

# "Americanizing" Amercian Indian Girls through the Off-Reservation Boarding School System

*Crystal Colleen Miles*

I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and I heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit...In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me...for now I was only one of the little animals driven by a herder. -Zitkala-Sa<sup>1</sup>

American Indian children suffered drastic consequences at the hands of the American government-run boarding school system beginning at the turn of the twentieth century. The first of these schools was the Carlisle Industrial School in Carlisle Pennsylvania, established by Richard Henry Pratt. The motto of Pratt, and the motivation for many of the schools was "Kill the Indian, save the man." The common ideology behind this reform was to completely rid American Indian children of their so-called "Indian-ness."<sup>2</sup> The obliteration of tribal identity started when children entered the doors of the reform institutions. Immediately they were stripped of their tribal clothing, tokens that represented their respective tribal identity, had their hair cut, and were forbidden to speak their native language under threat of punishment.<sup>3</sup> Children entered these schools through different processes depending on place and time. In some cases, it was through coercion by school and government officials, or through force by military personnel and Indian Agents who oversaw the American Indian reservations.<sup>4</sup> At times, parents and the children themselves believed that an American education would be beneficial to their future.<sup>5</sup> Once they arrived, however, the experience changed their lives in ways they had not anticipated. In the off-reservation boarding school system, there was unrelenting pressure to 'Americanize' students with corresponding gender norms, Christian religious beliefs, as well as 'civilized' ways to dress, speak, eat, and work. Girls' experiences were specific to the gendered model of Victorian womanhood. They

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<sup>1</sup> Zitkala-Sa, "The School Days of an Indian Girl," *Atlantic Monthly* 85, no. 508 (1900): 186.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites (1892)," In *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian" 1880 - 1900*, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 261-263.

<sup>3</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 185.

<sup>5</sup> Polingaysi Qoyawayma, *No Turning Back: A Hopi Woman's Struggle to Live in Two Worlds* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964), 49.

were taught to be submissive and "moral," according to the white Christian ideal, and to find their place in the assigned sphere of domesticity.<sup>6</sup>

Often the process of Americanization failed to attain a great degree of success. Many children created strong bonds with one another, despite different tribal affiliations, and at times strengthened their identity with their respective American Indian tribal culture.<sup>7</sup> Girls found small ways to resist, ranging from sharing Indian stories with each other, speaking their forbidden tribal languages, and creating secret names for teachers they did not like. Also, when they had to prepare meals with types of food they did not care for and serve them to students and faculty, they would find a way to ruin them. If caught, the girls would usually be punished. The feelings of joy in their resistance to the forced reforms implemented by school officials made them proudly willing to accept their punishment.<sup>8</sup>

Although some children did take on aspects of white culture, usually religion, they did not abandon their tribal identity. In some instances when American Indian children became adults, they returned to the reservation to live with their family or married a man who was part of their tribe instead of assimilating into white culture. In no case did the goal of "[Killing] the Indian, and [saving] the man" achieve great success. In *Boarding School Seasons*, Brenda Child talks about her grandmother becoming friends with girls from other tribes at boarding school and even picking up other tribal languages. Child said, "This peculiarly pan-Indian quality of the boarding schools is not what assimilationists, who were committed to the repression of tribal languages and culture, had in mind when they founded the institutions."<sup>9</sup> American Indian children did not seem to lose who they were, as was the goal, and often they crossed tribal lines. However the most common outcome when they left school was a feeling of being caught in-between two worlds, that of the native peoples and the white man's.<sup>10</sup>

I have chosen to focus on autobiographies of six American Indian women who experienced the off-reservation boarding school system from the 1890s through the 1930s, as policy changed little in this period. Zitkala-Sa, Helen Sekaquaptewa, Polingaysi Quoyawayma, Anna Moore Shaw, Irene Stewart, and Angel DeCora were from different tribes, attended different schools, and accomplished different things in their lives. While most of these women shared similar experiences in school, there were also differences in how they felt overall. I have started with the ideology and implementation of the off-reservation boarding school systems with speeches, letters, and written works of those who worked in the system, including Richard Henry Pratt who created the

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Anna Moore Shaw, *A Pima Past* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1974), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 13, 78-79.

<sup>7</sup> K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *The Story of Chilocco Indian School: They Called it Prairie Light* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 187-179.

<sup>9</sup> Child, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Quoyawayma, 65-66.

blueprint for subsequent boarding schools.<sup>11</sup> It is crucial to the understanding of the off-reservation boarding school system to know the intentions of the government and school officials, while at the same time looking at the personal experiences of students who attended these boarding schools.

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There are several ways to approach the history of Native American education in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. In her book, *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School*, American Indian historian and writer K. Tsianina Lomawaima used personal stories of students from American Indian boarding schools. Rather than the general experience or differences in experience over space and time, Lomawaima focused exclusively on the government-run, off-reservation boarding school, Chilocco Indian School, from 1920 to 1940.<sup>12</sup> In referring to interviews with past students, Lomawaima created a history of American Indian education in the Chilocco School. She argued that the school was part of a crusade to transform young American Indian people by using military organization and violence, and, as a result, to strip away all tribal identity from the students. In contrast, she also argued that something unexpected happened: students resisted, formed pan-tribal friendships, and created their own school culture.<sup>13</sup> Lomawaima focused on oral history interviews for the majority of her primary sources. She did, however, use other data, such as Chilocco Indian School records, Bureau of Indian Affairs records, correspondence between commissioners and other educational officials, attendance records, statements of children written by teachers, journals, and yearbooks. Lomawaima was particularly fascinated by how the students responded to efforts degrading their culture. She thus documents a story, not only of what happened to them, but also how students created life for themselves.<sup>14</sup>

In *Boarding School Seasons*, Brenda Child argued that in order to get an idea of what the experience was really like at off-reservation boarding schools, there needs to be attention given to the letters written by the students themselves. She stated that such letters paint a vivid story of American Indians being forced towards assimilation, and in the process losing some control over certain aspects of their lives.<sup>15</sup> She utilized stories and accounts of homesickness, illness and death, vocational education, and resistance to show that many children endured traumatic upheavals of their former way of life. Child argued that student experiences clashed with reform plans of the government's educational bureaucracy, a bureaucracy to which the students and their families were sometimes forced to submit and other times resisted

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<sup>11</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 55-59.

<sup>12</sup> Lomawaima, xv.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Child, xii-xiii.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Child, xii-xiii.

against.<sup>16</sup> Child used original letters from students and their families, as well as photographs, correspondence between school officials, Bureau of Indian Affairs documents, health records, journals, and newspapers. Like Lomawaima, Child focused on the personal experience of the youth as told through their voices rather than the through the lens of educational policymakers.

In *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, Ward Churchill explored the dark side of government-run, off-reservation boarding schools. He focused on the hardships that children endured, such as being immediately stripped of all physical tribal identity.<sup>17</sup> He argued that Indian schools were used to fully assimilate American Indians into white culture, and he believed that this was achieved through vocational training that failed to educate in any real academic sense. Churchill further argued that young American Indian girls were trained to be maids and household servants, as well as being used to produce goods that kept the school running. This, in turn, would create a new low-wage labor source without adequate education to compete in a domestic employment market. One of Churchill's most radical ideas was that the boarding school system produced a form of genocide, or cultural genocide at the very least.<sup>18</sup> In order to support his claim, Churchill used papers of school officials, U.S. government records, Bureau of Indian Affairs records, and official reports on the school system, such as the *Meriam Report*, a yearly investigation report on conditions of American Indians across the United States. He also utilized official reports on the Holocaust to show a connection between genocide of Jews by German Nazis and cultural genocide of American Indians by the United States government. Churchill did not focus as much on personal statements and stories as did Child and Lomawaima.

In all three of these academic works, I have found major points that I agree with as well as arguments that could be improved or elaborated upon. I agree with both Brenda Child and K. Tsianina Lomawaima that the voices of the students represent the most crucial element to the history of American Indian children involved in the boarding school phenomenon. Many students resisted the U.S. educational policy while continuing to embrace their tribal identities throughout the duration of their lives. Although the ideologies and words of policymakers are crucial to the full understanding of the history, historians can miss a big piece of the American Indian history by not including the students' voices. Child and Lomawaima focused on specific places and times as schools varied even though they were built along the same principles and ideals. It would be very difficult to know the overall experience, with all its complexities, by looking only at a couple of schools. Like Child and Lomawaima, I have tried to use mostly primary sources written by students and their families so that I too can gather and relay information based on the reality of the students. I focused on longer autobiographical works to acquire a full scope of the native women's lives, and used stories from different tribes and schools in order to show

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<sup>16</sup> Child, xv.

<sup>17</sup> Churchill, 45-59.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

contrasts in experience. Though diverse in nature, the students' experiences resembled one another.

Ward Churchill wrote about the brutality that occurred at some boarding schools. While useful, I also find that such accounts detract somewhat from the voice of the student. Even though it is relevant to use official records to set up context, it is even more important to see that the process of 'Americanization' and forced acculturation did not break American Indians, across many tribal nations, as a people in spirit or identity. Churchill compared his studies to the Holocaust to support his argument that the education American Indians received in order to assimilate them into Anglo-American society resembled genocide. He described the process as follows: "the deliberate destruction of cultures kills individuals just as surely as do guns and poison gas...[and] there is thus no way in which cultural genocide may be reasonably set apart from physical and biological genocide..."<sup>19</sup> I agree that there was an *attempt* to extinguish the American Indian people as a whole, at the very least just their respective cultures. I do not, however, believe that such an endeavor had great success. Although American Indian children placed in the boarding school system at the turn of the twentieth century were physically stripped of their tribal identity, forced into a military-style regimentation, and spent much of their academic life being trained for menial labor, they overcame these obstacles by creating strong bonds with each other, as well as strong ties to their heritage. Surely there have been problems generated by the 'reform' of American Indians, problems that native people are still being affected by today. I believe, however, that the educational system as it was meant to be, failed.

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On November 1, 1879, Carlisle Industrial School opened in Carlisle Pennsylvania, a school that was to be the model for the government-run, off-reservation boarding school system in the United States.<sup>20</sup> The founder of the Carlisle school was military officer Richard Henry Pratt. Pratt's famous motto was to "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." In this, he expressed his vision to rid the American Indian people of everything 'Indian' about them.<sup>21</sup> Pratt, along with other government officials, believed that using education to assimilate American Indians into white society was the only *moral* way to execute this vision and convert them from 'savages' into civilized Americans.<sup>22</sup> Thomas J. Morgan, appointed as the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1889, believed that education was the most "humane" way of "civilizing" American Indian people.<sup>23</sup> According to other policymakers, alternative options included

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, 48-5.

<sup>21</sup> Pratt, 261.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas J. Morgan, "Compulsory Education. (1892)," In *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian" 1880 - 1900*, ed. Francis Paul Prucha, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 252-253.

<sup>23</sup> Morgan, 252.

either killing all American Indians, which would be "immoral", or feeding them, which would be expensive.<sup>24</sup> Morgan thought that, unless native people could be educated for their "duties" and for the "enjoyment of their privileges as citizens," they would not benefit from what the United States was demanding of them (i.e. full assimilation in, and compatibility with, white society).<sup>25</sup> Morgan expressed in a report that if children were not forced into boarding schools, there would continue to be new generations of "savages." Furthermore, Morgan believed that the U.S. government owed it to the children of future generations to be born to "educated" parents.<sup>26</sup> Morgan felt as though the government was doing the American Indian people a favor by taking children away from their families and forcing them into an Anglo-Christian education system in the hopes of completely disintegrating their native cultures. This intention would, however, never come to fruition.

One important goal of the off-reservation boarding schools was to educate children far away from their homes so that their tribal communities and families would no longer influence them. In some cases, children went years without seeing their parents, as was the case for student Anna Moore Shaw, who only saw her parents once in ten years.<sup>27</sup> A school superintendent told Helen Sekaquaptewa that if he had his way, students would never see their homes again.<sup>28</sup> This tactic of alienating children was reflected in an article on the Carlisle school written by Richard Henry Pratt. He wrote that, in order, "to get the best results in our educational work among Indian children, as many as possible should be removed from reservation and tribal influences and placed in the atmosphere of civilized life."<sup>29</sup> There was also a belief that American Indians could not take care of themselves, especially not in a white man's world. Pratt commented accordingly. "Not only may we fit the Indian to take of himself in his own home, but may fit him to go and come and abide in the land wherever he may choose, and so loose his identity."<sup>30</sup> Here, Pratt explicitly states that the goal for the education of American Indians was to remove their identity, and to teach them how to take care of themselves. These principles were the basis for the government-run boarding school system for American Indians from the 1870s through the 1930s.

American Indian children arrived at these schools in different ways. For some, it required physical force and school officials were instructed to use it when needed. Helen Sekaquaptewa, a Hopi woman from the Oraibi village in Arizona, described the night she was taken away to a boarding school in Keams Canyon in her autobiography *Me and Mine*. She remembered it as a kidnapping. In October of 1906, her village was surrounded by federal troops who told her

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Moore Shaw, *A Pima Past* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1974), x.

<sup>28</sup> Louise Udall, *Me and Mine: The Life Story of Helen Sekaquaptewa as told to Louise Udall* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1969), 122.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, "Origin and History of Work at Carlisle," *The American Missionary* 37, no. 4 (April 1883): 109.

<sup>30</sup> Pratt, 111.

people that the government had lost its patience. The chief of Sekaquaptewa's tribe, Yokeoma, refused to let the troops in and, as a result, was attacked and imprisoned. All eighty-two children in her tribe were lined up and loaded into wagons, which traveled under military escort to Keams Canyon.<sup>31</sup> Irene Stewart, a Navajo woman from Canyon de Chelly in Arizona, had two different experiences. Her first experience of going away to school was at Fort Defiance boarding school, about a day's journey from Canyon de Chelly. Her grandmother had been caring for her and one afternoon while she had been left alone, a Navajo policeman, who had been instructed to take her to the school, kidnapped her. By the time she was to graduate the sixth grade at Fort Defiance, Stewart had been persuaded by school authorities to finish her schooling at an off-reservation secondary school. She agreed to go to the Phoenix Indian School, as it was not too far from her home, but because it was at full capacity, her only option was the Haskell Institute, which was located in Lawrence, Kansas. Although she went willingly, she did not feel like there was any other choice due to the pressure from the school authorities and her father, who wanted her to finish her education.<sup>32</sup>

Deception played a big role in how Indian children ended up at off-reservation schools. Zitkala-Sa, a woman from the Sioux tribe in South Dakota, wrote about her experience going to White's Manual Labor Institute in Indiana in 1884. She and eight other children were very excited to go East to the "Red Apple Country," which they were told lay a little beyond the prairie. She admitted that she had daydreamed about this region being a place where they could roam as freely and happily as they did at home, but under a "sky of rosy apples."<sup>33</sup> After a journey of several days, however, she arrived and her daydream was crushed by the lonely reality of being among total strangers in unfamiliar surroundings, away from her family and tribe.<sup>34</sup>

Angel DeCora, a woman from the Winnebago tribe, in what is now Thurston, Nebraska, was tricked into going to the Hampton Institute, where she would attend boarding school. A white man had come to a day school she had been attending on her reservation and, using an interpreter, he asked six of the children if they would like to take a ride on a train. The train ride lasted three days and ended in Haskell, Virginia. The six children had been coerced into taking a train ride, essentially being kidnapped, and were taken to a boarding school without their parents' knowledge. DeCora did not see her mother for three years, and when she finally did, her father had already died.<sup>35</sup> Many girls that went through the boarding school system were robbed of precious time with their families, and in DeCora's case, she did not have the opportunity to spend time with her father before he passed away.

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<sup>31</sup> Udall, 91-92, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Irene Stewart, *A Voice in Her Tribe: A Navajo Woman's Own Story* (New Mexico: Ballena Press, 1980), 15-27

<sup>33</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 185.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> Henook-Makhewe-Kelenaka, *Angel DeCora: An Autobiography* (University of Virginia Library, 1997): 280.



At times, children and their parents were excited about the prospect of receiving an education at an off-reservation boarding school. Yet, there still remained a degree of coercion by government agency workers, which caused this excitement. There were children who were formally enrolled by their parents and others who ran away to school. A man named Brave Bull wrote his daughter, who attended the Haskell Institute, that he was doing his best to become like a white man, and that she should learn as much as she possibly could in school.<sup>36</sup> Anna Moore Shaw, a Pima woman from the Gila Indian reservation in Arizona, remembered her father giving her a silver dollar when she left for the Phoenix Indian School in 1908. Both Shaw and her father felt good about her going away to school and receiving an Anglo-American education. Her father had converted to Christianity when Shaw was a baby, and before going to Phoenix she had already attended an off-reservation missionary school. Going to the Phoenix school did not seem out of the ordinary to a family acquainted with Christianity and an American-style education; it would, however, be a difficult transition to be so far away from home.<sup>37</sup> In 1906, Polingaysi Quoyawayma, a Hopi Indian woman from the village of Oraibi in Arizona, decided she was ready to leave her village. Growing up, she saw the white man as having "abundant supplies of food, good clothing, and opportunities to travel."<sup>38</sup> At fourteen years old, she decided that she wanted to share in "the good things of the white way of living."<sup>39</sup> She began daydreaming about joining the children who were preparing to leave for the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California. However, her mother refused to sign the necessary paperwork that would allow Quoyawayma to go away to school with the other children in her village. In defiance of her mother, she attempted to stow away in a wagon taking the other children to the train station from which they would go to California, but the white driver of the wagon found her. The driver told her that she would need the signed paper from her parents to allow her to leave. After pleading with her parents again, they finally gave in. As an adult, Quoyawayma remembered seeing her mother's tears as the wagon pulled away. She was losing her young daughter, maybe forever.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of how American Indian girls arrived at school, their initial experiences were remarkably similar. Helen Sekaquaptewa said, "For the next few days we were all curious about our new surroundings."<sup>41</sup> Some of the western amenities like electricity and running water created confusion among some girls arriving at school. Zitkala-Sa remembered how her body trembled upon arriving at school on a snowy night and seeing the lights inside the building flooding out over "the excited palefaces who blocked the way" of the

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<sup>36</sup> Brave Bull, "Letter to his daughter " printed in "Indian Education at Hampton and Carlisle," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 62, no. 371 (April 1881): 659.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw, 131-132.

<sup>38</sup> Quoyawayma, 49.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-52.

<sup>41</sup> Udall, 93.

entrance. She said it trembled "more from fear than the snow I trod upon."<sup>42</sup> Once inside the building, she had to stay close to the wall as the bright lights "dazzled" her eyes, and the sound of the hard shoes on the floor "whirled" in her ears. Her only safety at that moment was the wall.<sup>43</sup> Helen Sekaquaptewa recalled thinking it was daytime at night because electricity had lit up the buildings.<sup>44</sup> Upon Polingaysi Qoyawayma's arrival at the Sherman Institute, she was told to undress and get into the bathtub. She had never seen running water before, but what came to mind was the tale of the dangerous water serpent about which her mother had told her. Qoyawayma described her feeling at that moment as "terror, genuine terror."<sup>45</sup> Adding to the confusion was the fact that the children did not speak English, so they were unable to express their fear to school faculty.

After the new students arrived, they were stripped of physical tribal identity markers and were consequently given new American names.<sup>46</sup> In many cases, their hair was cut and their native clothing was taken away and replaced by uniforms. Zitkala-Sa tells a powerful story of the day her hair was cut. She said that in her tribe, only people in mourning wore short hair and cowards wore shingled hair. When she realized that her hair was to be cut, she hid, but eventually was found and tied to a chair. She said she felt "the cold blades of the scissors against [her] neck, and heard them gnaw off one of [her] thick braids...now [her] long hair was shingled like a coward's!" For her, this was only one of many indignities she would suffer at school.<sup>47</sup> Girls were issued school clothes, usually consisting of long-sleeved dresses with gathered waists and buttons all the way up the back, petticoats, stockings, aprons, a couple of pairs of underwear, and one pair of shoes.<sup>48</sup> The shoes were especially awkward because they were heavy and stiff, very different from the soft, leather moccasins that the girls were used to wearing.<sup>49</sup> The Native American names that faculty could not pronounce, memorize, or just thought sounded silly, were changed.<sup>50</sup> Many times, names of historical figures were given to the children, including presidents' names, which were the ultimate "American" symbols.<sup>51</sup> The changing of the children's birth names did not only take away part of who they were, but it also labeled them as something that the white school officials deemed appropriate for White-Anglo society.

A sense of loneliness and severe homesickness set in as a result of being in a strange place, with strange people, and having everything familiar stripped away, including names. Brenda Child called homesickness "the most

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<sup>42</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 185.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-186.

<sup>44</sup> Udall, 92-93.

<sup>45</sup> Qoyawayma, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Child, 28-30.

<sup>47</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 187.

<sup>48</sup> Udall, 93.

<sup>49</sup> Stewart, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, 108.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

common malady experienced by children in boarding school.”<sup>52</sup> All accounts I have read described scared young girls, who shed tears because they missed the comfort of their families and homes. Even those who went away to school voluntarily found that it was a challenging transition. Polingaysi Qoyawayma, a student who had originally wanted to run away to the Sherman Institute, felt “giddy with fear and nervousness” when experiencing all the new things, including crawling into a mattress bed for the first time. It was not until she had to go to bed that she realized she was in a room full of strangers, far away from everything she knew. She sobbed in bed every night for weeks.<sup>53</sup> It was also at bedtime when Helen Sekaquaptewa and the other girls in her dorm felt the most homesick. They gathered in a corner and cried softly so that the school matron would not hear them. Sekaquaptewa said in her autobiography, “I can still hear the little plaintive voices saying, ‘I want to go home. I want my mother.’” Not only were they feeling homesick, but since they had no knowledge of the English language, they had no one to talk to except each other.<sup>54</sup>

One way that the girls started forming bonds, both inter-tribal and pan-tribal, was through comforting each other during moments of homesickness. During Zitkala-Sa’s first night away at school, she pleaded to go home to her mother. None of the school employees responded but another girl offered to sleep in bed with her and spoke to her in her own language to soothe her.<sup>55</sup> Boarding schools soon became places where deep, emotional bonds formed, bonds like that of a family. Pan-Indian relationships were especially significant in the creation of these bonds as the plan of school policymakers was to destroy all things ‘Indian’, not strengthen ties between American Indian nations. This alone was a signature of policy failure. Anna Moore Shaw stated that there were girls not just from her own tribe at her school, but also from tribes in Oklahoma, the Dakotas, and California, and together they were, “one big happy family.”<sup>56</sup> Even more significant were the bonds that students formed between tribes that were traditional enemies, such as the Hopis and Navajos.<sup>57</sup> Stewart, who was Navajo, tells an anecdote about a Pima friend who cut her hair in a flapper style in the 1920s, showing that teenage girls bonded over typical juvenile experiences.<sup>58</sup> In these day-to-day experiences of soothing words and primping, the ‘Indian’ in the American Indians was not degenerating, but rather formed bonds between native girls.

Girls’ resistance towards their schoolteachers and curriculum was connected to their bonds to one another as well as their tribal identity. Groups of girls made up secret names in their own languages for teachers they disliked. For example, Shaw recalled a time when there was a school matron that they thought was “mean like a witch” because she frequently used her strap on them. As a

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<sup>52</sup> Child, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Qoyawayma, 58.

<sup>54</sup> Udall, 93.

<sup>55</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 186.

<sup>56</sup> Shaw, 135.

<sup>57</sup> Qoyawayma, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Stewart, 30.

result, they gave her the nickname "Ho'ok." When they heard her coming, the girls would alert each other with "Ho'ok! Ho'ok!" and dive under their covers pretending to be asleep.<sup>59</sup> The "Bloomer Story," which K. Tsianina Lomawaima included in her book, *They Called it Prairie Light*, was based on an interview with a Creek woman named Mariam. At the Chilocco Indian School in the early 1930s, girls had to wear thick, black bloomers under their dresses, which they did not feel were particularly attractive. Hence, when they went outside, especially to an event when they saw boys, there would be a bloomer check by the head matron. The girls started cutting their bloomers so they could just slip the bottom leg pieces on for the check and then throw them in the bushes until they picked them up again at night.<sup>60</sup> Lomawaima said that this story was a representation of the girls' solidarity against school authority.<sup>61</sup> There were also stories of resistance to authority by individual girls. Zitkala-Sa recalled a time when she was assigned to cooking duty in the school cafeteria. Her job was to mash turnips for dinner and she took out every ounce of frustration she had on those turnips. She said, "I bent in hot rage over the turnips. I worked my vengeance upon them." She beat the turnips right through the bottom of the glass jar, and when the teacher picked up the jar, all of the mashed turnips fell onto the floor. Zitkala-Sa described the joy she felt over her mishap, "As I sat eating my dinner, and saw that no turnips were served, I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me."<sup>62</sup> The small details of the girls' lives show their ability to resist the culture and regimentation that was forced upon them. Lomawaima said that these memories are "linked inextricably with their identity as Indians." As they now represent the experience of American Indian people historically, these stories continue to be shared within tribes. It was not just rebellion of children toward authority; it was also a rebellion of American Indian children against their oppressors.<sup>63</sup>

Many off-reservation boarding schools had a very strict schedule and teaching regiment that were often almost military in practice.<sup>64</sup> The Phoenix Indian School was an example of a military-like institution containing girls and boys battalions, which were then separated into different companies. Anna Moore Shaw was part of company "E" and recalled having to get up at five in the morning to participate in marching drills. She no longer had the freedom of her childhood that she had on the reservation.<sup>65</sup> Helen Sekaquaptewa, also a student at the Phoenix Indian School, recalled having to do everything at the sound of a bell, and on a strict schedule. There was also corporal punishment when faculty felt it was needed. The punishment was usually done by means of a strap in a private room, but sometimes students could also be forced to perform more tedious tasks, such as cutting the grass with scissors. If you were

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<sup>59</sup> Shaw, 134-135.

<sup>60</sup> Lomawaima, 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>62</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 189.

<sup>63</sup> Lomawaima, 98-99.

<sup>64</sup> Child, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Shaw, 122-123.

caught running away, as many students tried to do, you risked having your head shaven or were forced to wear a sign that read, "I ran away."<sup>66</sup> There were a variety of punishments to keep students in line by means of the strict, military-style rules of the boarding schools.

Included in the regimented schedule of school activities was industrial or "vocational" training. Richard Henry Pratt said, "From the beginning our principle has been to place the most emphasis on industrial training, next English speaking and then literary training."<sup>67</sup> How this curriculum played out in most boarding schools was a half a day on academics, such as reading, writing, and math, and the other half on so-called vocational training. For girls, the training was focused on "domestic science," based on the Anglo-American model of womanhood.<sup>68</sup> At the Carlisle School, Pratt lauded that faculty, "give our girls instruction in the various industries of the sex and find no general lack. In cooking, sewing, house work, laundry work, etc., they are apt pupils."<sup>69</sup> In reality, they engaged in manual labor in these areas at least half of the day, sometimes everyday, just to keep the school running.<sup>70</sup> Irene Stewart remembers being so tired from the manual labor that the girls in her dorm were too tired to study, showing that vocational training, or manual labor, was more important to school officials than academics.<sup>71</sup>

"About Things Domestic," a section in the Chillicothe School newspaper, explains the weekly vocational training curriculum for girls' domestic training. This training included the preparation and serving of food, guidelines on how to clean, do laundry, or treat guests. The lesson was broken up into very specific tasks. One learned how to clean walls, sinks, silverware, dishtowels, and other domestic items. There was an insistence on table manners from the very beginning of the course, as well as thoroughness of detail in measurements, movements, cleanliness, and general discipline. The cleanliness of hands was insisted upon at all times, and each student's personal class equipment had to be in "perfect order." These lessons were held in a model cottage in order for the girls to learn their "domestic duties" in a realistic atmosphere.<sup>72</sup> The other part of domesticity training was called "Domestic Art," which focused on sewing. These lessons included everything from how to hold a thimble to tailoring a shirtwaist, skills that enabled students to make school uniforms. Also included in this course was how to buy fabric on a budget and how to construct clothing that was 'suitable' in relation to their income level.<sup>73</sup> This domesticity training was to prepare American Indian girls for their future in the home whether it be in their own or working as a domestic in someone else's. This was not necessarily the experience of all female students when they

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<sup>66</sup> Udall, 135.

<sup>67</sup> Pratt, "Origin and History of Work," 109.

<sup>68</sup> Child, 71, 78.

<sup>69</sup> Pratt, 110.

<sup>70</sup> Adams, 149.

<sup>71</sup> Stewart, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Elsie E. Newman, "About Things Domestic," *The Indian School Journal* 15, no. 4 (December 1914): 201-203.

<sup>73</sup> Newman, 204.

graduated but it was the future they were being prepared for. This institutional preparation showed that domestic work was what the school officials deemed as the appropriate sphere for American Indian girls in American society.

Girls' "Domestic Science" training was also part of what kept the schools running. Female students had to scrub floors, do dishes, make beds, cook, do laundry, and complete whatever other domestic tasks were asked of them. Qoyawayma said, "The scrubbing detail was the most detested. A patch of floor was scrubbed, then rinsed and wiped, and another section attacked. The work was slow, and hard on the knees"<sup>74</sup> She was only fourteen, and along with other girls, she was given difficult manual labor tasks to keep the school clean. Anna Moore Shaw was not even a teenager when she had to scrub floors. She recalled being hit with a strap while she was still on her knees if she had not finished by eight in the morning, when classes were starting. She was later transferred to laundry duty where she ironed school clothes and bedding, which she found was a delight in comparison.<sup>75</sup> Because of the focus on vocational training, or free labor, it sometimes took longer to graduate from school than some students expected. Shaw was disappointed when it took her two years longer to graduate than it should have, as she understood that the school's focus on vocation and neglect of academic work made it impossible to have the adequate skills in English, reading, and writing that were still required to graduate.<sup>76</sup>

As part of the vocational training program, some girls worked in domestic service jobs for private families on summer breaks. This so-called "Outing Program" was thought to be a way to assimilate students into white culture faster, as well as for them to gain work experience. Richard Henry Pratt said, "One of the most useful features of our work has been the placing of our boys and girls in private families...this has the most beneficial results...the children take on English speaking and the industries of civilized life very speedily." Children would, however, only be allowed to go if, as Pratt said, "we can spare from our own work."<sup>77</sup> Outing programs could be set up by request of a private family looking for a domestic worker or by request of a school official that wanted help in the home. At times, the staff at the school itself would hire girls to stay and work. Often, students earned money, although a small amount, that had to be placed in an account for them to be used at a later time.<sup>78</sup> In a letter to the Superintendent of Indian schools, C.J. Cromwell, local day school teacher Clara True inquired about female Santa-Fe boarding school students working as domestics for local white families. True put in a request for several girls who would then be sent to work on a regular basis, thus taking time away

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<sup>74</sup> Qoyawayma, 63.

<sup>75</sup> Shaw, 135-136.

<sup>76</sup> Shaw, 142.

<sup>77</sup> Pratt, 110.

<sup>78</sup> Udall, 124.

from academic study and earning only a small amount of money.<sup>79</sup> An outing contract for the Carlisle School described the rules to which both the students working as domestics and the family for whom they were working had to adhere. The list included: weekly attendance at church, the forbiddance of going out in the evenings or on their day off (Sunday), the restriction that patrons were not allowed to give students more than half of their earnings, and the requirement that students bathe once a week.<sup>80</sup> In all of the cases I have seen, the employing families were white and ran their homes in an Anglo-Christian style, which was different to the style to which the girls were accustomed. When student Polingaysi Qoyawayma was fourteen years old, she was asked by one of her teachers to live with her and her husband, a white couple, for the summer to do housework. She had never before worked in a home of white people, or any other stranger's house for that matter. She said they were "tolerant" and showed her how to do work according to "the white man's way." She also earned a little money; they would not, however, give it to her outright, and put it into an account instead. Qoyawayma said that the couple gave her affection that she had not received since being at school, and she liked the idea of earning some money.<sup>81</sup> At times, girls stayed at school during the summer to work. Helen Sekaquaptewa, at fifteen years old, worked at her school all summer, doing laundry for faculty and government employees, as she was not able to go home. She was paid fifteen dollars a month and even though she recalled it being very laborious, she was happy to earn her own money.<sup>82</sup>

The training at school did not give girls many skills that would enable them to move past working-class jobs. I cannot say that all women who went through the boarding school system ended up domestic workers, because they did not. However, looking at the actual curriculum and training, domestic work was the employment for which girls were being trained. Some graduates went on to become teachers, like Polingaysi Qoyawayma, but others, like Helen Sekaquaptewa and Irene Stewart, did domestic work for much of their lives. Sekaquaptewa worked as a cook for an Indian school after she was married with children, saying that she had to do the cooking and cleaning for at least twenty-five people all of the time.<sup>83</sup> Irene Stewart cleaned houses for the Fort Defiance School agent. He paid her thirty dollars a month; yet, half of that small sum went back to the agent for room and board.<sup>84</sup> The U.S. government's goal for the employment of American Indian women was in manual labor, such as domestic work. Some women broke out of this, yet many did not.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Clara True, "Letter to Superintendent requesting a girl from the Santa Fe School for domestic service, March 31, 1904," *Record Group 75, ID 293274, National Archives and Records Administration*, <http://research.archives.gov/description/293274> (accessed April 3, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> William Peters, "Outing contract for the Carlisle Industrial School between pupil and patron, April 8, 1907," *Carlisle Indian Industrial School History*, <http://home.epix.net/~landis/outing.html> (accessed on April 3, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Qoyawayma, 62.

<sup>82</sup> Udall, 124.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>84</sup> Stewart, 33.

<sup>85</sup> Lomawaima, 83.

When girls left school for home after graduation, there was a sense of feeling caught in-between two worlds. They had been through years of immersion in white culture with the intention of taking away all things Indian within them, but they were also still tied to their culture and identified with their native roots to some extent. A very clear example of this uncertain state of limbo was Polingaysi Qoyawayma's experience. By the time she graduated from the Sherman Institute, she felt anxious about returning to reservation life. On the one hand, she knew she would not be happy there anymore, yet on the other hand, she felt the pangs of loneliness and longing for her family combined with the old familiarity of tribal life. She was worried that the people of her past could possibly reject the "new" her. She went back and forth on these thoughts, "needing a stable influence and finding none." At the time of this transition, she did not know what would make her happy in her life. When she returned to her village, to her old way of living, she knew she had already gone too far and there was no turning back to the life she had once lived. As she grew older there were parts of the Anglo-Christian lifestyle with which she felt comfortable, such as Christianity and the comfort of a mattress, but she never let go of her Native heritage. She ended up spending the rest of her life in her old village, teaching American Indian children. Most importantly, however, she realized that her Hopi culture was the foundation of who she was. She held on to the best part of her culture and also part of white culture, to make a "blend" that worked for her.<sup>86</sup> Zitkala-Sa also experienced confusion when leaving school. She felt conflicted between going east to a white college and going home to her family. She felt a pull towards college but her mother was adamantly against it. She recalled, "Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man's ways, and be content to roam over the prairies and find my living on wild roots." Zitkala-Sa decided to go to college far away from her family even though it put a wedge in her relationship with her mother. When she arrived at school she immediately regretted the decision. Wishing she could return to her mother, she cried for many years over the sorrow it had caused her. Zitkala-Sa finished her education and went on to become a prominent writer and activist for American Indian rights. Although she was forced through the off-reservation boarding school system run by the United States government, she ended up using her experiences to fight for the American Indian people.<sup>87</sup>

It is clear that there were aspects of students' lives that changed after going through the boarding school system. As the women's stories unfolded, they described the feeling of being caught in-between two worlds, that of the white man and that of their respective tribes. Although certain beliefs changed, not once in the personal stories I have read did I see a complete loss of tribal culture or affiliation. This brings me back to the intention of the school system, which was the stripping of American Indians of their respective tribal identities. Despite its intentions, the boarding school system did not have the intended outcome. No matter what the government, school officials, or teachers did, they

<sup>86</sup> Qoyawayma, 78, 179.

<sup>87</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 193.



could not take away the core of the students' identities. Students continued to create bonds with each other, sustain connections with their families, and resist the oppression implemented by the U.S. government's Indian education ideology. American Indians were oppressed through the off-reservation boarding school system and while there was a plan to take all individuality away, there was a burning light inside of them that could not be extinguished.

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