

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Indian Boarding Schools, Part 2**

### **Carlisle Indian Industrial School.**

In 1879, a former Indian fighter, Colonel Richard Pratt helped push a bill through Congress that transferred the old cavalry barracks at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior. Later that year, the barracks housed an experimental school based upon Pratt's belief that Indians were capable of shedding "savagery" and becoming productive citizens if they received opportunities equal to those of white Americans. Pratt immediately set out to make such opportunities available. Indeed, during its first year of operation, Pratt's school enrolled over 200 Indian students from about a dozen tribes. By the time it closed its doors 39 years later in 1918, over 12,000 Indian children had attended Carlisle.



A significant number of Pratt's first Carlisle students were recruited directly from the Sioux nations - specifically from the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations. The Secretary of the Interior made it clear to Pratt that the Sioux children would be held "hostages for the good behavior of their people." (Pratt, 1964:220.) At first Pratt had very little luck with Spotted Tail, leader of the Rosebud reservation, who responded that "The white people are all thieves and liars. We do not want our children to learn such things." (Pratt, 1964:222.) Pratt persuaded him to change his mind by arguing:

"Cannot you see it is far, far better for you to have your children educated and trained as our children are so that they can speak the English language, write letters, and do the things which bring to the white man such prosperity, and each of them be

able to stand for their rights as the white man stands for his? Cannot you see that they will be of great value to you if after a few years they come back from school with the ability to read and write letters for you, interpret for you, and help look after your business affairs in Washington? I am your friend, Spotted Tail...You may want something done in Washington and I might be able to help you. You want to write me about it, but you must get this interpreter or the missionary to write your letter. When I get the letter I shall know it was written by someone else and will not feel sure that it tells me exactly what you meant it to tell me...Then this or some other interpreter has to tell you what I say. You cannot be entirely sure he tells you exactly what I say. Cannot you see, Spotted Tail, what a disadvantage you and your people are under?...The Secretary of the Interior told me to come to you first, that he wanted you and Red Cloud to have the first chance to send children to this new school...As your friend, Spotted Tail, I urge you to send your children with me to this Carlisle school and I will do everything I can to advance them in intelligence and industry in order that they may come back and help you." (Pratt, 1964:223-34.)

### ***Discussion/Writing:***

- *Colonel Pratt was a military man and a former Indian fighter. How and why do you think these characteristics made him qualified to create the first Indian boarding school?*

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- *In your opinion, was Pratt's argument persuasive? Why or why not? Why do you think Spotted Tail was persuaded to change his mind?*

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Pratt, however, was not being honest with Spotted Tail. The Rosebud reservation had not been targeted as an honor, but because it had been especially troublesome for the federal government. As the Secretary had told Pratt, if the Sioux continued to be a "problem," their children enrolled at Carlisle would be held hostage by the federal government. Further, if we examine what children encountered at Carlisle, it becomes clear that Pratt had no intention of helping Indians "stand for their rights" or helping them learn how to "look after your business affairs." Rather, it was believed that once they became civilized at Carlisle, Indian children would lose interest in Indian "rights" and "business affairs" and instead happily assimilate into American society.

The children lived in dormitories and attended classes daily. School was structured with academic subjects for half the day - usually reading, writing and arithmetic - and industrial trades the other half - blacksmithing, carpentry, and tinsmithing for the boys, and cooking, sewing, laundry, and other domestic arts for the girls. Pratt envisioned that with at least three years of schooling, his students would have the equivalent of an eighth grade education and then would be prepared to either work in the white man's world, or to go on for further education in white public schools.



School life was patterned after military life. The boys wore uniforms and girls wore foreign dresses. Boys were organized via ranks into companies with officers who took charge of regular drill practice. The children marched to and from their classes and to the dining hall for each meal. Military-style discipline was strictly enforced and a hierarchical style of military justice was established. Students determined the consequences for offenses, the most serious being confinement to the guardhouse for several weeks. The most common offenses were running away and using forbidden native languages or practices.

Pratt's "Outing System" of free labor became one of the most celebrated practices of the non-reservation boarding schools. Indian children who attended Carlisle spent their summer hired out to non-Indian families where they would live with white people as their servants. This was also a source of low or no-cost labor for local farmers, businessmen, and craftsmen. Through this system, as well as through their training at Carlisle, Pratt hoped that his students would adopt the Anglo work ethic, desire to live more like their white neighbors, and ultimately, find a job in the larger Euro-American society.

**Discussion/Writing:**

- You have seen several photographs taken of children in Indian boarding schools. But there are many things that photographs of the boarding schools do not tell us. For instance: Who was taking the pictures and for what reason(s)? How does the photographer's agenda affect what we can learn about the schools? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Student Experiences.** At least two types of first-hand accounts have been used to document the student experiences of attending Indian boarding schools: those published in boarding school newspapers and yearbooks and heavily edited by

school personnel and which tended to be favorable to the experience; and those written after the boarding school experience by former students, which tended to be quite critical of the experience.

In these writings, we see the tremendous difficulties all the students faced when they were taken from their parents, often under military escort, and transported to a school where everything was foreign. As Helen Sekaquaptewa, a Hopi Indian, recalled:

"It was after dark when we reached the Keams Canyon boarding school and were unloaded and taken into the big dormitory, lighted with electricity. I had never seen so much light at night...Evenings we would gather in a corner and cry softly so the matron would not hear and scold or spank us...I can still hear the plaintive little voices saying, 'I want to go home. I want my mother.'" We didn't understand a word of English and didn't know what to say or do...We were a group of homesick, lonesome, little girls..." (Sekaquaptewa, 1969:92-93, 96.)

These experiences continued during the first several days in boarding schools. One of the most poignant of these experiences is written by Zitkala-Sa, a Dakota Sioux whose picture is shown below. **Zitkala Sa** recorded the following about her experience in boarding school:



"The first day...was a bitter cold one... Late in the morning, my friend Judewin gave me a terrible warning. Judewin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!...I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was singled like a coward's! In my anguish, I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder." (Zitkala-Sa.)

Sun Elk, from the pueblo of Taos, recorded this experience at Carlisle:

"They told us that Indian ways were bad. They said we must get civilized. I remember that word too. It means "be like the white man." I am willing to be like the white man, but I did not believe Indian ways were wrong. But they kept teaching us for seven years. And the books told how bad the Indians had been to the white men - burning their towns and killing their women and children. But I had seen white men do that to Indians. We all wore white man's clothes and ate white man's food and went to white man's churches and spoke white man's talk. And so after a while we also began to say Indians were bad. We laughed at our own people and their blankets and cooking pots and sacred societies and dances." (As quoted in Nabokov, 1991:222.)

Lone Wolf, a Blackfoot Indian, shared a story of loneliness and fear:

"If we thought that the days were bad, the nights were much worse. This was the time when real loneliness set in, for it was then we knew that we were all alone. Many ran away from the school because the treatment was so bad but most of them were caught and brought back by the police. We were told never to talk Indian and if we were caught, we got a strapping with a leather belt. I remember one evening when we were all lined up in a room and one of the boys said something in Indian to another boy. The man in charge of us pounced on the boy, caught him by the shirt, and threw him across the room. Later we found out that his collar-bone was broken. The boy's father, an old warrior, came to the school. He told the instructor that among his people, children were never punished by striking them. That was no way to teach children; kind words and good examples were much better. Then he added, 'Had I been there when that fellow hit my son, I would have killed him.' Before the instructor could stop the old warrior he took his boy and left". (As quoted in Nabokov, 1991:220.)

Others recalled the indignities of punishment:

"I remember my brother, my younger brother - he would get into fights. He would never have any hair and his head would always be shaved and I was always wondering why his head was always shaved and he said because he got into a fight! In all the four years that he was there, he never had any hair, they shaved his head all the time! Then, a couple of times, he

got handcuffed to hot water pipes downstairs in the basement of his dorm and they fed him cheese sandwiches all the time he was handcuffed." (Darlene Wall, former student at Carlisle; oral Interview with Jennifer Ferguson, Feb. 1997)

But the consequences of boarding school became even more severe for many Indians when they returned to their reservations. As Robert Utley notes, the students who left Carlisle found that "they either existed in a shadow world neither Indian nor white, with acceptance denied by both worlds, or they cast off the veneer of Carlisle and again became Indians." (Utley, 1987:xvi.) Those who maintained their white-oriented values usually alienated their family and friends. Tribal elders and parents often pressured the returning children to resume their old ways. Sun Elk, who attended Carlisle for seven years, faced a similar experience when he returned home.

"It was a warm summer evening when I got off the train at Taos station. The first Indian I met, I asked him to run out to the pueblo and tell my family I was home. The Indian couldn't speak English, and I had forgotten all my Pueblo language. But after a while he learned what I meant and started running to tell my father, 'Tulto is back...' We chattered and cried, and I began to remember many Indian words...I went home with my family. And next morning the governor of the pueblo and the two war chiefs and many of the priest chiefs came into my father's house. They did not talk to me; they did not even look at me. When they were all assembled they talked to my father. The chiefs said to my father, 'Your son who calls himself Rafael has lived with the white man. He has been far away from the pueblo. He had not lived in the kiva nor learned the things that Indian boys should learn. He has no hair. He has not blankets. He cannot even speak our language and he has a strange smell. He is not one of us.' The chiefs got up and walked out...And I walked out of my father's house and out of the pueblo...I walked until I came to the white man's town. I found work setting type in a printing shop. Later I went to Durango and other towns in Wyoming and Colorado, printing and making a good living...All this time I was a white man. I wore white man's clothes and kept my hair cut. I was not very happy. I made money and I kept a little of it and after many years I came back to Taos. My father gave me some land from the pueblo fields...I built a house just outside the pueblo...My father brought me a girl to marry...When we were married, I became an Indian again. I let my hair grow, I put on blankets, and I cut the seat out of my pants." (In Nabokov, 1991:223-224.)

Some Indian students have shared ambivalent feelings about their boarding school experiences. Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota Sioux who attended the first class at Carlisle, was able to adjust to white society for five years before returning to his reservation. However, he also found that many of his people were not so fortunate.

"I was now 'civilized' enough to go to work in John Wanamaker's fine store in Philadelphia...Outwardly, I lived the life of the white man, yet all the while I kept in direct contact with tribal life. While I had learned all that I could of the white man's culture, I never forgot that of my people. I kept the language, tribal manners and usages, sang the songs and danced the dances. I still listened to and respected the advice of the older people of the tribe. I did not become so 'progressive' that I could not speak the language of my father and mother...But I soon began to see a sad sight, so common today, of returned students who could not speak their native tongue, or, worse yet, some who pretended they could no longer converse in the mother tongue. They had become ashamed and this led them into deception and trickery... (Standing Bear, 1933.)

Some boarding school graduates, like Luther Standing Bear, were successful as they were able to combine the best of both Western and traditional education systems in a way that allowed them to adapt to both worlds. Anna Moore Shaw, a Pima who was the first Indian woman to graduate from high school in Arizona, wrote that her generation was "the first to be educated in two cultures, the Pima and white. Sometimes the values were in conflict, but we were learning to put them together to make a way of life different from anything the early Pimas ever dreamed of." (As quoted in Bataille and Sands, 1984:84.)

Indeed, recent scholarship based upon oral interviews and primary documents from Indian students and their parents indicate that in some non-reservation



boarding schools, students made the best of their limited educational choices and used the school to pursue their own educational and personal goals. Many other alumni returned to the reservations - and sometimes the boarding schools - to become teachers; some went on to become articulate champions of Indian rights; others pursued advanced degrees and became scholars (Francis LaFleshe), physicians (Susan LaFlesche and Charles Eastman), and journalists (Zitkala Sa); others became well-known athletes (Jim Thorpe and Louis Sockalexis).

**Discussion/Writing:**

- *Do you think boarding schools were a good solution to the "Indian Problem" in America? Why or why not?*  
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- *Why do you think forced assimilation through boarding schools failed? Is it likely that any person's cultural background can be totally erased?*  
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- *Although some Indians who attended boarding schools felt they were a "success," whose success did they actually feel - their success or success as defined by Euro-American policy makers?*  
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- *What do you think Zitkala Sa meant when she wrote that when she left boarding school, she was "neither a wild Indian, nor a tame one" in her article, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood." Do you think this was typical or atypical of most students? How and why?*  
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- *What do you think have been the long-term consequences of Indian boarding schools on the lives of American Indians in the 20th and 21st centuries?*  
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In the past several decades, a great deal of debate has arisen about whether or not the boarding schools as a carefully-created Federal Indian Policy could be classified as genocidal. According to the United Nations, **genocide** involves actions committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, or economic group. Such actions against a group include:

- killing its members;
- causing serious bodily or mental harm to members;
- deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the groups' physical destruction in whole or in part;
- imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
- forcibly transferring its children to another group.

The United Nations defines cultural genocide as an official government sanction of removal and/or repression of a particular group that subsequently eliminates and/or weakens parts of that group.

**Discussion:**

- *What role does the word "intent" have in the definition?*  
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Ryan Verville, "Indian Boarding School, Pt. 2" (Handout received in American History with Mr. Robertson, Phoenix, AZ, Jan. 3, 2017).