Dispossession of Identity and Land: Assimilation at Carlisle Indian Industrial School 1879-1884

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Dispossession of Identity and Land: Assimilation at Carlisle Indian Industrial School 1879-1884

by

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In 1879, the Carlisle Barracks were placed under the care of Richard Henry Pratt in order to establish a federally funded institution for the assimilation of American Indian youth. This institution, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, would become the flagship for the experiment of American Indian education. Led by Pratt, the institution was to transform students’ understanding of their race and cultural identity. American Indian students from across the United States would attend Carlisle and be forced to assimilate by speaking English, cutting their hair, changing their names, and removing themselves from the culture of their past. Yet students did not always use the lessons learned at Carlisle in the ways that Pratt intended. Rather, many would take the practices taught at Carlisle and use them to advance their own and their people’s well-being in a rapidly changing American society. Students were taught they could no longer remain Indian at Carlisle, but they found they could never truly be American either, as American citizenship was unattainable for many who attended Indian Boarding Schools. However, students from Carlisle created a new sense of identity for themselves, which bridged their past cultures and white American society.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: The Legacy of Federal Indian Boarding Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scholarship on Carlisle Indian Industrial School</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Introduction to American Indian Education in the United States</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Founding of Carlisle’s Educational Experiment</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Experiences and Changing Identities</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue: Reckoning with the Past</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report

Introduction: The Legacy of Federal Indian Boarding Schools

Federally funded Indian boarding schools are a current news topic. Their current relevancy through a search for “Indian Boarding Schools” results in multiple pages of articles discussing the impact of boarding schools, the stories of survivors, and government and religious leaders acknowledging the wrongdoing of the past. In acknowledging this wrongdoing, the department of Indian Affairs, Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland, completed the “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report” in May 2022. This initiative was created by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, who is the first Native American to serve as cabinet secretary. Secretary Haaland created the initiative with the goal to investigate the deaths and loss of lives as well as the continued impact of Federally funded Indian Boarding Schools.

The opening letter of the “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report,” written to Secretary Deb Haaland by Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Bryan Newland, states that, “This report shows for the first time that between 1819 and 1969, the United States operated or supported 408 boarding schools across 37 states (or then territories), including 21 schools in Alaska and 7 schools in Hawaii.”1 Assistant Secretary Newland discusses that American Indian tribes, as well as Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians, were specifically targeted through cultural assimilation in order to dispossess them of their territories. This initiative places the system of boarding schools within the historical context of land dispossession as well as highlighting, “some of the conditions these children endured at these schools and raises important questions about the short-term and long-term consequences of the

Federal Indian boarding school system on Indian Tribes, Alaska Native, and the Native Hawaiian Communities.”² This report is the first step taken by the Department of the Interior to understand the experiences of students at boarding schools as well as the extended generational consequences of Federally Funded Indian Boarding Schools.

Prompted by the discoveries of marked and unmarked graves of children in Canadian Residential Schools, this report is the introduction to the “investigation of the loss of human life and lasting consequences of the Federal Indian boarding school system.”³ This report recognizes the responsibility of the Federal Government in developing the system of assimilation through a federal system of boarding schools. The goals of this report include, “Identifying Federal Indian Boarding school facilities and sites; identifying names and Tribal identities of Indian Children who were placed in Federal Indian boarding schools; identifying locations of marked and unmarked burial sites of remains of Indian children located at or near school facilities; and incorporating Tribal and individual viewpoints, including those of descendants, on the experiences in, and impacts of, the Federal Indian boarding school system.”⁴ This report includes the first official list of Federally funded Indian boarding Schools, which included 431 specific sites.

In recent years, the subject of Indian Boarding Schools has become a major topic of discussion for news sources and government agencies in order to address the generational issues that were created in the past and continue on today. The resurging interest in Indian Boarding Schools in the United States is linked directly to the discovery of bodies on the grounds of former Canadian Residential Indian Schools. Although this system was based on similar ideas of

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assimilation into European-centric society as Native American boarding schools, Canadian Residential schools were mandatory for the youth of First Nations and most often refer to schools which began after the 1880s.

Much of the news coverage on the topic of Canadian Residential School revolves around the unmarked graves of students found of the grounds of these schools. Canadian Residential Schools were active longer than Indian Boarding Schools in the United States, from the 1880s to the 1990s when Native youth were forced into schools. For many families, parents, children, and grandchildren all attended schools and experienced the physical and mental assaults associated with Canadian Residential Schools. These schools were funded by the state and run by the Catholic church, and many of these assaults, both physical and mental, were performed by Priests and Nuns as well as students who would take out their trauma and anger on other students. The trauma of Residential Schools continues to present day as members of First Nations work to reclaim their identity and fight for the recognition from the government and church for the cultural genocide that took place. This fight has also led to archeologists searching the grounds of schools in hopes to return children’s remains to their homes and establish a process of healing from intergenerational trauma.

The 1879 founding of Carlisle Indian Industrial School, in Carlisle, PA, which is the main subject of this thesis, was one of the reasons that the Canadian government and religious leaders founded mandatory Residential Schools in Canada. These schools took some of the methods from Carlisle and created a system of destructive erasure for students who were rounded up and ripped from the arms of their parents. With Canadian Residential Schools in the news,

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the general public is looking toward the impact of Indian Boarding Schools on the lives of American Indians as well as the similar possibility of unmarked graves on the grounds of boarding schools in the United States. This new resurgence of interest in Indian Boarding Schools such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School escalates the need to understand its establishment and the influence this flagship school had in terms of creating practices of assimilation within American Indian Education.

American Indian Boarding Schools operated through a system of off-reservation schools instituted in order to assimilate American Indian youth. These off-reservation boarding schools operated most often under the guidance of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, formerly under the control of the War Department. The Federal government began to experiment with trying to assimilate American Indians in order to eliminate American Indian cultures and tribal relations well before the 1800s, but its more single-minded focus on assimilation took place following the institution of off-reservation boarding schools, such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School. In more recent news, Federal Indian Boarding Schools have become a prevalent topic due to the often negative experiences by American Indian youth. Although not all experiences were negative, students were generally encouraged to eliminate their former identities and try and fit into a society that did not wish to include them.

This thesis focusses specifically on Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which is considered the flagship institution of its kind. Carlisle’s experiment in American Indian education was rooted in the ideologies of its founder and superintendent, Richard Henry Pratt. Richard Henry Pratt’s goals and ideologies made him a progressive figure in terms of racial and cultural understandings of American Indians. Pratt’s enlightenment ideals about people as blank slates allowed American Indian youth to be transformed from “savagery” to “civilization” through a
proper education in white societal ways of life, and shaped Carlisle’s curriculum around these ideas.

Indian Boarding Schools were developed to assimilate American Indian children off-reservation in order to place children into a “civilized” society. This thesis examines the first six years, 1879-1884, of Carlisle Indian Industrial School, and the students who were enrolled in these years. These students who attended in the first six years often did not become fully assimilated as Richard Henry Pratt envisioned. Sources from students suggest that, although they were taught that being Indian would no longer be a possibility for them, they believed that white society would never fully accept them either. Instead, students were able to use the education they received from boarding schools such as Carlisle to adapt themselves and their communities to the racial, cultural, and political landscape of the late 19th century.

This thesis contributes to the expanding understanding of how Carlisle Indian Industrial School, and other Indian Boarding Schools like it, reflected and shaped the racial ideology of the time. The progressive ideologies of people like Richard Henry Pratt transformed white society’s understandings of American Indians and how they might become members of a white “civilized” society. This thesis also reveals the many ways students used Pratt’s program of assimilation to their own advantage in order to provide options for their life moving forward. Rather than the eradication of culture, as intended by Richard Henry Pratt, Carlisle Indian Industrial School became a foundation or gateway to create new opportunities for students and their communities.
The Scholarship on Carlisle Indian Industrial School

Carlisle Indian Industrial School was one of the flagship Indian boarding schools of the late 19th and early 20th Century. Housed in the former Carlisle Barracks, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which was given to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the institution was to be spearheaded by Richard Henry Pratt to force assimilation through an off-reservation boarding school. The military background of Carlisle and its founder, Civil War veteran Lt. Col. Pratt, influenced the harsh discipline of assimilation that took place at these boarding schools in order to, as Pratt described, “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” Pratt believed that in order to create a civilized person, “all the Indian there is in the race should be dead,” which led to the practices of assimilation that took place at Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

The mission of these schools was presented to tribal leaders as a way for children to learn English and advocate for their tribe. But these schools grew out of the many conflicts between Federal authorities and American Indian tribes over access to land and resources. In fact, the first students who were recruited to Carlisle were from tribes who previously had run-ins with the United States government. Just prior to the first years of enrollment at Carlisle, the Sioux and Cheyenne were awarded the sacred territory of the Black Hills in the Dakotas in the Sioux treaty of 1868. After this treaty in 1874, General Custer, along with miners searching for gold, took an expedition in the Black Hills. They found gold there and the miners requested protection by the United States government, due to the fact that they were mining on Sioux hunting grounds. General Custer and a small military group were annihilated by a band of Sioux and Cheyenne in

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1876. This altercation and continued run-ins with the Sioux and Cheyenne led to the United States Government confiscating the land.\(^7\) This specific altercation between the Sioux, Cheyenne, and the United States government, along with tribes who were forced to relocate away from their homes, were some of the first students forced to attend Indian boarding schools such as Carlisle.

While some parents saw this as an opportunity for their children, others were still unsure of the government’s efforts to help their children. This internal conflict for parents emerged from the dangers of sending their children away to be taught by those with whom they had previously had altercations that resulted in land loss and imprisonment. Carlisle’s development and policies influenced other government and private boarding schools in order to force the assimilation of Native youth. Historians such as David Wallace Adams, Brenda Child, Jacqueline Fear-Segal, Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc discuss the boarding school experience through various schools and themes, while always including the flagship boarding school, Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

David Wallace Adams’ influential work discusses the lives of students who attended Indian Boarding Schools across the United States, including Carlisle Indian Industrial School. In *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*, Adams argues that “policy makers sought to use the schoolhouse- specifically the boarding schools- as an instrument for acculturating Indian youth to ‘American ways of thinking and living.’”\(^8\) His argument functions in three ways by analyzing policy formation, the translation of

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educational policy to institutional practice in schools, and lastly describes the response of students to the efforts of the government and school administration. Adams’ work examines the educational practices of multiple off-reservation boarding schools, yet Carlisle is a prime example of how policy makers influenced their institutions.

To Adams, Carlisle was an instrument of assimilation led by a charismatic Richard Henry Pratt, who engendered students with a willingness to change the way that they live. Adams’ discussions of assimilation reflect specific acts, such as name changing, hair cutting, and the enforcing of English being the only spoken language allowed within the barracks of Carlisle. The assimilation of students reflected the policies passed down from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which held the intention of civilizing and transforming native children into American citizens. Adams describes how, “the course of study… emphasized the following branches of knowledge: arithmetic, geography, nature study, physiology, and United States history.”9 The assimilation at boarding schools was seen as the first step to civilizing and preparing the youth of native tribes for citizenship in order to erase their past lives.

Within Adams’ narrative is the larger theme of assimilation, which is broken down into smaller aspects that allow for a deeper understanding of the nature of the assimilation process that took place at Indian Boarding Schools. Forcing English as students’ primary language, Euro-American gender roles, and European inspired name changes are some of the major acts of assimilation that Addams describes as taking place at boarding schools such as Carlisle. Other practices, such as the cutting of long hair and the removal of all aspects of home life like clothing and jewelry, add to these larger themes of assimilation. Many of the students who were the first

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to attend schools such as Carlisle were still using their given name from their tribal home. These students were given the opportunity to select their own English name when arriving at the school, while others who attended in later years often already had an English name prior to arriving.\textsuperscript{10}

In discussing the multiple attempts at assimilation, Adams touches on the ideas of generational assimilation, which reflects the contact that some tribes already had with white ways of life. These past instances of contact meant that some children were more open to schooling than those whose first experience with Euro-American ways of life was Indian Boarding Schools. These same practices of assimilation were decided upon not by teachers at schools but was created by policymakers in order to establish a position in society which American Indians would be able to fill. In assimilating youth into a society which did not accept their culture, policy makers sought to transform many generations and in time eliminate American Indian culture.\textsuperscript{11}

In a similar narrative to that of David Wallace Adams, \textit{Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences}, edited by Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc, introduce the origin of off-reservation Indian boarding schools and their influence upon the students who attended. Within this history, the work of multiple historians reflects the efforts to understand how students coped with the experiences they had while attending off-reservation Indian boarding schools. Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc create a narrative that examines the beginnings of the Boarding school in mission schools to present day understandings of the results of the boarding schools. Boarding schools were seen as the

\textsuperscript{10} Adams, \textit{Education for Extinction}, 108-111.
purgatory between savagery and civilization. This purgatory, which leaders such as Pratt saw as closer to civilization, was understood as the elimination of the Indian problem.\textsuperscript{12}

An important theme captured in the work of \textit{Boarding School Blues} is that many policymakers on Indian affairs believed that American Indians should remain Indian but be able to participate within their specific place in American society. Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc describe how Pratt understood the mixing of civilization by equating, “his educational experiment to a child learning to swim: ‘the boy learns to swim by going into the water; the Indian will become civilized by mixing with civilization’… Pratt generally stood against on-reservation schools where school officials told Native Americans: ‘You are Indians and must remain Indians. You are not of the nation [United States] and cannot become of the nation. We do not want you to become of the nation.”\textsuperscript{13} Yet many policymakers disagreed with Pratt and believed that American Indians should be civilized, yet separate from society, similar to the practice of segregation of African Americans.

The practices that took place at Carlisle Indian Industrial School, as well as other schools that were modeled after Carlisle, were preformed because of Pratt’s own thoughts on the matter of civilization, in which American Indians would not have a specific position but would be able to function as freely as any other member could. These ideas of civilization, specifically those of Pratt, are a major focus of this thesis. Pratt’s motivation and his personal ideas are fundamental in creating a narrative that encompasses the practices of assimilation and the impact of Indian Boarding schools on the students who attended. In conversation with Trafzer, Keller, and

\textsuperscript{12} Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc, eds., \textit{Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences} (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

Sisquoc, the intention of this thesis is to understand the impacts of Carlisle Indian Industrial School on the students who attended.

Although many works that discuss American Indian education and inevitably Carlisle Indian Industrial School examine aspects of assimilation and how they influenced the student experience, there are historians who also focus upon memory, remembrance, and the impacts of off-reservation boarding schools upon families. Historians such as Brenda J. Child, Barbara Landis, and Jacqueline Fear-Segal discuss the ideas of memories and reflections in relation to schools such as Carlisle. For author Brenda J. Child, the work *Boarding School Seasons* discusses the experiences of the Ojibwe students who attended boarding schools from 1900-1940. Child relies heavily upon letters to create this narrative from the personal experiences of students and families, while also using the living sources of relatives who attended the schools that she discusses. The focus of this work is the varying reactions to Indian Boarding Schools, and the way that families are still reliving and healing from their time at off-reservation boarding schools.  

The actions of assimilation are fundamental in understanding the way that the lives of American Indian students and families were changed after the development of off-reservation boarding schools. For instance, the assimilation of language caused students to lose connections to family and members of their tribe. While the intention of boarding schools was to separate and create new cultural values for Native students, Child argues that the bonds between family members were able to withstand the separation that was intended to remove their identities.

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15 Child, *Boarding School Seasons*. 
Themes of remembrances, memories and familial healing are fundamental to understanding Child’s work as well as Landis and Fear-Segal. In order to understand the ways that families and children were affected by their experiences while attending Indian Boarding Schools, sources from multiple perspectives are important to truly understand the student experience. Authors like Child utilize multiple sources, such as letters, newspapers, and sources from policymakers who created curriculums, while mainly focusing on the letters and oral histories of students to fully encapsulate the way that students truly felt about the schooling experiment. In a similar way, this work will combine the perspectives of Indian Affairs policy makers, school administration, and students to create a narrative to understand the intended experience of students in contrast to their real experiences while attending Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

Historian Barbara Landis discusses the Carlisle experience through one specific aspect of assimilation: the changing of names. Landis’ work “The Names,” is an essay within the larger work edited by Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose entitled Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations. This essay unravels the memories and connections to the 10,595 names that were enrolled throughout the history of Carlisle. This work reflects the connections of families and students to Carlisle through the discovery of names, while also discussing the lives of those who returned following their time at the off-reservation boarding school. Landis reflects on the feelings of one student, which was also a shared feeling for other students, “when a non-reservation school student comes home and is ready for his trade and hunts for work white people size the Indian up and know he is Indian, he

has no work for him. It is no wonder students from non-reservation school get so discouraged and are once more back to their old Indian ways.”17 Landis attributes these experiences of Pratt’s failure to assimilate students within their time spent at Carlisle to his effort in working to fully remove American Indian children from the culture they were born into. Students who were unable to find jobs or a place within society were often still seen as spectacles to be watched rather than a member of white society.

While Landis’ work touches on the other aspects of assimilation, the aspect of naming and its importance is fundamental to the narrative, which focuses on the generational trauma created by the American Indian education experiment. Many students who attended off-reservation Indian Boarding Schools often had their given name changed before attending schools, while those who attended in the first few years often had their names changed when they first arrived. This aspect of assimilation created a new life for American Indian youth, one that was fully separate from their previous lives. This practice led to some students former lives being completely forgotten, as some schools did not keep records of past names and new names, this created difficulties for families who had students that never returned from schools.18

The work of connecting these lost students to families is a common theme within Landis’ work as well as Jacqueline Fear-Segal’s work within the essay, “The Lost Ones: Piecing Together the Story.”19 Fear-Segal’s essay encompasses ideas of students whose stories were never told after attending boarding schools leading to the importance of communities of descendants searching to understand the lives of their ancestors. The practices of assimilation

often led to the complete erasure of lives before entering the halls of schools such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Often times students who attended schools with siblings would not be marked as relatives on official documentation, completely changing the identity of students while they attended schools.20

Jacqueline Fear-Segal edited the work Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations and wrote the work White Man’s Club: Schools, Race and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation. The work, White Man’s Club, discusses various aspects of the Indian education system with foundations in mission schools, the theories in which schools were rooted, as well as men who were in charge of these schools. Amongst this discussion, Richard Henry Pratt and Carlisle Indian Industrial School are main themes within the larger discussion of the Indian Education. In White Man’s Club, Fear-Segal argues that schools, “supposedly established to educate native children for citizenship, became arenas where whites debated the terms of that citizenship and where native peoples, struggling in this convoluted context against the total erasure of their cultures, claimed, adapted or deflected the ‘white man’s club’ and in the process, realigned and redefined tribal and Indian identities.”21 Within this narrative, Fear-Segal also discusses unseen and seen men who controlled the lives of those who attend these boarding schools.

Fear-Segal’s White Man’s Club deals more with narratives of control, such as the Man on the Bandstand from Carlisle Indian Industrial School, who was an anonymous columnist for the school newspaper that acted as the eyes and ears on campus meant to keep students in line and morally responsible while on campus. This figurehead who watched from the bandstand at the

21 Jacqueline Fear-Segal, White Man’s Club: Schools, Race and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2007), xii.
center of the campus was always vigilant to the events and lives of both students and faculty of Carlisle. Both the Man on the Bandstand and Richard Henry Pratt are examples of control over the student population at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. While these men are themes within Fear-Segal’s narrative of the “white man’s club,” a strong aspect of her narrative are the changing understandings of students’ own identities after their time at institutions such as Carlisle.

Fear-Segal’s work in both *White Man’s Club* and “The Lost Ones” discusses the lives of students at Indian Boarding Schools in relation to their perceived fit within white society. The main narrative within *White Man’s Club* discusses their unattainable position within Euro-American society. The shifting understanding of civilization and American Indian youth’s place within this civilization complicated the identity of those who attended Indian Boarding Schools. The theme of complicated understandings of identity is rooted in the erasure and practices of assimilation that took place at Indian Boarding Schools such as Carlisle.

Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s importance to understanding the experiment of assimilation in American Indian Education is fundamental to understanding the practices of assimilation that took place at schools located across the United States. Authors such as Addams, Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc discuss the major practices of assimilation that impacted students, while Child, Landis, and Fear-Segal focus on practices of assimilation, their main argument revolves around the methods of remembrances and memory for families of students who attended boarding schools. The experiment of education in American Indian Boarding

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22 Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 207.
23 Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 50.
24 Fear-Segal. *White Man’s Club*, 186.
schools is an expanding narrative as this subject is still making headlines specifically reflecting the impact of schools on the students and families who attended.

In conversation with these works, this thesis will discuss the intended experience of students by school administrators and Indian Affairs policymakers in contrast to the experiences and perceptions of the students who attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School. In creating this narrative, the balance of perspectives is used to establish a full understanding of how students who attended Carlisle, as well as those who attended those modeled after Carlisle, were impacted by the practices of assimilation and the removal of their known culture. The civilizing mission of Indian Boarding Schools is fundamental to understanding the lives of students who lived within two separate societies. These students were told that they were Indian and could never be truly American; but they were also told they should strive to be fully American, and completely erase their past lives for Euro-American Civilization. Within this context, some students recounted good experiences while also struggling with their own identity because they could not fully be white and were taught that they could not remain Indian.

An Introduction to American Indian Education in the United States

The early system of education for American Indian youth began in the sixteen-hundreds while the United States of America was still a colony of Great Britain. Early aspects of American Indian Education revolved around ideas of missionary work and conversion, influenced by Christian ideas that were an ideal, prominent within the English colonies. In comparison to the education practices that were developed in off reservation boarding schools in the late 1800s, these earlier schools relied on conversion to Christianity as the foundation of education, with its
inspiration being rooted in the education of the old world, with the minister and church being the dominant educational leaders within the community.\textsuperscript{25}

Conversion was the top priority of the early colonial Indian educational system, with an emphasis on moving American Indians from “savagery” to “civilization.” English religious leaders in the American colonies contended that living within a specific culture was the cause of savagism and that the only way to correct this savagery was to provide indigenous youth with a civilized environment, separate from their formerly “savage” culture. Historians of this time period reflect on these cultural differences in the experiences of students who were placed within these separate environments. In early schooling systems some students were able to remain close to home, while others were sent off to schools far from home or even out of state. Those students who remained close to home were able to live within two separate cultures, the first, the one they were born into, which was considered “savage” by colonial standards, and the other culture, that of an English Colonist which was considered “civilized.” Students who lived at these schools were unable to live within these separate cultures, and were fully forced to assimilate into European culture, and the developing American society.\textsuperscript{26}

The “civilizing” of American Indians in early schooling systems did not have a shared measure of success between the so-called “civilizers” and those being “civilized.” Those in positions of control believed that a fully assimilated member of society was a success, while students saw their success in the ability to fit within both cultures. For British Colonists, assimilation was fundamental to creating successful members of society who spoke English, were Christians, and participated in this English society in civilized ways. But they never fully

\textsuperscript{26} Snyder, \textit{Great Crossings}, 11.
succeeded because most students continued to move between cultures, retaining values from both.\textsuperscript{27}

Further, not all schools were created with the same intentions. For instance, some tribal leaders in the early nineteenth century founded schools in order to develop opportunities. They did not see these schools as tools of assimilation, but instead as places to train their children in an environment where they could thrive as dual citizens within their own culture and the developing Euro-American culture. Tribal parents saw real value to the potential opportunities of this kind of educational experiment. The Choctaw Academy at Great Crossings, Kentucky was founded in 1825 by Choctaw parents who were seeking out the opportunity for their children to advocate for their tribe. This school was later funded by the United States Government, but then closed after the Choctaw were relocated to Oklahoma by the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

The Choctaw Academy was rooted within the religious framework of the Protestant and Christian United States. Historian Christina Snyder discusses the school as a case study of mission driven education in \textit{Great Crossings: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in the Age of Jackson}. Snyder suggests that the religious landscape of America was being transformed through ideas of the Second Great Awakening, which led to, “a series of diverse religious revivals that supported the notion of an inclusive and progressive republic… the revivals inspired women and people of color seeking a share of liberty.”\textsuperscript{28} These revivals and desire for the liberty developed the Choctaws increasing interest in Western education that was being offered to them. Yet they were generally disinterested in the driving force for that education: their conversion to Christianity.

\textsuperscript{27} Snyder, \textit{Great Crossings}, 311.  
\textsuperscript{28} Snyder, \textit{Great Crossings}, 8.
The case study of the Choctaw Academy at Great Crossings highlights the influence of Western education of the youth of the Choctaw nation while also influencing the life and education of their nation after the removal of American Indians by the federal government. Student Pierre Juzan spoke in 1826, “With great anxiety and solicitude, we have expected your arrival at this place, the location of the Choctaw Academy. Although we have been separated from you a long time, by space and time, we have been united in our friendship and affection and our prayers have been constant that the Good Spirit might protect and smile upon you in your journey through a land of strangers.”

Students along with Juzan stated their excitement in the possibility of sharing the “blessings” of Choctaw Academy with Indian Nations from all across the United States. The opportunity of education was intriguing to members of the Choctaw nation for its potential possibilities for empowerment.

Students who attended Choctaw Academy were selected by leaders of their tribes as, “the most promising graduates of mission schools… [which] was designed to decrease competition between the mission schools and the Choctaw Academy.” Many of the students who attended were of the elite within the Choctaw Nation. Although many tribal leaders of the Choctaw sought to send their children to the academy, many other Indian leaders also sought to send their children to the Choctaw Academy in order to have members of the tribe who could speak English and become advocates for their way of life. The Southern nation of, “the Creeks… were the first to seek a contract with Choctaw Academy.” The Creeks had recently experienced the loss of 23 million acres of land to the United States following the Red Stick War. As other American Indians had previously experienced the idea of schooling in Western led mission

29 Snyder, Great Crossings, 70.
30 Snyder, Great Crossings, 72.
31 Snyder, Great Crossings, 73.
schools, they saw the possibility of corruptible leaders while also understanding the possibility of preventing corruption by creating a literate populace.

In order to fully understand the Indian Boarding Schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as the subject of this study, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, it is critical to understand the foundations of the American Indian educational experiment. The conversion of students to Christianity, as well as creating a separate environment in order to assimilate them into Euro-American society, reinforced the idea that American Indians lived within an environment of “savagism.” This so-called “savagism” could be prevented by removing American Indian children from their own culture and placing them within a “civilized” culture, which created the environment of assimilation. Early practices of assimilation at schools such as speaking English, practicing Christianity, and living within a European colonial way of life were the early foundations of educational practices that fully influenced the development of boarding schools. These early aspects of assimilation for American Indian youth continued to influence those who would become leaders of Indian Affairs in the United States Government and those who would become future leaders of Indian Boarding Schools. In particular, Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt, founder of Carlisle, was influenced by these ideas of early American Indian educational experiments and continued the experiment of education at Carlisle, modeling assimilation practices for other Indian Boarding Schools to follow.

Although the experiment of American Indian education began with missionary schools in the 1600s, the boarding school such as Choctaw Academy and Carlisle instituted similar ideas of transforming the “savage” into the “civilized.” Carlisle Indian Industrial School and schools with similar practices were motivated by the altercations with American Indians over tribal lands, which escalated as white Americans moved further west into allotted Indian territories. Prior to
these educational experiments, United States military often classified those involved in altercations, wars, or massacres as “prisoners of war” or they were killed for their involvement. The Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 involved the Cheyenne and Arapaho and approximately 675 volunteer soldiers. The volunteer soldiers led by Colonel John M. Chivington, drove the Cheyenne and Arapaho from their camp before killing around 230 people mostly women, children, and elderly.32 The Sand Creek Massacre was not the first massacre, altercation, or war that took place between the United States Government and American Indian people; however, its relevance is in those who were involved and how many from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School.33

Similar to The Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, Red Cloud’s War of 1866 involved the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota and the United States Government. This war took place because of the rising interest in gold in the Wyoming and Montana Territory which was allotted to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota. From 1866 to 1867, the tribes were led by Red Cloud a Lakota leader in order to prevent white settlers on allotted tribal lands.34 The Battle of Little Bighorn, or the Battle of the Greasy Grass involved Lt. Colonel George A. Custer and the Lakota and Cheyenne in 1876 which influenced the number of Cheyenne and Lakota students in the first six years. Some of the first students who attended Carlisle were Plains Indians who had been transported to Fort Marion as prisoners of war following the Red River War. The Red River War took place in 1874, in order to remove Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Arapaho and Caddo from southwestern territories to Indian territory, this war involved some survivors of the Sand Creek Massacre.

massacre. The resulting estimated seventy prisoners were sent to Fort Marion and later placed under the care of Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt and inspired him to establish the experiment in American Indian Education, Carlisle Indian Boarding School.

The Founding of Carlisle’s Educational Experiment

This work will examine the student experiences at Carlisle Indian Industrial School from the first six years, as well as the motivations of the first superintendent of the school, Richard Henry Pratt. Richard Henry Pratt is famed for his statements on the ideas of civilization and assimilation, “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” Although this particular saying is what is most often associated with Pratt, in full context the quote reads, “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his education has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, 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.”35 This extended statement does not change the defining aspects of the shortened quote, but it does highlight Pratt’s interest in the education of American Indians.

As a flagship of American Indian off-reservation boarding schools, Carlisle Indian Industrial School plays a pivotal role in understanding the motivations that influenced further developments of American Indian education. Richard Henry Pratt is a central figure in this narrative due to his drive to develop practices of assimilation and precedents for students and school administrators. Resources from the school administration and Pratt, as well as sources

from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, establish what school and government leaders intended for American Indian students. Sources from students such as letters, newspaper clippings from their time outside of the boarding school, and postcards to the school, display the way that students actually experienced Carlisle Indian Industrial School. In combining both sides of the narrative, a fully encompassing record of the experiences at Indian Boarding Schools is created in order to understand the boarding school system.

Carlisle founder Richard Henry Pratt, whose name is synonymous with the creation of off-reservation boarding schools, developed his ideas regarding American Indian Education following military service.\(^{36}\) Pratt’s military experience began in the Civil War, but his interactions with American Indian groups began in small skirmishes out west starting around the same time as the Civil War. The Red River War, 1874-1875, resulted from the United States government attempts to remove Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, and Caddo tribes from the Southern Plains and transport them to Indian Territory, in present day Oklahoma. Operating as Lieutenant, Pratt was charged with transporting seventy-two prisoners of war to Leavenworth, Kansas, while the government was devising a plan to determine their fate. The intention was to try them before a military commission, but this, “would be illegal because a state of war could not technically exist between ‘a nation and its wards.’”\(^{37}\) The decision was made for Pratt to transport these so-called prisoners of war to Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. At this time Pratt had spent nearly eight years in the West fighting American Indians. This experience led him to believe that “there was only one way for the Indians to survive the onslaught of progress:

\(^{36}\) Richard Henry Pratt is referred to by many titles within the letters and documents in the archive such as, Captain, Colonel, Lieutenant and Brigadier General. He received all of these titles throughout his life, but in this work, I will refer to him as Richard Henry Pratt, Lieutenant Pratt, or simply Pratt.

they would have to be swallowed up in the rushing tide of American life and institutions.38 By this time period, many American Indians had experience with prototypes of Indian education such as missionary schools and reservation day schools, which meant students often already spoke some English.

With vague orders for the incarceration of the war prisoners, Pratt took it upon himself to utilize Fort Marion as an experiment in education, a new prototype in order to “civilize” the American Indian youth. Pratt’s military experience inspired the methods of the Fort Marion school, with students acting as soldiers and teachers as officers. In other words, the prisoners would act as obedient children and Pratt their benevolent father. This prison-turned-military school was a somewhat success in the eyes of Pratt, as these students began to intermingle within the society of St. Augustine. Pratt’s methods gained the attention of those who sought to solve the nation’s “Indian Problem.” This “Indian Problem” began before the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This Act impacted the American Indians who retained almost twenty-five million acres of land in the American south, which was taken by the American government through the transfer of tribal lands in exchange for lands west of the Mississippi River.39

Following this somewhat successful civilization attempt at Fort Marion, Pratt was able to enroll some of his students in Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, a school established for former enslaved people following the end of the Civil War. Although the Hampton Institute allowed Pratt the ability to create an environment for institutionalized assimilation, Pratt disliked the fact that his decisions about his students were also dependent upon another superintendent.

38 Adams, Education for Extinction, 38.
Unlike his experience of educating students at Fort Marion, at Hampton he was unable to make the final say on how to assimilate students through his desired practices. Pratt also struggled with the idea that American Indians, “would suffer from their association with blacks, not because blacks would prove a degrading influence, but simply because white prejudice against blacks would inevitably spill over toward Indians.”\textsuperscript{40} If Pratt intended for American Indians to fully assimilate into white American society, he wished for there to be no outside associations that would prevent their acceptance into society, despite the fact that his students were often viewed as spectacles when on excursions from their institutions. Pratt intended to create an environment that would allow his students successful assimilation and to create lives within American society.

Consequently, Richard Henry Pratt went to Washington, D.C., to lobby for a fully realized off-reservation school, which he was authorized to do after recruiting 125 students for the new school. In 1879, the War Department transferred the Carlisle Barracks, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to the Department of the Interior to house the school. One of the ways that Pratt recruited his first students was to suggest that the best way to fight the issues that many American Indians had with the white man was to learn English and be immersed within white culture. Pratt’s main method of displaying the transformation of students was through photographs taken upon students’ arrival as well as photographs taken after students had been immersed within Euro-American culture. These photographs displayed the visual transformation of students and the progress of the American Indian educational experiment.

\textsuperscript{40} Adams, \textit{Education for Extinction}, 48.
Pratt believed that Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s position within Indian Education to be another steppingstone for American Indians to be integrated into Euro-American society. Pratt intended for students to attend Carlisle, or schools that were modeled after it, and then attend higher levels of education in order to advance themselves further in society. These off-reservation boarding schools would allow American Indians the opportunity to experience American society in an environment where they would be accepted. The foundational aspects of schools like Carlisle were due to Pratt’s belief that people were shaped by their cultures, which is evident in this statement:

It is a great mistake to think that the Indian is born an inevitable savage. He is born a blank, like the rest of us. Left in the surroundings of savagery, he grows to possess a savage language, superstition, and life. We, left in the surroundings of civilization, grow to possess a civilized language, life, and purpose. Transfer the white infant to the savage surroundings, he will grow to possess a savage language, superstition, and habit. Transfer the savage-born infant to the surroundings of civilization, and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit.⁴¹

The intention was to create an environment that established civilization for those who were considered savage, as the slogan for Carlisle read, “To civilize the Indian, get him into civilization. To keep him civilized, let him stay.”⁴² Pratt considered this civilizing mission to be a war, in which he was fighting to create civilization from savagery. This battle reflected Pratt’s own understanding of race and culture which was progressive compared to his contemporaries at the time.

In comparison to others who dictated American Indian Education at the time, Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt’s ideals were focused on culture rather than on race when it came to the

⁴² Adams, Education for Extinction, 55.
assimilation of American Indian youths. The experiment in education came just following the end of the Civil War, when schools dedicated to the education of formerly enslaved peoples were opened. Schools such as these were seen as a place for students who were considered lesser than white students of the same age or educational level. Pratt believed that a school that served American Indians would have to be separate to other schools created for African Americans, because he understood the nation’s feelings on race. In separating American Indians from African Americans, he believed that white Americans would be more accepting if they also spoke English, understood white American society, and could play a role within that society.

In these ideas of a possible society where American Indians and white Americans could interact with one another, Pratt’s views on cultural and racial ideologies could be classified as progressive in comparison to others within society. In 1871, the United States Congress approved the Indian Appropriations Act, which ended tribal sovereignty and classified American Indians as wards of the United States Government. Although those in positions of authority sought out Indian territory rather than the education of American Indians, Pratt’s educational experiment could serve as a solution to their want for land. Richard Henry Pratt’s intentions for the educational experiment of Carlisle Indian Industrial School differ from those in the government who sought to forcibly eradicate American Indians from tribal land. These intentions were for the successful assimilation of American Indian youth through a curriculum heavily based on vocational training.

Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt believed in the civilizing mission of the Indian education experiment; unlike others who thought that the only solution to the “Indian Problem” was the genocide of Indian tribes, Pratt believed instead in a cultural genocide, which killed the Indian within the man. In 1879, an article entitled “The Indian Problem” asked the question “What
shall be done with the Indians?" Nelson A. Miles believed, like others at the time, that the only way for American Indians to remain within the United States was to place them under the control of a government agency that would keep them in line. The civilizing mission that Pratt set out to accomplish was rooted in his belief in the cultural inferiority of indigenous peoples, which he believed would be erased through the education of American Indian youth. Pratt worked closely with the Department of Indian Affairs, who agreed that it was “indispensably necessary that [the Indians] be placed in positions where they can be controlled, and finally compelled, by stern necessity, to resort to agricultural labor or starve… it be admitted that education affords the true solution to the Indian Problem, then it must be admitted that the boarding school is the very key to the situation.”

The boarding school was the sought after solution for the dispossession of Indian land through the assimilation of American Indian youth. Placing American Indian youth within a structure that would allow for the control and transformation of their identities and culture would allow them a place within American society.

In prototype experiments of American Indian education, students were not seen as individuals or as educated peoples who could be fully civilized. Rather, education was just one part of a larger strategy to dispossess Indian tribes of their land. The boarding school experiment was designed to create a sense of individualism for American Indian youth in order to break up “tribal lands into allotments to the individuals of the tribe.” The United States government saw this assimilation as an opportunity to break up larger groups of American Indians in order to dispossess their land and allow for the migration of white settlers. The United States created a

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44 Miles, “The Indian Problem,” 310.
twin policy of Indian territorial dispossession and Indian Assimilation explained by the United States Senate:

beginning with President Washington, the stated policy of the Federal Government was to replace the Indian’s culture with our own. This was considered ‘advisable’ as the cheapest and safest way of subduing the Indians, of providing a safe habitat for the country’s white inhabitants, of helping the whites acquire desirable land, and of changing the Indian’s economy so that he would be content with less land. Education was a weapon by which these goals were to be accomplished.47

This use of education as a weapon became an easier method for the separations of Indian tribes from their territories rather than through military movements and conflicts. The United States Government believed that if they could control American Indian youth, then families and tribes as a whole would be more easily controlled.

The “Indian Problem” was as much a concern for land for the United States government as a cultural concern. Pratt’s solution to these two concerns, the erasure of Indian culture as well as the seizure of Indian lands, was the assimilation and education of American Indian youth. As American Indian youth were sent, brought, or forced to Federal Indian Boarding Schools, they often met people from other tribes and did not return home, causing tribal land to be less inhabited. This movement off of tribal lands, as well as the push for individual land ownership while at Indian Boarding schools transformed the way that tribal lands could function, succeeding in government efforts to take tribal land. Although some like Richard Henry Pratt believed in a civilizing mission to erase the culture for American Indian youth, the root of this mission and efforts for Federally funded Indian Boardings schools was the dispossession of American Indian Tribal territories.

Following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the “Indian Problem” resulted in Americans searching to find a place for American Indians to fit within the society so that their former land could be allotted to white Americans. Those in positions of power saw the potential that assimilation and civilization could transform the ways that American Indians lived. Even after the Indian Removal Act, many American Indians remained to live in tight knit communities, preventing the use of these lands for white settlers. Through the assimilation of American Indian youth, tribal and communal living could be prevented as students would find connections and marrying those they met in school, which resulted in relocation and the availability of land.\(^{48}\)

The establishment of Carlisle Indian Industrial School instituted a new prototype for American Indian education: the off-reservation boarding school. Pratt’s intentions stemmed from the popular ideas about American Indians’ place, which held that there was not one for them within advancing society. Pratt liked Indians as people, however he did not see a need for Indian culture. He fully believed that “civilization” would triumph over the “savagery,” without killing American Indians in the process. Carlisle’s fundamental idea of assimilation was a cultural one, as Pratt believed American Indian inferiority was not racial, but instead cultural and could be changed through one’s environment. This is why the prototype of off-reservation boarding schools relied on the change of environment. Pratt believed that “we are not born with language, nor are we born with ideas of either civilization or savagery.”\(^{49}\) The major difference between separate prototypes of schooling was rooted in the way that American Indians were viewed and treated. Reservation schools taught Indian students that they would only ever be

\(^{48}\) Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 17.

\(^{49}\) Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 52.
Indians, while schools like Carlisle looked at students as individuals immersing them into mainstream American culture.\textsuperscript{50}

Pratt believed that solving the Indian Problem would create opportunities that would allow American Indians to mix into civilization and prevent their return to communal living on tribal lands. Reservation boarding schools as well as land allotment, “would continue to perpetuate Indian communities” as American Indian’s were seen as, “chained to the locality and neighborhood in which the commune prevailed,” which meant that students would not be able to build themselves through their newly developed ideas of civilization.\textsuperscript{51} In prototype education such as reservation schools, civilization was only a theoretical concept that could be taught, while at boarding schools such as Carlisle, “civilization” was taught and experienced by students on a daily basis.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, founded in 1824, focused on relations and treaties with American Indians, as well as the forced experiment of education on American Indian children. By 1879, the Bureau of Indian Affairs increasingly focused on the promise of off-reservation boarding schools, noting that “the work of promoting Indian education is the most agreeable part of the labor performed.”\textsuperscript{52} Schools were viewed by BIA officials as fundamental to the assimilation of American Indian youth, and in turn their parents and families. The methods began by first assimilating their children and then creating generational practices of assimilation that transformed tribal relations and land dispossession.

\textsuperscript{50} Adams, \textit{Education for Extinction}, 31.
\textsuperscript{51} Adams, \textit{Education for Extinction}, 53.
\textsuperscript{52} United States Department of the Interior, \textit{Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1879 \textit{Accessed at the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, October 2022. Original at Dickinson College Archives \& Special Collections, SC-Indian 351.73, U58a 1879. (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1879), VII.}
The Bureau consistently applauded Pratt’s approach, going back to his first “very satisfactory” American Indian students enrolled in the vocational program at Hampton Normal and Educational School.53 The Bureau of Indian Affairs saw the success of these students at Hampton and believed that “the success attending the experiment has led to the establishment of a training school of the same kind at Carlisle Barracks… under the charge of Lieut. R. H. Pratt.”54 To school leaders such as Pratt, the individualism of students was fundamental to fully transform them into a person who would fit into white society. In assimilating American Indian youth, the Bureau of Indian Affairs compared boarding school students to white students; “Indian children are as bright and teachable as average white children of the same age… the progress of the youths trained in our schools is of the most helpful character.”55 This comparison of white children and American Indian children was a product of assimilation, students who attended Indian Boarding Schools were seen as a steppingstone to assimilating an entire race of people.

One can better understand the goals and operations of Carlisle during its early years through the annual reports Pratt submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The first year of Indian Boarding School education at Carlisle was not an easy adjustment for students or the educators who worked at the school. In a letter sent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1880, Richard Henry Pratt believed that some of the first students enrolled in Carlisle should return to their reservations and agencies due to some, “being rather old, and some of them heads of families.” He thought it, “best to return them to their tribes, and fill up with children, great

53 United States Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1879, VIII.
54 United States Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1879, VIII.
55 United States Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1879, VII.
numbers of whom were anxious to come.”^^56 Pratt believed that some of these students had learned enough to be teachers within their own tribes and agencies to help influence other children to attend schools such as Carlisle.

In its second year of operation, Pratt’s intended goal was to expand the school and increase the number of students from around the country, as there was no other school of its kind. Although many Indian parents had adverse feelings about the idea of sending their children away to an off-reservation boarding school, there were some who saw a benefit of sending their children to an institution that would allow them to learn English and advocate for tribal relations. Pratt informed the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that he had received, “numerous letters from many parts of Indian Country, and from parents and relations of the children here, and from other Indians… so now that there is an awakening among the Indians in favor of education and industrial training for the young.”^^57 The parents who wanted their children to attend boarding schools such as Carlisle saw positive and successful outcomes of educational experiments through those who were able to integrate into white society.

In its first year of operation, 1879, Carlisle introduced an outing program that allowed students to learn and practice vocational skills on farms surrounding the school. This outing program allowed students to, “assist in the duties of the farm and the household for their board and will attend the public schools, thus having advantages for learning civilized habits and gaining knowledge far better than we can give at this school.”^^58 These outing experiences place

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American Indian youth within a specific place in white American society, where they could work for their place within an advancing society,

The Indian Boarding School experiment intended for American Indian youth to be removed from their culture and placed within an environment that did not allow for them to continue their cultural practices. Carlisle contained students from multiple tribes from across the country. They did not have the opportunity to be individuals while surrounded by hundreds of other students. The outing program allowed for students to learn the same skills they would learn while on school grounds, but they would also allow for individual experiences. Pratt’s efforts for the outing program reflect that “if freedom and citizenship are to be their lot, then the surroundings of freedom and good citizenship during education would seem the best to equip them for that lot.”\(^59\) Education allowed for the assimilation of students which would allow for fully capable American citizens. However, for students to understand citizenship they needed to experience it firsthand through the outing system, were they made menial wages and worked jobs on farms or small shops in town.

The outing system allowed for the students to be individuals and experience white American society that leaders like Pratt would want them to be a part of. For the families involved in the outing system, Pratt asked questions to understand how students were adjusting to these new environments. Questions such as “Was the general conduct of the pupil, good, fair, or bad? Was the pupil generally industrious or idle? Please give the kinds of work performed. What wages were paid?” All of these questions would reflect the experience of students from any school.\(^60\) Questions like “In comparison with other races, was the pupil quick and apt to


learn or the contrary? How was the pupil treated - as member of the family or otherwise - and with what effect?"\textsuperscript{61} highlighted that Pratt understood that his students were often treated differently than other young people on the farm. However, he believed that these questions were important in order to see the transformation of students and the effects of his assimilation practices.

The school struggled throughout its early years with students who returned to their tribes, stayed with their outing placements, or otherwise ran away. In its fourth year of operation, Pratt urged the Bureau to judge those students who had left school lightly as, “judgements based upon the success and failure of those who have made this mere beginning [of education] can only be imperfect.”\textsuperscript{62} Rather than critique the school for any failures, Pratt instead argued that any contact with Western education was a positive for the larger goal of assimilation. The students that left Carlisle were not the successfully assimilated students that Pratt had planned for, but he believed that this small experience with education would transform them from their so-called savage ways – and potentially inspire similar changes in their friends and loved ones. Pratt believed that even in an imperfect system, “why should not every state have schools, and these schools be made introductory to civilized contact, and so in time all Indian children grow into a knowledge of and a desire for American citizenship?”\textsuperscript{63} This introduction to citizenship through boarding schools, like reservation schools and day schools, could become a steppingstone for students, not only for their education but for their citizenship as well. Even Pratt’s imperfect system as an introductory to education placed students into an environment for assimilation.

\textsuperscript{61} United States Department of the Interior, \textit{Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs}, 1882, 178.
\textsuperscript{62} United States Department of the Interior, \textit{Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs}, 1882, 179.
\textsuperscript{63} United States Department of the Interior, \textit{Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs}, 1882, 181.
The teaching methods of Carlisle Indian Industrial School first and foremost revolved around language. The foundation of Carlisle’s academic curriculum was English language and writing practice. Math, science, and history were secondary to English, while the other aspect of education involved the vocational training of school outings. Each year’s pedagogy involved English language practice first and foremost, with the first-year introduction being, “writing words, phrases; and sentences upon slates,” as well as, “counting, writing, and reading numbers.” For most students this was not their first introduction to the English language as many reservation and missionary schools taught English. For second year students, writing and arithmetic advanced slightly but it was not until the third year of education that students began writing in journals and studying geography. Curricula for fourth-year students involved “simple lessons in natural science, history, and geography,” while “the fifth-year curriculum involved the addition of animal and plant sciences.”

Richard Henry Pratt believed “that every educational effort of the government should urge these people into association and competition with the other people of the country and teach them that it is more honorable to be an American citizen than to remain a Comanche or Sioux.” The educational experiment of Indian Boarding Schools was seen by the Bureau and Commissioner of Indian Affairs as its most successful method for the full assimilation of American Indian youth and in turn their parents and tribal relations. The off-reservation

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boarding school was fundamental to assimilation as, “the system of educating in tribes and tribal schools leaves the Onondagas Onondagas still.” The removal of American Indian youth to institutions such as Carlisle transformed their environment and forced assimilation, and through the eyes of Richard Henry Pratt and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, created citizens.

Pratt’s approach was unique for his time. While others sought to forcibly remove American Indians from their lands through war and treaty, or otherwise segregate them from mainstream American life, Pratt instead sought full assimilation and citizenship. In contrast to those who believed American Indians were whites’ racial inferiors, he contended that American Indians were not innately savage. Rather, they were fully capable of integration into “civilized” white society with the proper education and training. By removing Indians from their cultures, languages, and religions, Pratt believed he could remake them into something new and better, with no trace of their past selves. As we shall see, however, his students often proved him wrong.

Student Experiences and Changing Identities

In its first six years of operation, Carlisle Indian Industrial School enrolled an estimated six hundred and three students who were from hundreds of different tribes that attended between 1879 and 1884. The number of students and numbers of tribes, however, are estimates because there are many missing or incorrectly preserved documents at Federal Indian Boarding Schools. The study of Indian Boarding Schools is rapidly expanding as investigations like the one that is currently in progress by the Department of the Interior to understand the Federal Indian Boarding School system continues its efforts to unearth the experiences of students. This rapidly expanding study of Indian Boarding Schools means that new records are being discovered as well as corrections to existing records that reveal the stories and lives of those who attended Indian Boarding Schools such as Carlisle.
This work will weave together the intention of those in positions of power with actual experiences of students who, in some cases spent years at the school without meeting the expectations for graduation. The sources from these students can provide a complex understanding of years of assimilation practices placed upon American Indians throughout the educational experiment. Each source that is being used in this work is from the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, which was developed to combine resources from multiple digital platforms in order to understand the school and its legacy. These sources are distinguished by date, Nation and Tribe, and documents provided are application for enrollment; behavior and disciplinary information; financial transactions; former student response postcards; letters and correspondence; medical and physical records; news clipping; outing record of student; outing evaluation; photographs; progress and conduct card; report after leaving; returned student survey; student information survey; and trade and position record card.

This study will examine a small sample of thirteen records from students from the first six years of operation of Carlisle Indian Industrial School, selected because their record contains letters and correspondence among other resources that allow for a richer understanding of their time in school. Although many student records, like the ones sampled, contain a variety of documents, many other records only contain a student information card, and in many cases this student information card is only partially complete. Those with letters and correspondence allow for a better understanding of the lives of students who attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

While these accounts of students represent a small sample of the thousands of students who attended Carlisle from 1879 to 1884, these thirteen students were selected because their student files contained newspaper clippings, letters, and outing evaluations that elaborated on their time spent at Carlisle, as well as how it changed their lives after attendance. Many of these
students wrote of their warm feelings toward Carlisle, but these experiences were not shared by all who attended. Further, these student records were initially gathered by Carlisle’s leadership before eventually ending up in the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. It is therefore quite possible that some records were saved for specific reasons, such as to highlight students’ appreciation to the school and the intended success of the Federal Indian Boarding School system.

The experiences of students can be analyzed qualitatively through letters, correspondence, photographs, evaluations, surveys, and other materials of a similar nature. The student records from the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center allow for the lives of students, who might otherwise be forgotten, to be examined and understood. Likewise, a quantitative understanding of the students at Carlisle Indian Industrial School through an analysis of the numbers of students each year as well as the number of students from separate nations can enrich our understanding of Carlisle Indian Industrial School. This work will utilize both quantitative and qualitative modes of study as both can be useful practices in developing the narrative of student experience of at Carlisle Indian Industrial School as well as other Federal Indian Boarding Schools who developed practices based on Carlisle.

This specific quantitative aspect of Carlisle has to do with the number of students from specific tribes throughout the first six years of operation. More often than not, the number of students per year are an approximate number, as some students have multiple sets of records or have the same documents under their English given name and their Tribal name. Additionally, not every student record could have been preserved in a proper manner. Nonetheless, a quantitative understanding of the student body helps us to understand the exterior influences for
why certain tribes had a greater number of students who attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

The shortcomings of the existing records are proved by the numbers of students listed by date of entry for the first six years are approximately six hundred and three, while the records of students by tribe indicate over two thousand students with records at Carlisle that are not accounted for within other places in the database. These two thousand students came from one hundred and thirteen tribes and bands from across the United States. These 2,260 estimated students were present on Carlisle’s campus and were only distinguished by their tribe on student records. These students were forced to be individuals and were unable to remain in familiar groups, unable to speak their own languages or participate in cultural practices, their tribal identification was considered irrelevant while at Carlisle. There were many diverse cultural backgrounds that students were instructed to leave behind for a future life of individualism similar to the white man.

Similar to the approximate nature of the number of students who attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the true experience of the students who attended Carlisle cannot be fully understood as only some students have records that contain ample sources. Almost all student records contain a Student Information Card, which is often incomplete. The student information card below belonging to Luther Standing Bear, Indian Name Kills Plenty, is more complete than other student cards. This descriptive and historical record of students included a student’s English name and Indian name as well as whether or not their father and mother were still living. These cards also listed their agency, nation, band, and the time that they attended Carlisle. For many students in the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, their records only contain these
student information cards, which are only partially completed, as many students who attended Carlisle often did not graduate.

![Student Information Card of Luther Standing Bear](image1)

*Student Information Card of Luther Standing Bear, one of the first students to arrive at Carlisle as well as one of the first students to graduate from Carlisle Indian Boarding School.*

![Student Information Card of Charles Oheltoint](image2)

*Student Information Card of Charles Oheltoint of the Kiowa Nation. He entered the school in 1879, and his student contains only a sparse information about Oheltoint.*

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Many of the following examples of students discuss how their time at Carlisle allowed them to help their people. For each student, the idea of helping their people often meant different things and was often motivated by the experiences of their own people. Students like Henry Roman Nose advocated for his people to attend schools, while others advocated for the education of their people and their advancement of tribal lands, and then others utilized their education in English and American society to help their people through land disputes. Often times students who attended Carlisle were children of tribal leadership, which often meant after leaving the school they might become chief. After attending Carlisle and becoming Chief, Luther Standing Bear discussed the hard work that came with the title. In an excerpt from his book, *My People the Sioux*, Luther Standing Bear writes, “the title of Chief is now right and proper for me to use, whether in California or in any other part of the United States; and my people know that as long as I live, I will do what is right and proper for them.” Luther Standing Bear went on to advocate for American Citizenship for American Indians as well as the end to white agents at reservation agencies. While some advocated for their tribe, others advocated for themselves by using their boarding school training to find jobs off the reservation, meet people, and improve their lives.

Although some student files contained very little information, like the sparsely detailed student information card shown above, other files contained detailed student surveys, letters to the school administration, and newspaper clippings about their life following their time spent at Carlisle. Students such as Henry Roman Nose, a Cheyenne student, who was a former prisoner at Fort Marion in Florida, first attended Hampton Institute and was one of the first men to attend Carlisle Indian School. Contained within his records are no documentation in regard to

graduation, only a departure date in 1883 with no cause of discharge listed. After leaving Carlisle, Henry Roman Nose became Chief of the Southern Cheyenne band. Roman Nose was at many times an advocate for Indian education, but not for the same reasons that educational leaders like Richard Henry Pratt believed. The aspect of Indian education that Roman Nose proposed to his people was the ability to speak English and interact in white American life.

In a speech given in 1912, entitled, “How to Settle the Problem,” Henry Roman Nose urged Indian youth to seek out education through Indian Boarding Schools in order to help themselves and their people. Roman Nose states, “The first thing, you boys and girls, your parent, your people, send you to school. That is the first thing to get knowing about white man’s way.” Often times students who attended Indian Boarding Schools were stripped of their cultural identity, unable to speak their own language, wear traditional clothes, or unable to use their traditional given name. There were some who believed that they could work the system of Federal Indian Boarding School education to their advantage and utilize the skills that they learned while attending boarding schools in order to advocate for their people in ways that they were previously unable to do.

Advocates for education such as Roman Nose believed that children should, “show what you can do in white man’s way... you get up here and you try to do best you can for your people, and your people watch what you do... your people want you to help them.” School administrators and political leaders hoped that schooling would separate the individual from their tribe and free up tribal lands to be taken over by the government. Yet Henry Roman Nose went

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on to lead his people and, unlike the intentions of Indian educational leaders, remained on tribal
lands and led his people to pursue education. This first example of the Indian Boarding school
education experience is one that highlights the differing intentions of students and
administrators. The intention of federal boarding school education was to transform American
Indian youth so they could fit themselves within an American society and eliminate their
previous cultural identity. Meanwhile, the intention of American Indians who attended boarding
schools was to utilize their education in ways to help their people, and advocate for them within
an advancing society.

Similar to Henry Roman Nose, many students did not write about their experiences while
attending Carlisle. Many records, letters, and newspaper clippings were written following their
time spent in the boarding school system. Many of the records utilized in this work contain
letters following their so-called assimilation into white society. These records highlight the way
that students utilized their training from Carlisle and continued its efforts of assimilation in their
own tribe or by finding their own place within advancing society.

Students like Luther Standing Bear (Kills Plenty) were notable names because their
parents were tribal leaders. Often times tribal leaders would send their children to boarding
schools as an example to other members of their tribes. Tribal leaders such as Standing Bear,
Luther Standing Bear’s father, understood the potential consequences of refusing to send
children to Indian boarding schools, such as losing rations, land, and having their children taken
by force. Children of tribal leaders were often the first to attend Indian boarding schools, as
examples of compliance with the United States government, meaning that students like Luther
Standing Bear served as prime example for life after Indian Boarding schools.
In an article published on August 17, 1917, titled “Chief Standing Bear Educated Indian,” described how many children of tribal leaders were viewed after attending Indian Boarding Schools. Luther Standing Bear was described as, “a full-blooded descendant of the warrior chiefs of the Sioux tribe and a large land holder under the government Indian Agency regulations, Standing Bear is not only a warrior but an educated philosopher.”72 Luther Standing Bear utilized the opportunities gained from Carlisle Indian Boarding School to further himself and his tribal communities. Students such as Luther Standing Bear recognized, along with parents who sent their children to Indian Boarding schools, saw that shifts in society, required them and their children to interact with the so-called white man’s way of life.

Luther Standing Bear became an advocate for Indian citizenship and travelled to Washington D. C., for meetings with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Luther Standing Bear was described in the article in 1917, “Standing Bear’s Example to Others,” as being “on his way to Washington to ask of the Commissioner of Indian affairs the right of citizenship. He expressed regret that the Indian is still in the hands of the Government, but he said that the time is not far distant when he must take his place among his fellow white men and compete with them in all lines of work.”

In his experience at Carlisle Indian School, Luther Standing Bear established

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himself within white man’s society in a way to better himself and his people. While the schools were designed to integrate Native Children into a white man’s society through assimilation, students like Luther Standing Bear combined the skills and moral guidance given at Indian Boarding School with their own tribal cultures. Through advocating for Indian citizenship and developing post offices on tribal land, Luther Standing Bear expanded the skills from Indian Boarding Schools to fit his own perception of a white man’s way of life.

The Maze, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Poster, 1908. It is unclear if Luther Standing Bear is depicted in this poster.75

Luther Standing Bear also performed in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Shows. The following excerpt is from a letter written by Luther Standing Bear on January 26, 1910. It explains how he integrated the lessons he learned at Carlisle into his later experiences in wild west shows:

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75 The Maze, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West poster. Buffalo Bill Center of the West. Originally Published in Points West magazine. Summer 2012.
“The schools may not be in favor of the shows, but that is where I have seen and learned good deal from too. As the saying goes experience is a good teacher during my travels I have been amongst good and bad. But I never forgot what was taught at Carlisle not to drink not to smoke not chew tobacco or tell lies. I tell you I have been where temptation was strong especially in the show-life but believe me I have lived up to what I was taught. I went to Carlisle in the year of 1879 October the 6th with the blanket on in fact I was one of the first students. It is easy to be good in school but it’s hard when you get out into the world."

Luther Standing Bear believed that attending Carlisle Indian Boarding School benefitted him in ways that may have differed from the intention of those who led the school and establish Federal Indian Boarding Schools. However, this access to education allowed him to be an advocate for his people while also being in the public eye for Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show may not seem to be of importance to students who attended Indian Boarding Schools. The show, however, fictionalized the history of the West, depicting American Indians as savages who were irreconcilable to American progress. This sentiment of the characterization and the fictionalized story telling was recognized by Edward Manson, a member of the northwestern Tsimshian Tribe, who worked as a Presbyterian minister, educator, and missionary. Manson described Buffalo Bill’s Wild West as follows: “that is not the true Indian. You are deceiving the public. You are making money by upholding a bad relic of heathenism. You are inviting much ridicule and mockery upon William Penn’s intimate friends. You are disgracing the modern American Civilization. No, that is not the true Indian. Just give him a fair chance, and he will soon find his way into the pulpit, the legislative hall, the commercial house, and the scientist’s laboratory, as others of his own race have already done.”

American Indian leaders were more than just the dramatized character of the west. The ghost

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writer of the Carlisle Indian Helper wrote in 1897 that “only the SAVAGE in the Indian does Buffalo Bill care to keep constantly before the public gaze, and it is only the SAVAGE in the Indian that a certain ignorant, excitable element of society pays fifty cents and a dollar a seat to go see. Carlisle tries to bury the SAVAGE that the MAN in the Indian may be seen.” This mockery of a fictionalized American Indian in the West did not fit into the efforts of those at Carlisle Indian Industrial School and their efforts to erase the Indian of the past.

These implications of the fictionalized “heathen” or “savage” who was present in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show made Luther Standing Bear’s participation more significant. Standing Bear himself wrote of the conflict he felt in taking part, but he also wrote about his experiences in the show becoming an education into a life in white society. In participating in a fictionalized retelling of the past, Luther Standing Bear perpetuated the idea that he could never fit into white society, but in playing a fictionalized characterization of an Indian he could not be the man he was before attending Carlisle.

Many of the first students who attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School were children of tribal leaders or children from tribes who were seen as combatant by the United States government. Children from tribes who had been involved in altercations and massacres at the hands of the United States government were often times sent to schools great distances from their homes like Carlisle. In sending students a great distance away from their homes, schools believed this would break up tribal lands that would then be given back to the United States government. Removing children to distant schools also further separated them from their cultures and reduced the numbers of tribal members who remained. This was true for Nellie

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78 Fees, “Wild West Shows: Buffalo Bills Wild West.”
Carey, a member of the Apache tribe, who attended school at Carlisle in 1880 and then took a position as Laundress at Fort Sill School in Oklahoma. The Apache had many run-ins with the United States government following the ceded territory by the Mexican government to the United States, leading to students attending Indian Boarding Schools.

From Carey’s record, the school appeared to have been largely successful in alienating her from her culture. In a letter sent to Carlisle, Nellie Carey wrote, “I am glad that I went to Carlisle Indian School, there is what I learned what I know today, the temptations where [were] many, but I fought them through, am fighting them still, and will fight to the end.” The influence of Indian Boarding Schools and the moral education that many students received transformed their lives following their time spent in schools. Many students believed that the only way they could enter into the white man’s society was through completing their time at Indian Boarding Schools. Further, their experiences served to largely remove them from their tribal cultures and family members long after graduation.

In comparison to the experience of Nellie Carey, Summer Stacey Riggs (Red Hat), who attended in 1880, believed that the brief time he spent at Carlisle did not have any impact on his success in life.

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80 Summer Riggs (Red Hat) Student Information File. Accessed at the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, October 2022. Original at National Archives and Records Administration, RG 75, Series 1327, Box 8, Folder 334
In 1912 S. Stacey Riggs wrote in a letter to Carlisle, “Although I am not a Carlisle graduate, but I am not ashamed to say that I have nearly the same chances as the Carlisle graduate has.”⁸¹

Students such as Riggs rejected the ideas that American Indians needed education from Indian Boarding Schools in order to fit within the advancing white American society. Riggs was a successful Indian trader and merchant who attended Carlisle for four years, which he believed was an important starting point for his life, but not the thing that determined his own success.

Many of the records of students who attended Carlisle between 1879 and 1884 document students’ warm feelings toward the time they spent at Carlisle, while others noted that their time at Carlisle allowed them to better their people in ways they previously could not. Students like Nellie Robertson, a Sioux who attended in 1880, and Stacy Marlock, a Pawnee who attended in 1883, both took positions at Carlisle as teachers, disciplinarians, and clerical workers. Nellie Robertson, married name Denny, managed the outing system at Carlisle, while Stacey Matlock, who played football on the first team at Carlisle, became a teacher and disciplinarian following his graduation in 1890. Joseph Harris, a Gros Ventre student who attended in 1881 wrote that, “I still have a warm place for it in my heart.”⁸² For many students boarding schools became their home, with some spending many years within these institutions, making friends, finding love, or developing a new identity for oneself would create fond feelings for an institution such as Carlisle. Harris never returned to the west following his time at Carlisle. In a similar experience, Nellie Londrosh, who attended in 1883, did not return to tribal lands. Nellie Londrosh was of

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Winnebago blood, but not a member of the tribe, and the only assistance she received was while attending Carlisle for just over three years.

Often times students who attended Carlisle Indian School related to Luther Standing Bear’s mission to help his own people following his time at boarding schools. Students Joel Tyndall, Omaha, Edward Hears Fire, Crow, Fred Big Horse, Sioux, Yamine Leeds and William Paisano, both Queres, utilized their experience at Carlisle Indian Industrial School in order to better their people through mission work, education, and meetings with Indian Affairs leaders in Washington, D. C. Joel Tyndall, who attended in 1882, often returned to Carlisle Indian School on his way to Washington and wrote to Carlisle, “I have spent fifteen years…in cause of my people… so Indian problems might settle and Indians become citizens.”

In similar regards Edward Hears Fire, who first attended Carlisle in 1883, wrote “I am one to help my people all the time… I always do the best I can.” These men as well as Fred Big Horse, a member of the Sioux tribe who attended in 1883 describe how their time at Carlisle to influence their people by introducing the white man’s way of life though education and missionary work. Yamine Leeds and William Paisano, both Queres who attended in 1884, the former became a court interpreter to help his people through difficulties, while the latter was elected governor of his tribe and appointed to represent his people in Washington.

Student experiences at Indian Boarding Schools cannot be simplified by a handful of students from the first six years of operation. These first six years represent the foundations of an educational experiment that called upon the precedent of previous Indian Boarding Schools,

while being spearheaded by a somewhat progressive and transformative figure in Richard Henry Pratt. Although many students might look back fondly on their time spent at Carlisle or appreciate the opportunities and knowledge that they gained for this boarding school, others did not receive the same treatment or develop the fondness for Carlisle. The narrative of students who recognized the opportunity that assimilating offered them was only one segment of Carlisle’s student population. The others who might not be so readily recognized by those in positions of authority are only starting to be uncovered.

Although many of these sentiments of Carlisle Indian Industrial School are somewhat positive, the negative experiences of students, which may not have been recorded, are significant. Students who were forcibly removed from their families, abused, and those who were sent home after contracting disease, are just as significant as those who first attended Carlisle. These students in the first six years who spoke highly of Carlisle in one way, or another were also attending in a time when being themselves and identifying as American Indians could often mean imprisonment or even death. The options for the first students were to attend Indian Boarding Schools or risk their lives and the lives of their tribes for refusing the push of the United States Government. The lives of those who had negative experiences are being uncovered and remembered through the efforts of the Department of the Interior’s investigation into Federal Indian Boarding Schools.

Epilogue: Reckoning with the Past

As recent news outlets highlight the continued relevancy of Federal Indian Boarding Schools, this thesis illuminates the complexity of students experiences during a crucial time period for racial ideologies. While the intention of these educational experiments was to remove
young American Indians from their culture and place them within the “civilized” white society, many students were persistent in remaining true to identities they created for themselves. The students represented in this thesis attested to their experiences as positive because it allowed them to forge new paths for themselves and their communities.

Recent reports, such as the “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report,” discuss the negative impact of Federal Indian Boarding Schools on students and families. These reports highlight the experiences of students whose stories were removed or never fully recorded within the archive. They allow for the examination of students and families who have other perspectives on the schools. The following section highlights the importance of the report written by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Bryan Newland to the Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, and how the recognition of the American Indian educational experiment and the impact it had on American Indian youth and families even in present day is the first step in allowing families to heal.

The investigation of Federal Indian Boarding Schools is ongoing, making this report the first step in understanding the boarding school system. Even the list of Federal Indian Boarding Schools is still a work in progress. This report created a criterion for a school to classify as a Federal Indian Boarding School such as:

“Housing- The institution has been described as providing on-site housing or overnight lodging. This includes dormitory, orphanage, asylum, residential, boarding, home, jail, and quarters. Education- The institution has been described as providing formal academic or vocational training and instruction. This includes mission school, religious training, industrial training school, manual labor school, academy, seminary, institute, boarding school, and day school. Federal Support- The institution has been described as receiving Federal Government Funds or other Federal support. This includes agency, independent, contact, mission, contract with white schools, government, semi-government, under superintendency, and land or buildings or funds or supplies or services provided.
Timeframe- The institution was operational before 1969 (prior to modern departmental Indian education programming including BIE). As the investigation is ongoing, more schools (some of which may not have met these criteria), may in the future be considered Federal Indian Boarding Schools as new records are identified.

This report recognizes the twin policy that the United States pursued in relation to the Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Kingdom of Hawaii. This policy of education created the possibility of Indian territorial dispossession and Indian Assimilation. In this recognition of policy from, “the beginning, Federal policy toward the Indian was based on the desire to dispossess him of his land. Education policy was function of our land policy.” As far back as 1803, President Thomas Jefferson explained that a strategy of assimilation would be less costly in lives and funding in order to remove Indian Tribes from their tribal territories. The groundwork of American Indian education was created by, “the Civilization Fund Act in 1819…the purpose of the Act was ‘providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes, adjoining the frontier settlements of the United States, and for introducing among them the habits and art of civilization.’ Congress funded these first schools and required annual reports in order to account for the federal funding.

One major aspect of Indian Boarding school education for some Indian parents was the forceful removal of their children. In 1871, the government created regulations to “secure the enrollment and regular attendance of eligible Indian children who are wards of the Government in schools maintained for their benefit by the United States or in public schools.” In some cases, parents were given the choice between sending their children to federally run boarding

schools, or the abolition of ration systems, while children were removed without the consent of their parents. The removal of Indian children from their homes was under the responsibility of Indian Police, with forcible removal of children to Federal Indian boarding schools. U.S. Indian Agents Fletcher J. Cowart describes the efforts of Indian police:

I found the attendance at the boarding school about half of what it should be, and at once set about increasing it to the full capacity of the accommodation. This I found extremely difficult. When called upon for children, the chiefs, almost without exception, declared there were none suitable for school in their camps. Everything in the way of persuasion and argument having failed, it became necessary to visit the camps unexpectedly with the detachment of Indian police, and seize such children as were proper and take them away to school willing or unwilling. Some hurried their children off the mountains or hid them away in camp, and the Indian police had to chase and capture them like so many wild rabbits.  

The War Department continued to support the Department of the Interior in order to further the Federal Indian Boarding school system. In compelling parents to send their children, the War Department used their personnel to forcibly remove children from their families in order to fill Federal Boarding Schools with Indian children.

To the United States Government, the Federal Indian boarding school system was considered fundamental to the Indian assimilation policy. This quote comes from the Annual report for the Commissioner of Indian Affairs of 1910:

The essential feature of the Government’s great educational program for the Indians is the abolition of the old tribal relations and the treatment of every Indian as an individual. The basis of this individualization is the breaking up of tribal lands into allotments to the individuals of the tribe. This step is fundamental to the present Indian policy of the Government. Until their lands are allotted, the Government is merely marking time in dealing with any groups of Indians.

The practice of assimilation through education was the deliberate separation of the tribal family unit. This report describes the experience at schools as artificial communities, which created

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extended families that would communicate solely with the English language. Schools such as the “Haskell Institute, Kansas, instituted a ‘stricter form of discipline that heretofore prevailed… the Institute intentionally mixed Indian Children from 31 different Indian Tribes to disrupt tribal relations and discourage or prevent Indian language.” 91 This separation of families and disruption of family ties produced intergenerational trauma.

Similar to the experience of Canadian Residential schools, which were predominantly controlled by the Catholic Church, Federal Indian boarding schools worked in conjunction with religious denominations such as, “the American Missionary Association of the Congregational Church, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, and the Protestant Episcopal Church.” 92 This was considered, “an unprecedented delegation of power by the Federal Government to church bodies,” because religious denominations, “were given the right to nominate new agents, and direct educational and other activities on the reservations.” 93 Missionary groups were given the funds in order to support Federal Boarding schools. In conjunction with religious institutions, missionary work and Federal Indian Boarding schools created institutions for assimilation.

Conditions at most Federal Boarding Schools were inspired by military traditions, as well as vocational training. The United States, “applied systemic militarized and identity-alteration methodologies in the Federal Indian boarding school system to assimilate American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Children through education.” 94 Students at Federal Indian

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Boarding schools spent each hour of their day through a rigid system of schedules. This schedule helped to enhance the “systematic identity-alteration methodologies employed… [including] renaming Indian children from Indian names to different English names; cutting the hair of Indian Children; requiring the use of military or other standard uniforms as clothes; and discouraging or forbidding the following in order to compel them to adopt western practices and Christianity: (1) using Indian languages, (2) conducting cultural practices, and (3) exercising their religions.”

As a regimented military schedule was the predominant practice at Federal Boarding schools, rules were enforced through corporal punishment. This enforcing of rules was often done for the school as a whole, in order to show the school that rule breaking was wrong. Often times offenders were submitted to a jury of other students to determine punishment, “trying boys guilty of any serious offense by a court-martial, using the older and more intelligent as a court…charges are preferred against the prisoner; the court examines witnesses, hears the defense, fixes the degree of guilt, and recommends a punishment.” Although this was thought to be an effective form of control over students, the actual outcome resulted in, “strict discipline that not only failed to accomplish its purpose of moral training but in many cases contributed to an attitude of conflict with authority of any sort.” This militaristic aspect of Federal boarding schools often led to runaway children.

The experience of students at Federal Boarding schools were, “unequivocally… grossly inadequate.” Abuse such as physical, sexual, and emotional, along with disease, overcrowding

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and a lack of medical care for students is heavily documented. Insufficient housing led to boarding schools such as, “White Earth Boarding School, Minnesota: ‘one bed to two pupils.’ Kickapoo Boarding School, Kansas: ‘three children to each bed.’ Rainy Mountain Boarding School, Oklahoma: ‘single beds pushed so closely together to preclude passage between them, and each bed has two or more occupants.’” As well as inadequate boarding, students were not given access to adequate toilet facilities as well as an adequate supply of toiletries. Diets high in sugar and starch also contributed to the declining health of many students. Many Federal Boarding schools were housed within former military barracks, which were built before modern advances in normal conveniences.

The discovery of marked and unmarked burial sites is central to the investigation of the Federal Boarding school system. This aspect of the investigation is still ongoing due to the limitations of research that included, “inconsistent Federal reporting of child deaths, including the number and cause or circumstances of death, and burial sites and certain potentially relevant records are in the control of other Federal agencies and, or non-Federal entities.” The number of marked and unmarked burial sites are expected to rise as the investigation continues with approximate number of sites currently at 53.

The legacy of the Federal Indian Boarding school system is still being understood, but this analysis will provide guidance for, “Future Federal Indian law and policy change in health care, education, and economic development.” At their foundations, Federal Indian Boarding schools separated children from family, with further investigation revealing a correlation between attendance at boarding schools and an increased number of health conditions later in

The investigation for this report revealed that, “Indians who attended boarding schools have lower physical health status than those who did not...now-adult attendees were more likely to have cancer (more than three times), tuberculosis (more than twice), high cholesterol (95 percent), diabetes (81 percent), anemia (61 percent), arthritis (60 percent), and gall bladder disease (60 percent) than nonattendees.” Along with these health conditions increased PTSD, depression, and unresolved grief are higher risks for those who attended Federal Boarding schools.

The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative is the first step in the Department of the Interior’s investigation into the system of schools developed to assimilate American Indian children. This investigation is the first step in the admittance of fault in the intergenerational trauma that took place at Federal boarding schools. This trauma was rooted in practices of assimilation rooted in militaristic tradition to instill ideas of authority as well as American ideals of assimilation. The practices of assimilation such as exclusively speaking English, vocational training, the practicing of Christianity, cutting of hair, and changing of names, were fundamental to the cultural assimilation of American Indian children and in turn future generations of American Indians. These practices of assimilation were used in order to dispossess native peoples of their land. Through this investigation, the development of opportunities for the revitalization of American Indian culture can allow for healing for those who were impacted by Federal Indian Boarding Schools.

This thesis has argued that even the very first students at Carlisle experienced the dispossession of no longer being fully Indian and being incapable of becoming fully white.

These children and young people navigated a set of impossible circumstances, forced to be placed between to separate ideas of civilization. On the one hand, they faced the annihilation of their peoples and cultures on reservations. On the other hand, as the 2022 report makes clear, they faced the elimination of their very identities and disintegration of their families while at boarding schools. It is remarkable that so many found a path through these difficulties to continue to help their people and cultures survive.
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