occasion in 1909 in which he and another school employee brought Native

³³ Edwin L. Chalcraft, *Assimilation's Agent*, (Lincoln: Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 2004), 122-23.

³⁴ Wadsworth, *1914 Annual Report*, 7-8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

American girls and boys to an assimilation school gathering in Seattle. He describes how pleasantly and wonderfully the students performed the gendered skills they were taught in the assimilation schools:

Young maids passed about the refreshment trays with all the aplomb and ease of their white sisters, and the guests partook of the sandwiches and cake and drank tea and coffee, the only noticeable feature being that they had keener appetites than that of the usual guests at afternoon teas.³⁶

Superintendent Chalcraft perceived these Native American students as successful because they acted compliantly within the American gender roles that were incorporated into their curriculum.

Assimilation schools, such as Chemawa, were English-speaking only and they forbid the use of Native American languages in order to “Americanize” the students. J.D.C Atkins was a progressive who worked as the national U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The reasoning behind this lingual ban appears the 1880’s official report of the Indian Affairs that Atkins authored. He determined that assimilation schools should forbid Native American children from speaking their native tongue. He and others believed that continuation of the language equated to the continuation of “their barbarous practices.”³⁷ According to Atkins, if Native Americans were to be allowed to speak in their own languages:

[I]t will prejudice the youthful pupil as well as his untutored and uncivilized or semi-civilized parent against the English language, and, to some extent at least, against Government schools in which the English language exclusively has always been taught.³⁸

Just like Native American culture, their languages could be removed in order to reassert white power and superiority. Native languages, once out of use, would only survive through older generations. This forced removal of native languages forced the Native American students

³⁶ Chalcraft, *Assimilation’s Agent*, 228-229.

³⁷ J. D. C. Atkins, “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” in *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880-1900* by Francis Paul Prucha, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 203.

³⁸ Ibid.

to think, read, and speak in Americanized terms. These assimilation schools did not deem the various Native American languages to be worthy of survival. An academic study conducted by Sheila T. Gregory in 2012 found that educational incorporation of Native American culture and language was critical to the success of the Native American student. Without this inclusion, the students are less likely to be connected to their own home and, overall, less likely to be academically successful.³⁹ Without this cultural inclusion, the students weren't connected to their homes or families. The overall goal of these schools was to assimilate the students into the "American" identity, which, as stated earlier, is an ethnocentric and male-centered ideology. American English has both racial and gendered language. The English language leads the mind towards certain assumptions. Native American children were removed from their homes on reservations and taught English terms in boarding schools to describe what they had come from. They learned that the reservations that their families lived on were "poor" and that living on a reservation would not lead to success. If the boarding school students returned home to visit their reservations, they did so with new ideas of how society should be and with a language that preferred the Christian white man to Native American people. With this ban, Native American students were no longer able to connect and communicate with the most natural parts of their identity. The ban is an attempt to remove interconnects between Native American people. However, language was just the beginning of the stripping of Native American culture that took occurred in places such as Chemawa Indian School.

Wadsworth's 1913 superintendent report aligns with the religious and moral aspects of assimilation school curriculum that was asserted in the 1889 national article by Commissioner

³⁹ Sheila T. Gregory, *Voices of Native American Educators: Integrating History, Culture, and Language to Improve Learning Outcomes for Native American Students*, (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), 9-11.

Thomas J. Morgan. Although on a federal level there is a separation between church and state, these federally funded assimilation schools were coated with religious influence. The superintendent of each school was required to live with his family inside the school. There they would be seen as the ideal Christian family for Native American students. In Wadsworth's report there is evidence of religious inclusion within the daily lives of the Native American children at the boarding school beyond this familial example. Wadsworth describes how both Presbyterian and Roman Catholic sects perform services and regular visits to the school.⁴⁰ Although the Christian sects differed, it did not allow for any practice of Native American religion and spirituality. Wadsworth details that both of the religions sects had equal opportunity to work with the children. He claims that these practices aid children mentally and morally.⁴¹ This directly connects to the religious influences seen in the 1889 Commissioner of Indian Affairs' report by Thomas J. Morgan. It asserts a moral superiority through Eurocentric religious language while neglecting to acknowledge that Native American children could have their own religious identity.

In addition to religious, spiritual training, there was also patriotic, physical training. Students went through several events throughout the day that were created with the intention of instilling patriotism towards the U.S. The removal of Native American languages disconnected the students from their culture and its history. Assimilation schools instilled a new gendered culture that promoted the valiant history of the U.S. There were no classes that educated Native American students on the inhumane and unjust consequences of colonialism. Instead, the Native American children were taught to admire the U.S. and its success. In Wadsworth's report, he has a "patriotic training" section that details the methods of instilling national pride. Native

⁴⁰ Wadsworth, *1913 Annual Report*, 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

American children were forced out of bed at early hours to march to the “Star Spangled Banner” as the U.S. flag rose; afterwards, they were to salute the flag while reciting the pledge of allegiance.⁴² These children were reciting a commitment to a country that they were not fully accepted within. Assimilation schools, such as Chemawa required students to swear allegiance to a country based on a frontier complex in which they do not have a choice to resist. They do not have the option to be both culturally Native American and American; there could only be “white” American.

This patriotic routine is also used in military boot camps to promote allegiance. These Native American students did not have a choice to resist this patriotic training. By removing a choice, and possibly inflicting punishment for lack of participation it causes the Native American children to associate resistance with failure and it forces them to conflate patriotism with success. Recent psychologists have found evidence to support the claim that younger children base their opinion on an action based on the positivity or negativity of this outcome.⁴³ By being patriotic they are doing “right”, therefore to be unpatriotic is “wrong.” This was intended to translate into their lives after they graduate. Regardless of their age, all Native American students could understand that it is easier to assimilate into the American model rather than to resist and punish. With these religious and patriotic routines, it forces them to be only in a space of American ideals.

As mentioned earlier, students between the ages of five and were recruited by agents of the Office of Indian Affairs to these assimilation schools. However, in rules provided by the Indian School Service, it required that students stay in the assimilation schools until they

⁴² Wadsworth, *1913 Annual Report*, 8-9.

⁴³ Genyue Fu, Melanie Killen, Wen S. Xiao, Kang Lee, “Moral Judgment and Its Relation to Second-Order Theory of Mind,” in *Developmental Psychology* (2014), 2085.

graduate or until they reach the age of twenty-one.⁴⁴ Therefore, the assimilation schools had possession and control over the mind of a Native American person for the greater majority of their development. The brain is easily manipulated, especially if the process is begun at a young age and maintained past maturity.⁴⁵ This also explains why certain Native American graduates could have supported the assimilation schools and the opportunities they have obtained. These students did not have an option for a voice that is heard so they assume they do not have a voice. With the tactics in schools, they are a clean slate and ignore the culture of the students. Even if the children visited home, as many were able to do, they returned knowing that their ethnic routes are separate from their current identity. They visited with a newly influenced mind that perceived the Native Americans on the reservations as a lower people who are resisting civilization. Visiting the reservation could even act as a reminder of how the children need to continue on their path to whiteness, otherwise they are doomed to the lives their relatives live. Through the teaching in assimilation schools, Native American people start to view their family's way of life as inferior. These Native Americans were raised with the white perspective to see the assimilation schools as vehicles of hope rather than industries of cultural genocide. However, one must bear in mind that these students were not allowed to leave the school. Those who ran away could be searched for, arrested, and returned by those in the Indian School Service, almost as if they were prisoners to these assimilation schools.⁴⁶ The longer the students stayed at the schools, the further detached they would become to the Native American culture, the people, and their causes.

⁴⁴ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian School Service*, 26.

⁴⁵ Genyue Fu, "Moral Judgment", 2087.

⁴⁶ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian School Service*, 6.

Those who worked in the Office of Indian Affairs and in assimilation schools, such as Chemawa, viewed themselves as philanthropists with good intentions. All of the mentioned advocates for reservations and assimilation schools saw their actions as necessary to the survival of the Native Americans. The activities and the curriculum within assimilation schools, such as Chemawa, went beyond sewing, mechanics, and farming. Within Chemawa there were athletic programs, music rooms with available instruments, and even a bear pit.⁴⁷ Additionally, both Wadsworth and Chalcraft are void of negative slurs when referencing Native American students in their writings. In the 1913 and 1914 superintendent reports by Wadsworth he praises Native American children for possessing inherent musical abilities that are far beyond other ethnicities.⁴⁸ This description, although intended to be a compliment, stereotypes Native American people. Even though stereotypes may be true at times, they are dangerous to use as it creates one story or depiction of a diverse group of individuals. These compliments towards Native American people can be seen as condescending. On one hand, they are attributing a positive skill towards Native American people, however on the other hand these superintendents do not believe that Native American people have the ability to govern and teach themselves how to adjust to white society.

In Chalcraft's description of his time at Chemawa School, he spends the majority of the section of his autobiography emphasizing his generosity and commitment to the school. He recalls times where he frequently bought over one hundred turkeys for holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.⁴⁹ He also made major improvements to the Chemawa School such

⁴⁷ Wadsworth, *1913 Annual Report*, 3-10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁹ Chalcraft, *Assimilation's Agent*, 227-28.

as a new hospital, recreational rooms, and an open-air sanitarium.⁵⁰ The education, sanitary, and gender standards for assimilation schools are all listed within the Rules for the Indian School Service. A section self-explanatorily titled “General Care of Buildings and Grounds” provides evidence of humanity and morality for those who constructed these immoral assimilation schools. Cleanliness was required within plumbing, kitchen areas, water and sewer facilities, roads, and the grounds.⁵¹ If the creators of the assimilation schools were completely evil, they wouldn’t have paid any mind to sanitation. However minimal in the larger scope, it is still important to note that these people were considered extremely progressive and tolerant during the early 1900s. Yet, however many improvements Chalcraft made, his methods of assimilation were deemed to contain too much corporal punishment. In 1911 he received the following letter from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

Sir: I find after careful examination of several source of information: First – That immorality among the students is a matter of common knowledge at Chemawa, Second – That in October last you whipped a number of girls, ranging in age from 15 to 21. Third – That you also had some of these children whip each other. Fourth – That you have failed to observe the letter as well as the spirit of the religious regulations. Fifth – That you do not carry the pupils’ fund on your official account.⁵²

His treatment of the Native American children and use of physical punishment shows a lack of stewardship and empathy. It is especially pertinent to note that this punishment was seen as religious salvation. Chalcraft had been working at the school for seven years before he received reprimanding for his treatment of Native American children. Although Chalcraft was a progressive, he was a participant in the racist system of assimilation schools. He participated of the removal of Native American children from not just their family, but also their language, culture, and identity. His methods of discipline were unjust and cruel, yet not uncommon.

⁵⁰ Chalcraft, *Assimilation’s Agent*, 223-25.

⁵¹ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian School Service*, 24-25.

⁵² Chalcraft, *Assimilation’s Agent*, 239.

There is further evidence of resistance from Native American students that can be seen in Chemawa School's student records. Throughout the country the comings and goings of Native American students within the assimilation schools were recorded in yearly descriptive statements. The school's superintendent created these statements as it was required by the Indian School Service's rules.⁵³ Information on Chemawa students who ran away, were expelled, or graduated has been logged in the *Index to Descriptive Statements of Students: 1889-1914*. Several superintendents, including Edwin L. Chalcraft and H. E. Wadsworth, wrote the document. Each student's description includes the following categories: their tribe's name, their Native American "percentage", if they ran away, were expelled, or graduated, and whether or not their parents were alive at the time.⁵⁴ The descriptions are logged chronologically for the most part; however superintendents who worked for over a year, such as Wadsworth, often combined an individual student's record for several years so that it would not repeat on the list. Although the title expresses that it is descriptions between the years of 1889-1914, there are several years missing and periods where the descriptions are mostly bare. Focusing on the years between 1912 and 1915, during which Wadsworth worked, estimates of 1,168 students were enrolled in the school. Between these four years, 164 students had "ran away" in their descriptions.⁵⁵ Many of these runaways did so multiple times, several were returned and fewer were expelled from the school. This data from Chemawa, along with rule 21 in Rules for Indian Service, supports the claim that Native American students ran away often.

Although there are a variety of reasons why a Native American student would wish to run away, it is important to note that during these four years there were zero descriptions of a student

⁵³ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian School Service*, 26-27.

⁵⁴ *Index to Descriptive Statements of Students: 1889-1914*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

graduating in these recordings. This suggests that the assimilation system struggled in Chemawa during these years. Chemawa's superintendents did not record a high graduation rate between 1889 and 1914 in these descriptive statements. It is further suggested that numerical support for the success of assimilation in Chemawa was lacking through W. E. Wadsworth's description of the alumni. Avoiding any numerical evidence, Wadsworth raved on, in both the 1913 and 1914 report, how the Chemawa assimilation school was a success. Wadsworth begins his 1914 Annual Report by responding to rumors that the assimilations schools were unsatisfactory. He calls these attitudes pessimistic and he reassures in the introduction, alongside other sections in the report, that Chemawa is a success story. In the "Practical Results" section of the report, Wadsworth doesn't list any statistical or quantifiable evidence to support his claim that Native Americans appreciate assimilation efforts. However, he states:

A stronger school spirit has been developed during the year, and every student going home for the summer vacation announced himself as determined to spread the fame of his school wherever he might be during his absence. A genuine quickening of interest has been in evidence throughout the school, and the beginning of the new term is awaited with impatience on the part of students and employees alike.⁵⁶

Wadsworth is the ultimate authority on the status and the success of his school. He is able to portray Chemawa in the most favorable light while also having complete monopoly over the choices of Native American children. There was no outpost of expression for how the Native American children feel. The Native American students at Chemawa are in an isolated environment; when they are allowed to visit home again they bring with them the white mindset. If the superintendent of an assimilation school claims these children are happy and they are away from the general public, whatever a superintendent reports is taken as the complete truth.

⁵⁶ Wadsworth, *1914 Annual Report*, 15-16.

Native American graduates of the school acted as a mascot of justification and legitimization for the assimilation process of Chemawa. This explains why superintendents, such as Wadsworth emphasized their presence and their impact. Once again, instead of listing how many Native American people graduated from the assimilation schools, Wadsworth focuses on how those that graduated the program successfully ended up supporting the assimilation school system and even wished to join it:

Graduates and returned students from this school are making enviable records for themselves everywhere throughout the country. Many of them are occupying places of responsibility in the Indian Service, several being at this time employed here, after passing the necessary examinations conducted by the United States Civil Service, and are a credit to themselves and the Service. Just before the close of the term for the current fiscal year, two students left the school to accept positions in the Service.⁵⁷

The statement that former students, post-graduation, return to assist the assimilation schools supports the idea that Native American people appreciated these programs. In reality, several students at assimilation schools like Chemawa participated in the system and took the opportunities that were available to them. However, it is a completely separate argument to suggest that these Native Americans would have chosen the process of forced assimilation over a diplomatic agreement between native tribes and the U.S. government. These students were participating in a severely unequal power dynamic. Graduates of these schools were not fully liberated, as they were working within the limited options that the world unequally provided to them. In addition, Wadsworth's emphasis on graduation rates and avoidance of runaway rates delegitimize the resistance preformed by these Native American students.

Native American students, at times, successfully graduated from the assimilation schools to go on to live prosperous lives. Regardless of their success, the students still graduated with less cultural awareness and connection than when they joined the school. Zitkala-Sa was a

⁵⁷ Wadsworth, *1914 Annual Report*, 4-5.

prominent Native American advocate. She was born with the name Gertrude Simmons to a Native American mother and a white father. At a young age, she was removed from her mother and sent to an assimilation school in Indiana. She achieved musical and literary success post-grad and she even taught for several years in the 1890's at another Indian labor school.⁵⁸ She was a success story for assimilation schools; however later in her life she began to criticize the assimilation schools for their acts of cultural removal. After renaming herself Zitkala-Sa, a name representing her Native American culture, she wrote several autobiographies.

The 1921 "The School Days of an Indian Child" revealed Zitkala-Sa's personal account of how assimilation negatively affected her emotionally and culturally. She recalled one of the first few days of school in which she, along with the other girls and boys were required to cut off their hair:

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.⁵⁹

She is forced, like many other Native American children in assimilation schools, to cut their hair in order to become American. Zitkala-Sa's analogy of her braid representing her spirit signifies how identity is manifested through appearance and how a forced change can alter the entire presence of an identity. The removal of their braids also signified a removal of their culture and of their pride. It was as if the Native American people were beginning to join the white race by

⁵⁸ P Jane Hafen, "Zitkala-Sa (Gertude Bonnin)," in *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* by Frederick E. Hoxie, (Harcourt: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 1.

⁵⁹ Zitkala-Sa, "The Cutting of My Long Hair," in *The School Days of an Indian Girl* (Atlanta: Dodo Press, 1996), 187.

disconnecting from the Native American connection of appearance. Here, Zitkala-Sa compares the students within the schools as sheep who are led by assimilation's agents.

Zitkala-Sa reflects the mixed feelings that Native American students could feel towards those in the administration of the school. After all, those who work at the assimilation schools were progressive people who believed that they were helping the Native American children. The superintendents and teachers were not evil or malicious in their intentions. However, the execution of their intentions often caused Native American children to be treated immorally. In "The School Days of an Indian Child" she explains her frustrations with the strict assimilation school curriculum that she referred to as the "Iron Routine." Alike the routine at Chemawa Indian School and so many other assimilation schools, Native American children were required to rise out of bed early for patriotic drills, "A loud-clamoring bell awakened us at half past six in the cold winter mornings. From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumbled out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day."⁶⁰ Although this description contains romanticizing, the romanticizing of her culture could be seen as a necessity to show the contrast of the life of the Native American people that could have been. She fantasies about this life because she was not allowed to have a concept of it while in the school. The lack of cultural knowledge she has forces her into these romantic descriptions.

Zitkala-Sa criticizes the lack of individualism within these assimilation schools, beyond physical appearance and language. When her friend dies of a disease within the school, Zitkala-Sa describes her frustration with the lack of medical resources in the school:

I despised the pencils that moved automatically, and the one teaspoon which dealt out, from a large bottle, healing to a row of variously ailing Indian children. I blamed the hard-working, well-meaning, ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts her

⁶⁰ Zitkala-Sa, "Iron Routine," in *The School Days of an Indian Girl* (Atlanta: Dodo Press, 1996), 190.

superstitious ideas. Though I was sullen in all my little troubles, as soon as I felt better I was ready again to smile upon the cruel woman.⁶¹

This image of Native American people forced to be automatons at the hands of school employees. This shows how the people were not practicing what they are preaching. They weren't treating the Native American students as fully human, instead they were seen as an inferior thing in need of help. They gave every student medicine, the exact same amount to "variously ailing" children. This also alludes to how Native American children could not have an individual identity. They were apart of this machine. Zitkala-Sa acknowledges that the women working in the assimilation school had good intentions. However, it does not justify conditions in which Native American children were forced to live. It is unknown how many graduates of assimilation schools such as Chemawa were like Zitkala-Sa. Many Native Americans could have felt differently, without grudge or regret, about their experience. Regardless, it is vital to acknowledge that these Native Americans were doing the best that they could with a severally unequal power dynamic. Graduating assimilations schools could not act as a true liberation for Native Americans because they were working within a discriminatory world.

From 1880 and well into the 1950's, Native American students at the Chemawa Indian Training School were stripped of their individual tribal culture and forced into "American" habits and ideologies in order to assimilate them into white, American society. This decision to "kill the Indian, save the man" came after debate upon only two options: assimilate the Native American people or assist in their decimation.⁶² The Office of Indian Affairs, both in Oregon and nationally, did not attempt to understand the Native American tribes or their culture. They did not wish to live equally with the different tribes; they wished to conquer the frontier unbothered.

⁶¹ Zitkala-Sa, "Iron Routine," 190.

⁶² Carl Schurz, "Present Aspects of the Indian Problem," 14.

They saw the native people as inferior and in need of the United States government's assistance. Those who argued for assimilation in the form of specialized education were considered progressive during this time. However, the methods in which they attempted to assimilate Native American children were extremely unjust and immoral. The U.S. government endeavored to raise the Native American people up into "civilized" people through this Americanizing assimilation process. What this assimilation process actually entailed was a complete annihilation of Native American culture and individuality. Chemawa Indian School was led by Edwin Chalcraft and H. E. Wadsworth during the years of 1904-1914. The curriculum echoed the standard set by the Carlisle Industrial Institute as it contained gendered subjects and skilled training.⁶³ It did not allow for Native American language or physical dress to penetrate the school.⁶⁴ Instead, the students were taught how to be "American", without consideration to their cultural and familial ties.

Currently, the Chemawa Indian School is still open. It is still funded by the government and it still lacks a proper documentation and paper trail. Employees on the school board and former students comment on the lack of transparency for funds and student accounts.⁶⁵ The government has recently built a fence around the school. Delores Pigsley, who works as chairman of the Confederate Tribes of the Siletz Indians has said the following on the new installation: "I don't know if that's to keep the kids in, or keep people out." There has been no attempt from the school, from the Office of Indian Affairs, or from any section of the United States government to apologize for the forced cultural removal that took place within off-reservation assimilation schools.

⁶³ Wadsworth, *1913 Annual Report*, 3-10.

⁶⁴ Thomas J Morgan, "Supplemental Report on Indian Education," 228.

⁶⁵ Rob Manning and Tony Schick, "Behind the Fence: Chemawa's Culture of Secrecy," *OPB*, Nov. 27, 2017.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addressed the issue of assimilation schools on November 24, 2017. Through his tears, he acknowledged and apologized for the “profound cultural loss led to poverty, family violence, substance abuse and community breakdown” that resulted from these institutions. In addition, around 900 former students won a class-action lawsuit that will reward them with 50 million Canadian dollars.⁶⁶ The NYT article describing this event also detailed how these Canadian assimilation schools were fewer in number and based on the United States’ assimilation schools, such as the Carlisle Industrial Institute and Chemawa Indian School. It is important for the United States government to recognize its past and its flaws. It is not too late to act. Native American people are still affected by the cultural removal that took place in off-reservation assimilation schools, such as Chemawa Indian School. If the Canadian government can acknowledge that their assimilation schools, which were based off of American assimilation schools, were harmful then so can the United States government. The best way to move forward is to learn from our mistakes and as we move up together, in the words of Mary Church Terrell: “lifting as we climb.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ian Austen, “Trudeau Apologizes for Abuse and ‘Profound Cultural Loss’ At Indigenous Schools,” *NY Times*, Nov. 24, 2017.

⁶⁷ Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women,” *Address Before the National American Women’s Suffrage Association*, Feb. 18, 1898.

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