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The Last Indian War: Reassessing the Legacy of American Indian Boarding Schools and the Emergence of Pan-Indian Identity

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On the poor plains of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, a poignant cry was uttered in the form of a poem in 1973:

“my blood rages
in these Lakota hills
as the Wind screams out
purify
purify
be strong
be one
search no longer
stand
STAND
free me
free you
free the people.”¹

In these thirteen lines lies the story and language of Pan-Indian resistance in the latter half of the twentieth century. Written by Karoniaktatie, a participant of the Occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, in which members of the Oglala Lakota nation and the recently formed American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied the historic site for seventy-one days, this poem stands as a testament to the power of American Indian identity.² Tribal differentiation became blurred in the face of overwhelming sorrow, shared experience, and a collective commitment to a widespread awareness of the largely unrecognized story of the indigenous peoples.

The massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, the symbol of the occupation, exists deeply rooted in the American Indian consciousness and memory as the embodiment of indiscriminate federal violence against the nation’s first inhabitants. One hundred years after the last shot left three hundred Lakota men, women, and children dead and buried in mass graves on the Pine Ridge Reservation, the Big Foot Memorial Ride to Wounded Knee was staged as a demonstration of a continued memory the seminal event that has come to define, for many, white-Indian relations.³ Wounded Knee is a striking representation of intertribal solidarity and collective experience both in 1890 and 1973, but the

¹ Karoniaktatie, “Hostages” (1973), in *Voices From Wounded Knee, 1973 In the Words of the Participants*, ed. Akwesasne Notes, Mohawk Nation (Rooseveltville: Akwesasne Notes, 1974), 39.

² Philip D. Roos et. al, “The Impact of the American Indian Movement On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation,” *Phylon* 41, no. 1 (First Quarter 1980): 89-90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/274670>.

³ Mario Gonzalez; Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *The Politics of Hallowed Ground: Wounded Knee and the Struggle For Indian Sovereignty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 81-120.

ironic story of the emergence of Pan-Indian identity begins in a less belligerent way in the form of federally maintained boarding schools. American Indian boarding schools have been consistently cited, appropriately, as the primary form of federal efforts to extinguish American Indian culture as a solution to the “Indian problem.” It is my contention, however, that boarding schools played a more nuanced role and that they served as a catalyst in the emerging American Indian identity that was developed during the twentieth century.

Before discussing the connection between boarding schools and the emergence of Pan-Indianism, it is necessary to establish a context in which this phenomenon has been studied in the past. Scholars have ascribed a myriad of origins to the rise of a larger American Indian identity that transcends regional and tribal boundaries. All of these have their merits, but I will make the case that the boarding schools system played a crucial factor in this development as well. I will argue that the boarding schools are a necessary and significant chapter in this “Red Dream.”

The 1970s witnessed a burst of scholarship regarding American Indian identity and history as a result of an outbreak of Pan-Indian identity that was happening simultaneously. Hazel W. Hertzberg describes the early instances and roots of Pan-Indianism, primarily in reference to European colonial and American relations with tribes in the nineteenth century, in her comprehensive study, *The Search For an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (1971). Hertzberg chronicles the roots of Pan-Indianism, beginning with first European contact in the sixteenth century and ending in the period of her own time. She explains that the tribes’ interactions with the United States, were based in an Americana policy of understanding American Indians as lumped together as part of the “Indian problem” rather than as separate and distinct sovereign nations. This viewpoint is invaluable in identifying the significance of the development of a Pan-Indian identity because it addresses the generalized ways in which American Indian peoples were viewed by the American policymakers that were to so deeply affect their lives. She argues, “of all these factors, perhaps the most important single element in stimulating Pan-Indianism was expanding education opportunity for Indians.”⁴ Hertzberg sees the school system as ultimately a positive step towards the creation of Pan-Indian identity, but focuses more on education in the twentieth century rather than the effectiveness of the schools themselves.

Recent scholarship, however, tends to emphasize more contemporary explanations for the emergence of Pan-Indianism, and is characterized by a pervasive view of the boarding schools as nothing more than a more humane

⁴ Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search For an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 14.

version of cultural genocide. Donald L. Fixico makes the argument for the significant role of increasing urbanization of American Indian individuals following World War II in *The Urban Indian Experience in America* (2000). He focuses specifically on the Relocation Program, the sequel to the much more violent Indian Removal Act of 1830, and the economic issues faced by American Indians in the 1940s and 1950s that drove many into urban centers. Fixico emphasizes the shock Indians encountered transitioning from “communalism to a foreign individualism.”⁵ This sudden blurring of identity for American Indians shifting into mainstream urban American life had several effects on the idea of Pan-Indianism and the way in which people from varying tribes interacted with each other.

Fixico highlights the growing divide between urban and reservation American Indians as a barrier to a transcendent identity, but eventually characterizes the solidarity movements for each respective group in much the same way—primarily the formation of social enclaves along lines other than tribes. It is in this way that Fixico touches briefly upon the boarding school as a contributor to the fostering of Pan-Indianism, but he sees it as only a secondary factor. Thus, Fixico maintains, “urbanization fostered Pan-Indianism as a new ‘Indianess’ to which American Indians could belong and find security within a group membership.”⁶ Fixico makes a compelling case for urbanization as a directly related cause of Pan-Indianism, but does not emphasize the earlier efforts of federal American Indian education.

Sherry L. Smith in her study, *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight For Red Power* (2012), claims the various Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and 1970s were the most significant causes in fostering Pan-Indianism and the Red Power Movement. Like Fixico, Smith focuses on recent contributions to Pan-Indianism, referring to counterculturalists, African- and Mexican-American civil rights activists, and anti-war protesters as the first explicit allies to the furthering of a Pan-Indian movement. She asserts that it “was, rather the cumulative effect of Native American articulation of needs and demands over the decades matched with non-Indians’ realization of their legitimacy during the 1960s and 1970s that finally led to substantive, meaningful reform in Indian affairs” and the development of a cohesive identity that transcended individual tribal identities.⁷ However, similar to Fixico, Smith focuses on recent developments in Pan-

⁵ Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience In America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 3.

⁶ *Ibid*, 142.

⁷ Sherry L. Smith, *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight For Red Power* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 16.

Indianism and does not address earlier instances in which it existed and developed.

Finally, the boarding schools themselves have been characterized in almost exclusively the same way—as despicable federal efforts to destroy beautiful and complex cultures in the name of American progress—among both American Indian scholars as well as others. Margaret Szasz in her book, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination, 1928-1973* (1974) approaches her study in the formation of federal American Indian education, the role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the subsequent self-determination American Indians achieved in the education of their children, rather than a transformation of identity.⁸ Along the same lines, David Wallace Adams in his study, *Education For Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (1995) focuses on the traumatic experience of the boarding schools and their development, only mentioning briefly in his conclusion that “at such institutions students learned that the ‘Great Father’ made no allowances for tribal distinctions; Indians were simply Indians.”⁹ The great irony of the story of American Indian boarding schools—that what was meant to destroy American Indian identity actually stimulated it—is lost on these arguments.

The classification of American Indians as a problem reaches back to the inception of the United States. In 1793 an unnamed member of the Delaware tribe made an extraordinarily prophetic speech regarding the fate of the indigenous peoples in the years leading up to William Lewis and Meriweather Clark’s trek to the Pacific Ocean: “we desire you [U.S. Congress] to consider, brothers, that our only demand is the peaceable possession of a small part of our once great country. Look back and review the lands from whence we have been driven to this spot. We can retreat no farther.”¹⁰ The northeastern portion of North America, the current location of the state of Delaware, was all that was referenced in this speech, yet in the next century these words would be applied to every corner of the continent. Indeed, American Indians had been identified from the beginning as a serious problem for the United States. In the colonial period, European powers had dealt with tribes as sovereign nations, as the Ojibwa-French and Iroquois-British alliances during the Seven Years’ War among others can attest.¹¹ However, by the time Britain ceded all previously held land to the newly formed

⁸ Margaret Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination, 1928-1973* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 197.

⁹ David Wallace Adams, *Education For Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 336.

¹⁰ Bob Blaisdell, ed., *Great Speeches By Native Americans* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), 37.

¹¹ Ian Barnes, *The Historical Atlas of Native Americans* (New York: Chartwell Books, 2009), 180.

United States in 1783, American Indians were not treated as sovereign but rather as problematic hindrances to westward expansion. The confrontations between white settlers and American Indians in Ohio country in the 1780s were just the beginning.¹²

Though Indian removal had been federal policy since at least the 1820s, it was not until the Indian Removal Act of 1830 that federal efforts at solving the “Indian problem” took the form of removal to territories west of the Mississippi River¹³. Ironically, the genesis of Pan-Indian identity had been created by the United States in the lumping together of all tribes as one collective problem. But by the latter half of the nineteenth-century and the expansion to the west coast, displaced tribes simply had nowhere to go. The land disappeared. As the member of the Delaware tribe presciently commented, “we can retreat no farther.”

It is into this context of this removal dilemma that Richard Henry Pratt, a captain in the United States Army during the Civil War, provided a new solution to the “Indian problem” that no longer required American Indians and white Americans be unconditionally separated. His policy removed the need to maintain a federal effort in dealing with the unwanted presence of American Indians at least in terms of land ownership. Succinctly described by Pratt as “kill the Indian and save the man,” this new method encouraged wholesale assimilation into American society as a permanent form of “removal” of the American Indian in the United States.¹⁴ It seemed to be a moral counter to the extermination that had characterized Indian-white relations up to this point.

To do this, however, Pratt had to overcome significant barriers persuading Americans this was even possible or desirable. Before the Civil War and during the peak of settlement in the American west, Americans for the most part believed the Indian, like the black slave, to be incapable of true civilization and progress.¹⁵ In a country that consistently defined itself by its inherent penchant for progress and modernity, an inevitable clash resulted between the two cultures. Pratt sought to resolve this understanding, largely among western settlers who were in regular and often violent contact with the western tribes. He proposed that deep inside the Indian was a civilized man worthy of all the benefits of American progress and enterprise. All the United States needed to do was awaken him. Reformers, especially of religious bent, responded enthusiastically to Pratt’s proposal and by the 1870s had launched their culturally imperialist campaign to evangelize the

¹² Ibid, 210.

¹³ Ibid, 258.

¹⁴ Amy Lonetree, *American Indian Boarding Schools: An Exploration of Ethnic and Cultural Cleansing* (Mount Pleasant: Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, 2011), 5.

¹⁵ Szasz, 9.

Indian and open his eyes to the virtues of the American way of life.¹⁶ As George E. Ellis, former commissioner of Indian Affairs asked in 1882, “Cannot civilization civilize?”¹⁷ The question would be answered-“yes”, by means of education.

Pratt and his supporters succeeded in 1879 in opening the first boarding school for Native Americans, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. Using procedures developed at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida in the “re-education” of Cheyenne prisoners-of-war, Pratt enrolled one hundred and sixty-nine students, mostly of the High Plains Lakota in his school designed to allow the Indian to reach his full potential.¹⁸ As David Wallace Adams points out in the foreword to the re-print of Pratt’s autobiography, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, “Pratt’s answer was boldly simple: remove Indian youth from their tribal communities and place them in off-reservation boarding schools simultaneously stripped of their tribal heritage and tutored in the knowledge, skill, and beliefs of white society.”¹⁹ Carlisle’s success in this pursuit was widely reported and quickly followed up by a Congressional appropriations bill towards the institutionalization of American Indian boarding schools in 1882.²⁰ By 1900, twenty-four other off-reservation schools had been created, most of them directly modeled after Carlisle, providing education for some 20,000 Indian youth.²¹ Pratt’s emphasis on a complete separation of children from any sense of tribal heritage or community is critical in the development of Pan-Indian identity, as Adams and others frequently point out in the discussion of off-reservation schools, and will be considered in the latter half of this study.

As a sort of western Progressivism, the concrete goals of the schools served a highly idealistic purpose comparable to its contemporaries in the eastern urban centers. Pratt himself understood the “Indian problem” to be of a cultural rather than of a racial foundation, championing the belief that everything the Indian needed to be a true American already existed. Notions of racial inferiority, in Pratt’s mind, were absurd and also unhelpful in the larger cause of assimilation. In this type of “removal” of American Indians, lies a subtext of simultaneous cultural repression of Indian culture and a cultural suffusion of white American

¹⁶ Ibid, 9.

¹⁷ George E. Ellis, *The Red Man and the White Man in North America* (1882): 600, quoted in Adams, *Education For Extinction*, 27.

¹⁸ Barnes, 358.

¹⁹ David Wallace Adams, foreword to *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, by Richard Henry Pratt, ed. Robert M. Utely (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), xi.

²⁰ Szasz, 10.

²¹ Barnes, 358.

culture all connected to the larger purpose of wholesale Americanization, a permanent answer to Indian removal. Thus, inhumane extermination could be replaced by this more benevolent strategy.

The federal government had already been attempting this, to some extent, through the General Allotment (Dawes) Act, popularly referred to as the “Indian Emancipation Act” of 1887.²² The act allowed the division of reservation lands given to tribes into land holdings intended for individuals. By connecting this division of American Indian lands to the emancipation of slaves during the Civil War, the act was seen by its reform-minded advocates as a proselytization of American civic virtue, what I will refer to as the capitalist salvation. There is no debate that the Dawes Act was perhaps the most devastating legislation in Indian affairs enacted during the latter half of the nineteenth-century, whose roots can be found in the very same evangelical reform that motivated Pratt and other advocates of federal American Indian education. Using land ownership as a means of Americanization and rejection of the primitive, was seen by reformers to be a way of lifting the burden of tyrannical tribal political society and thus engaging in an individualization of the Indian free from the constraints of communal life. This vision of individualism and independence, which had long been key components of American identity, were to be promoted through government instruction of American Indian children.²³

Though suffused with heavy idealism, students were expected to leave their time at the schools with very tangible and real-world skills that would not only aid them in their quest for assimilation and acceptance into white society, but would also develop them as industrial commodities and dutiful laborers.²⁴ The Gilded Age, the period between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the early twentieth century, in which the United States rapidly industrialized and wholly transformed as a world power, provided newly found appreciation and emphasis upon business, innovation, and efficiency. As a civilized nation, the United States would benevolently show American Indians the virtues of the American principles of progress. The new industrial values expressed through the likes of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s “scientific management” and Henry Ford’s assembly line, were quickly dehumanizing the workplace and replacing individual craftsmen with mass unskilled laborers. It is into this context that American Indian children would be molded into ideal passive industrial workers, and if the schools were successful, this would be applied to all American Indians everywhere.

²² K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 3.

²³ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁴ Barnes, 358.

It is important to note the good intentions of Pratt and the other reformers, even if they are now viewed as deeply problematic. What reformers considered a compassionate plea for humanitarianism in the federal response (which, up until that point had most decidedly *not* been humanitarian), American Indians have considered to be “destruction in the raw materials of consciousness,” as Glen T. Morris, a member of the Shawnee tribe, has termed it.²⁵ Specific concrete goals were developed at the outset of the federal program designed to ease transition into white society. It was a culturally imperialist approach reminiscent of the “white man’s burden” stressed by Theodore Roosevelt and others in reference to the Philippines and elsewhere during this period of American imperialism. Nonetheless, it was intended to give American Indian youth a head start in the world.

English instruction was the most instrumental means in this pursuit, reminiscent of the work of Progressives like Jane Addams in settlement houses in the urban centers of the east designed to teach English to immigrants. While Pratt may have considered the story of American Indian assimilation as potentially comparable to the story of immigrant assimilation, American Indians were anything but immigrants; they were indigenous inhabitants of the land, and as such were much more inextricably linked to community and heritage.²⁶ To further separate children from this heritage, English was mandated exclusively as the only language to be spoken. In conjunction with Pratt’s concept of off-reservation boarding schools and “outing programs,” in which students would live with upstanding white Christian families, American Indian children were psychologically stripped of their past and forcefully pushed into the blinding white light of their future.²⁷ In this way, instruction in the English language served much more than a practical purpose; it also necessitated, oftentimes in harsh ways, instruction in correct culture. “Reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic” was the next step in the curriculum assigned to American Indian students, though this too is inseparable from the practical suppressive instruction in English.²⁸

However good the intentions of Pratt and other reformers were, a very specific type of education was promoted, one that only offered vocational or industrial training for American Indian students, as opposed to any sort of higher academic training. Similar to Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in Jim Crow Alabama, the boarding schools emphasized practical training in preparation

²⁵ Glen T. Morris, “Vine Deloria Jr., and the Development of a Decolonizing Critique of Indigenous Peoples and International Relations,” in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, ed. Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 124.

²⁶ Hertzberg, 17.

²⁷ Lonetree, 15.

²⁸ Adams, *Education For Extinction*, 139.

for entry into the workforce. The larger economic context of the schools, in which industrial training was invaluable in the new institutions of mass production and labor, reveals the mindset of reformers and was inextricably linked with widespread American industrialization. As a second westward expansion began in the wake of this industrial progress, American Indians were in the way again. American Indian children, through harshly enforced instruction in English, “the three R’s” and industrial training in the domestic sciences such as housekeeping, were inculcated to be passive and quiet in their industrial service to the United States and represented a new invisible labor force upon which American progress would be built upon for a second time.²⁹

This aim was pursued with alacrity at the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma. Following the example of Pratt and Carlisle on 1883, Superintendent McCowan sent his students of primarily agricultural industries to the 1906 World Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, as a way of exposing them to the glory of American innovation.³⁰ The ostensible rhetorical purpose behind this field trip, in both the Carlisle and Chilocco cases, was to inspire students in the individual and entrepreneurial pursuit of American ingenuity, a tenet of capitalism. Merrill Gates, a reformer famous for his exposé on the schools in 1926, described the policy of the schools as thus: “[the boarding schools hoped] to get the Indian out of the blanket and into the trousers... with a pocket that aches to be filled with dollars.”³¹ Despite the individualistic and entrepreneurial rhetoric espoused by the federal government, students were prepared for employment more than anything. Thus by inculcating students with a sense of the power of American innovation, individualism, and capitalism, schools hoped to give them agency in the larger industrial world. The realities of such an ambition, however, are questionable.

The horrors American Indian children encountered at the schools are critical in understanding the shared experience between members of varying tribes that was so instrumental in the development of Pan-Indian identity. There are valid reasons why American Indian boarding schools have been characterized so harshly in the past. To not represent these experiences is to render them insignificant in the larger positive but unintended outcome of a cohesive American Indian identity.

Juanita, a Cherokee student at Chilocco in the 1930s, remembered daily life at the schools:

“There were schedules all *over* the place. You had to have a schedule or you never would know where you belonged. It was

²⁹ Adams, *Education For Extinction*, 335.

³⁰ Lomawaima, 18.

³¹ Thomas Varnum, *Just Too Much of an Indian: Bill Baker, Stalwart in a Fading Culture* (LaPointe: Just Too Much of an Indian Press, 2008), 58.

very hard when I left there because there were no schedules, there were no bells ringing, and no whistles blowing: I didn't know what to do."³²

The military-like discipline at Chilocco is reflected in most of the first-hand accounts of former students in K. Tsianina Lomawaima's study, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School*. A Creek student named Curtis described the demerit system and compared it to the disciplinary action at West Point military academy, referring to "jails," belting, and manual labor as forms of punishment carried out among children. He remembers,

"If you got into so many demerits they would also make you run a beltline. You'd line up, a whole big line of guys on either side and they'd take off their belts, and you had to run through the line, and they'd belt you with a belt as you go through...for some of the smaller kids, that was kind of brutal."³³

This strict discipline, reminiscent of a soldier's barracks rather than a school, also translated into academic and spiritual life at the schools. Morning and evening prayers were strictly regimented. The prayers at the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School in Michigan saturated a sense of industry and work within the curriculum and the students:

Morning

"Now get me up to work,
I pray Thee Lord, I may not shirk;
If I should die before tonight,
I pray Thee Lord, my work's all right."

Evening

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray Thee Lord, my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray Thee Lord, my soul to take."³⁴

Students were viewed by administrators as blank canvases with no prior experience as civilized people, and as such, every aspect of their lives was strictly, and oftentimes brutally, regimented. Long hours in the classroom combined with manual labor, all of which was so carefully supervised, left students bewildered once they had returned to the real world. This shock is a major contributing factor

³² Lomawaima, 122.

³³ Ibid, 111.

³⁴ Lonetree, 10.

to the torn identities students had upon graduation, as will be considered in the discussion of the appeal of Pan-Indian movements.

Perhaps the most upsetting of the school system's methods in the whitewashing of American Indian youth, however, was the physical transformation students underwent upon arrival, as well as an enforced separation from any familial or tribal contact while attending the schools. A photograph of a Navajo student at Carlisle name Tom Torlino illustrates this metamorphosis provocatively.³⁵ A series of two portraits, one depicting Torlino the moment he arrived at the school, and the other three years into his instruction at the industrial school, emphasizes the stripping of students from their heritage. Torlino arrived with long hair, tanned and weather-beaten skin, and the jewelry and clothing of his culture (See Fig. 1). Three years later he was nearly unrecognizable, with shortly cropped and severely parted hair, lightened skin, and a suit typical of 1883 men's fashion (See Fig. 2). Other than his features, any trace of his heritage was removed. The effect of this physical transformation was to render students humiliated and submissive to the hegemonic forces of white American culture, making them more malleable to instruction. Furthermore, by limiting communication between families and tribes at off-reservation schools, American Indian children had none of the traditional upbringing their parents had, oftentimes making them strangers in their homes upon their return. As Adams poignantly puts it, "the last great Indian war should be waged on children."³⁶

The story does not end there, however. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the birth of a new phenomenon, Pan-Indianism. It manifested most significantly in the form of movements during the Civil Rights era of the 1960s and 1970s as well as widespread rhetoric regarding a larger American Indian identity. While tribal culture is certainly still a critical source of identity for indigenous peoples because of its deep allegiance to ancient lands, a larger indigenous identity has been developed that transcends tribal distinctions. The result is one of the greatest ironies in American history: the schools attempted to eradicate American Indian culture but in so doing created a common bond between people of varying backgrounds, thereby aiding the development of a collective understanding of what constitutes "Indian-ness." The boarding schools exist as a pivotal mechanism among others in this pursuit.

But by 1928, the Indian school system was nearly fifty years old and, accordingly, was beginning to bear the signs of disrepair. During this time of the late 1920s and early 1930s, a period that is referred to as the "Indian New Deal,"

³⁵ Choate, John N., "Tom Torlino 1879," from the National Anthropological Archives, *John N. Choate Photographs of Carlisle Indian School, circa 1879-1902*, 008 in x 010 in glass negative, <http://siris-archives.si.edu>.

³⁶ Adams, *Education For Extinction*, 337.

the Bureau of Indian Affairs was subjected to numerous studies as part of a larger nationwide educational analysis.³⁷ Misleading statistics regarding enrollment rates, however, had barred governmental reform. It was not until the Meriam Report of 1928 was conducted that meaningful reform was at least discussed. Indeed, the study remained an institutional guideline for Indian commissioners well into the 1940s. This study conducted by the Brookings Institution, an independent research organization, suggested significant reforms in the boarding school system including community-based education, a greater inclusion of American Indian culture, and extensive physical repairs.³⁸ Yet it was not until the late 1960s that the suggestions provided by the Meriam Report were taken seriously by Congress and the BIA, indicating the relevance of the report forty years after its publication.³⁹ In other words, nothing had changed.

The schools of the latter generation were the institutions in which the future leaders of the Pan-Indian movements in the sixties were educated, and their experiences figure prominently in the rhetoric of these leaders. Dennis Banks the co-founder of AIM dedicates an entire chapter to his experience in three boarding schools in his autobiography, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (2004). He recounts in occasionally graphic detail his experience at the Pipestone, Wahpeton, and Flandreau schools, from humiliating and physical punishment for wetting the bed as a young child, to the curriculum itself. He remembers, “Their efforts to acculturate us extended even as far as our history books, which depicted Native people as murderous, mindless savages. In one of these books was a picture of a grinning Indian scalping a little blond white girl, one of those cute Shirley Temple types. I began to hate myself for being Indian, and made myself believe that I was really a white boy.”⁴⁰ Though a personal experience, Banks begins this chapter, called “The Yellow Bus,” by asserting the commonality in this experience: “There is one dark day in the lives of all Indian children: the day when they are forcibly taken away from those who love and care for them, from those that speak their language.”⁴¹

The Pan-Indian movements may not have had an effect on the school system itself until the early 1970s, but the schools clearly were imprinted in the minds of these future leaders.⁴² Banks attended school in the 1940s and early 1950s; yet his memories differ very little from others’ memories at Chilocco in

³⁷ Szasz, 2.

³⁸ Ibid, 3.

³⁹ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁰ Dennis Banks, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 28.

⁴¹ Banks, 24.

⁴² Szasz, 6.

the 1920s and even Carlisle in the 1880s. The result is the unifying development of a long tradition of childhood struggle, of shared experience.

The American Indian outlook on life is indispensable in the comprehension of indigenous identity, and even then, it is something that is difficult for non-Indians to understand due to its deep ties to kinship. A dilemma is presented to those wishing to study this “psychology of earth and sky” which makes an all-embracing study of indigenous identity near impossible.⁴³ It is with this admission in mind that I will attempt to delineate the American Indian perspective.

The seeds for collective identity were already planted, in some sense, in the communalism of tribal life itself. In deep contrast to the “I” of white American society, the American Indian “we” stands as an early example of collective community, which the Pan-Indian movement would only build upon. Indeed the editor cited for the published primary accounts of the Occupation of Wounded Knee in *Voices of the Occupation of Wounded Knee, 1973 in the Words of the Participants*, is the Mohawk Nation as a whole, rather than specific individuals. It is this communalism that appeared so tyrannical to reformers bent upon spreading the capitalism salvation.

Wilma Mankiller, the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation, compiled an anthology of the meditations of women of various tribes called *Every Day Is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women* that speaks to this “extended kinship.”⁴⁴ She writes in the preface of the work,

“family is described in terms of an extensive kinship system of relationships with people who are not always related by blood. Community is not always a specific geographic space shared by people of common interests and values; it is sometimes a larger community of culture in which people share values and a sense of responsibility for one another...they maintain a strong community of culture, of relationships, of shared experiences, and kinship.”⁴⁵

The totality of the American Indian perspective is perhaps most striking and exists to see everything in life as inextricably connected, crossing all space and time into one vision of profound spirituality. This “spirituality has sustained indigenous peoples since time immemorial,” and continues to provide intense community

⁴³ Joy Harjo, “The Psychology of Earth and Sky,” in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, edited by Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 3-4.

⁴⁴ Wilma Mankiller, ed., *Every Day Is a Good Day: Reflections By Contemporary Indigenous Women*, (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2004), 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, xxvi.

between every aspect of life.⁴⁶ In this way, as Mankiller has stated above, communities are not entirely physical, and rely on shared experiences and values to thrive across geographic boundaries.

Communities take a physical root, however, in the spiritual connections to ancient and ancestral lands. The role of memory in the American Indian perspective of the world is coupled with shared experience. It is in this way that the boarding school experience is now lodged deep in the collective memory and thus consciousness of indigenous peoples, regardless if the individuals themselves went through it. Gail Small, a member of the Northern Cheyenne, offers this take on history:

“At our Northern Cheyenne homelands we look at history quite differently. Our history is the premise of who we are and how we make decisions today. Each time we hear stories about what American soldiers did to our people, especially our grandmothers, the pain and anger is fresh and raw. What we have gone through is so real, it is like it happened yesterday.”⁴⁷

Mankiller herself adds, “if one has never seen a grandmother who was prohibited from speaking her own language in a government boarding school overcome with love and joy when a young child proudly says a few words in her own language, how can one understand the people?”⁴⁸

History, homelands, and spirituality are intertwined on a tribal level, as these women from various communities with tribe-specific experiences attest, but the experiences that move beyond individual tribal histories and are known by people of all tribal backgrounds have formed a more transcendent identity. This new identity, according to Mankiller’s definition of indigenous community, would be based upon shared experience. The boarding schools, which affected people of all tribes and are vividly remembered by contemporary American Indians, are one of the more provocative of these experiences.

With such a unique perspective that has been developed over centuries of tradition, students returning from the boarding schools faced substantial obstacles in attempting to incorporate back into indigenous communal life. After potentially twelve years of regimented and forced instruction in the individualistic and commodity-driven mainstream American culture, young American Indian men

⁴⁶ Octaviana Valenzuela Trujillo in *Every Day Is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*, 27.

⁴⁷ Gail Small in *Every Day Is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*, 6. Wilma

⁴⁸ Wilma Mankiller in *Every Day Is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*, 7.

and women were left straddling both worlds.⁴⁹ Vine Deloria Jr., perhaps the leading American Indian scholar between the 1970s and his death in 2005, understood that there were “two realities of indigenous peoples and non-Indians.”⁵⁰ Clyde Warrior of the Ponca tribe, while addressing President Lyndon B. Johnson’s National Advisory Committee on Rural Poverty, testified in 1967 that “very few [students of boarding schools] ever became more than very confused, ambivalent, and immobilized individuals, never able to reconcile the tensions and contradictions built inside themselves by outside institutions.”⁵¹ These two realities, which were so opposed to one another in every way, led to torn identities within students, grappling with an indigenous emphasis upon spiritual and communal connection and a white insistence upon individualistic industrial activity.

Urbanization played a major role in this as well, as Donald Fixico establishes in his work. Though as Mankiller points out, indigenous community is not entirely physical and is more spiritual than anything. American Indians living in urban centers were geographically detached from a total tribal community. Rather, urban American Indians were suddenly thrust into what were increasingly becoming multicultural cities, and had to confront the idea that American Indian identity was now one of many other cultural identities. Tribal distinctions, thus, served as potential roadblocks to the survival of indigenous culture. The urban experience, like the boarding school experience, necessitated a binding together of people from all tribal backgrounds in an effort to preserve American Indian culture as a whole, thereby establishing a sense of a Pan-Indian identity.⁵²

Pan-Indianism, thus provided the healing answer for released former American Indian school children searching for a cohesive vision. The schools had given students an entirely new understanding of the world that was so deeply opposite of what many had been socialized to believe on the reservation and had alienated them in the process. Left to wander in no-man’s land between a now unfamiliar tribal culture and a white society that was hesitant to accept them, the boarding-school generation and their children sought for one vision. Shared experience pointed them to Pan-Indianism, which was a restorative answer to their prayers.

The new Pan-Indian identity manifested in powerful movements during the Civil Rights era. The American Indian Movement (AIM), launched in 1968 by Dennis Banks, Russell Means, and Clyde Bellecourt, was perhaps the most

⁴⁹ Clyde Warrior in *Great Speeches By Native Americans*, 208.

⁵⁰ M.A. Jaimes-Guerrero, “The Metaphysics of Federal Indian Law and U.S. Colonialism of American Indians,” in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, 78.

⁵¹ Warrior, 208.

⁵² Fixico, 124.

successful of the movements, famously initiating the occupation of Alcatraz and Wounded Knee between 1969 and 1973. Much of the rhetoric AIM and the Red Power Movement was centered around “we” as the indigenous community across the United States, and also the shared experience of the boarding schools. Banks himself was a former student of the Pipestone Boarding School in Minnesota and declared the schools to be “concentration camps for children where we were forbidden to speak our language and were beaten if we prayed to our Native Creator.”⁵³ Warrior and Mankiller, who participated in the Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, continually referred to the schools as the experience all indigenous peoples can relate to either by direct experience or by historical and spiritual connection to peoples who did. This intergenerational trauma sustained much of the rhetoric of AIM and continues to be a source of simultaneous pain and bonding for people affected by the destructive efforts of reformers.

The Occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 articulates this confused rage and cohesive peace in a remarkable instance of solidarity between people of all tribal backgrounds. Karionaktatie’s poem references the massacre at Wounded Knee as the source of fury for American Indians, but reflects this confusion and torn soul-searching that resulted from the divisive boarding school curriculum. Both instances of horrific shared experience culminate in the end of the poem as such:

“be strong,
be one
search no longer
be strong
stand
STAND
free me
free you
free the people.”

Refined out of the fire, a Pan-Indian identity has emerged spiritually whole and self-aware. The boarding schools were sickening. Yet from that pain the generations affected by its destructive policies that told them what it means to be white, have healed and created a cohesive sense of what it means to be Indian.

⁵³ Banks, 24.



Figure1: Tom Torlino in 1880



Figure 2: Tom Torlino in 1883

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