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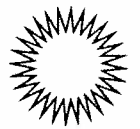
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Education for Extinction

AMERICAN INDIANS AND THE
BOARDING SCHOOL EXPERIENCE,
1875-1928

David Wallace Adams



University Press of Kansas

Institution

The boarding school, whether on or off the reservation, was the institutional manifestation of the government's determination to completely restructure the Indians' minds and personalities. To understand how it functioned in this regard one must attempt to understand how Indian students actually came to know and experience it. And this effort must necessarily begin at that point in time when Indian youths left behind the familiar world of tribal ways for the unfamiliar world of the white man's school. For philanthropists, of course, the journey of Indian children to boarding school was that first step out of the darkness of savagery into the light of civilization. For most Indian youths it meant something entirely different. In any event, the day they left for boarding school could never be forgotten.

For a young Lakota Sioux named Ota Kte, or Plenty Kill—later named Luther Standing Bear—the idea of attending the white man's school first presented itself in the fall of 1879, when he and a friend noticed a crowd gathering around one of the agency buildings at Rosebud. Curious, the two boys approached the building and peered through a window. The room was mostly filled with Sioux, but there were also a few whites among them.

When they saw us peeping in at the window, they motioned for us to come inside. But we hesitated. Then they held out some sticks of candy. At this, we ran away some little distance, where we stopped to talk over this strange proceeding. We wondered whether we had better go back again to see what the white people really wanted. They had offered us candy—and that was a big temptation. So we went back and peeped in at the window again. This time the interpreter came to the door and coaxed us inside. He was a half-breed named Charles Tackett. We called him Ikubansuka, or Long Chin. We came inside very slowly, a step at a time, all the time wondering what it meant.¹

From Long Chin, Plenty Kill learned that the whites had come to collect children for a school in the East (the man in charge of the white party was Captain Pratt, recruiting his first volunteers for Carlisle). If Plenty Kill

wanted to go to the white man's school, Long Chin explained, he must bring his father, Standing Bear, to the agency to enter his son's name in the ledger. Plenty Kill was both suspicious and intrigued with the proposal. After giving the matter some thought, however, he decided he wanted to go with the captain. As for his reasons, he later recalled:

When I had reached young manhood the warpath for the Lakota was a thing of the past. The hunter had disappeared with the buffalo, the war scout had lost his calling, and the warrior had taken his shield to the mountain-top and given it back to the elements. The victory songs were sung only in the memory of the braves. So I could not prove that I was a brave and would fight to protect my home and land. I could only meet the challenge as life's events came to me. When I went East to Carlisle School, I thought I was going there to die; . . . I could think of white people wanting little Lakota children for no other reason than to kill them, but I thought here is my chance to prove that I can die bravely. So I went East to show my father and my people that I was brave and willing to die for them.²

The next day, Plenty Kill, the other recruits, and a number of parents left for the Missouri, where the final parting would take place as the children boarded a steamer to take them south. The final farewell was emotional. The children had no sooner boarded the steamer than both parents and children began to sob. "It was a sad scene," Plenty Kill recalls. "I did not see my father or stepmother cry, so I did not shed any tears. I just stood over in a corner of the room we were in and watched the others all crying as if their hearts would break."³

The next day, the steamer pulled into shore whereupon the recruits were directed to a "long row of little houses standing on long pieces of iron which stretched away as far as we could see." Each house had a little stairway. Instructed to climb up into the "little houses," the Indians found them to be lined with cushioned seats.

I took one of these seats, but presently changed to another. I must have changed my seat four or five times before I quieted down. We admired the beautiful room and the soft seats very much. While we were discussing the situation, suddenly the whole house started to move away with us. We boys were in one house and the girls in another. We expected something terrible would happen. We held our blankets between our teeth, because our hands were both busy hanging to the seats, so frightened were we.

As the locomotive picked up speed, Plenty Kill noticed the line of tele-

graph poles passing by. "It seemed to me that the poles almost hit the windows, so I changed my seat to the other side."⁴

When the train pulled into Sioux City, Iowa, the Indians were informed that they would be taken from the train to one of the city's restaurants. Not knowing what to expect, some of the older boys placed feathers in their hair and painted their faces. Just three years after the Custer debacle, this act further excited a crowd of spectators who were on hand to see firsthand the sons and daughters of Sitting Bull's Sioux. Indeed, as Pratt ushered the Indians through the mob of onlookers, they heard frightening imitations of the Sioux war whoop. "We did not like this," recalls Plenty Kill, "and some of the children were naturally very much frightened. I remember how I tried to crowd into the protecting midst of the jostling boys and girls." Once in the restaurant, the Indians noticed a crowd of whites pressing their faces against the window. Too upset to eat, the Indians scooped up the food in their blankets and took it back to the train.⁵

By the next day, the "iron road" had taken them as far as "Smoky City," or Chicago. "Here we saw so many people and such big houses that we began to open our eyes in astonishment. The big boys said, 'The white people are like ants; they are all over—everywhere.'" Since the layover in Chicago was a long one, the Indians were placed in a large waiting room where they entertained themselves by dancing. Back on the train, "the big boys began to tell us little fellows that the white people were taking us to the place where the sun rises, where they would dump us over the edge of the earth, as we had been taught that the earth was flat, with four corners, and when we came to the edge, we would fall over." On the second night out of Chicago the anxiety was at fever pitch.

Now the full moon was rising, and we were traveling toward it. The big boys were singing brave songs, expecting to be killed any minute. We all looked at the moon, and it was in front of us, but we felt that we were getting too close to it for comfort. We were very tired, and the little fellows dozed off. Presently the big boys woke everybody. They said they had made a discovery. We were told to look out the window and see what had happened while we were dozing. We did so, and the moon was now behind us! Apparently we had passed the place where the moon rose!⁶

After a journey of several days, the train finally arrived at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. A two-mile walk brought the travel-weary recruits to the great gate that served as the entrance to the Carlisle barracks. Plenty Kill would later lay claim to a very special distinction: "I was the first Indian boy to step inside the Carlisle Indian school grounds."⁷

Such is Plenty Kill's remembrance. It is, of course, just one story. How others experienced the journey depended on several factors. Younger children, for instance, must have felt the pain of being separated from family and community more severely than older ones. Those coerced into attending school were surely more bitter than those who went voluntarily and with their parent's blessing. Children who had attended a day school, which constituted a sort of intermediate introduction to white schooling, must have found it easier than those taken directly from the camp. Moreover, it must have been much more difficult for the first generation of children, who had no idea of what lay ahead, than it was for later recruits, who had the benefit of learning from returned students what to expect. Finally, because different tribes had been exposed to white ways with varying intensity, it stands to reason that those children coming from cultures where there had been sustained contact with whites would find both the idea and necessity of schooling more comprehensible than those to whom the school was the first taste of white civilization.

But regardless of these differing circumstances, leaving for boarding school was almost always a painful affair, as evidenced by an account left by Hoke Denetsosie, a Navajo, who, at the age of six, was carted off to a reservation boarding school in 1926. In this instance the departure occurred after an all-night ceremony of ritualistic praying and singing, an apparent effort by parents to protect their children against any evil that might lie ahead.

Early in the morning, after we had eaten, the police assembled us near . . . two old black Model "T" Fords. They started to warm up the cars, and the machines just shook all over. Altogether there were 14 boys and girls, all taller than I was. Some of the parents gathered around talking to their kids. Some were weeping. There was a wave of sadness all around. All of us wore our hair long, tied into bundles behind our necks. Just before we climbed into the cars some of the girls' parents got shears, and cut off the hair bundles and kept them. As we moved out everyone wept again, and we all waved good-bye; then we were on our way.⁸

THE ASSAULT ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

From the policymakers' point of view, the civilization process required a twofold assault on Indian children's identity. On the one hand, the school needed to strip away all outward signs of the children's identification with tribal life, that is to say, their savage ways. On the other, the children needed to be instructed in the ideas, values, and behaviors of white civili-

zation. These processes—the tearing down of the old selves and the building of new ones—could, of course, be carried out simultaneously. As the savage selves gave way, so the civilized selves would emerge. As a “total institution,” the boarding school was designed to systematically carry out this mission.⁹

For boys the stripping away process began when the school sheared off their long hair. Shortly after arriving at Carlisle, Luther Standing Bear noticed “some white men come inside the school grounds carrying big chairs.” The interpreter informed the boys that the men had come to cut their hair. While sitting in class Standing Bear noticed that one by one the boys were being quietly removed: first, Ya Slo; then, Whistler. Each returned looking strange in his short hair. When it came to Standing Bear's turn, he comments that “it hurt my feelings to such an extent that the tears came into my eyes.” All the short-cropped Sioux boys felt strange. “We still had our Indian clothes, but were all ‘bald-headed.’ None of us slept well that night; we felt so queer. I wanted to feel my head all the time.”¹⁰

The short-hair policy was rooted in two considerations. First, it made it easier to control the problem of head lice. Head lice were by no means universal among recruits, but a general policy of short hair made dealing with the problem much simpler. Frank Mitchell, a Navajo, recalls that after bathing and having his hair cut, a “blue ointment” was immediately applied “to kill the bugs.” After this, “they checked our heads every now and then and would give us treatments. They kept us clean by bathing us every so often. And of course, finally, they got rid of all of those scabs and sores.”¹¹

But the reason for short haircuts went deeper than cleanliness. At the heart of the policy was the belief that the children's long hair was symbolic of savagism; removing it was central to the new identification with civilization. It is interesting that Standing Bear rejects the idea that cleanliness was the primary reason for the short-hair policy: “The fact is that we were to be transformed, and short hair being the mark of gentility with the white man, he put upon us the mark.” This motivation can clearly be seen in an incident recalled in a letter from S. M. McCowan to a former student at Fort Mohave Boarding School. McCowan, who had been superintendent of the institution, recalled:

I can remember when I first took you into the Ft. Mojave school and what a time I had in cutting your hair for the first time. I can see now all the old Mojave women standing around crying, while you covered your long hair with your arms and told me that I wouldn't dare to cut that hair off, but the hair was cut in spite of all your efforts and the direful predictions of the Mojave women. I compelled you to have

your hair cut off, not because of any objections to the long hair in itself, but merely because the long hair was a symbol of savagery.¹²

The haircutting exercise, in addition to being a traumatic experience, could also spark deep resentment and occasionally even resistance. Commissioner Morgan made note of this fact after witnessing a haircutting session involving Hopi boys. "The boys had beautiful, glossy, black, long straight hair," reports Morgan, "but unfortunately it did not bear close examination, and when they had submitted their hair to the scissors and their locks were thrown into the fire there was, . . . a great destruction of the innocents." Morgan went on to confess that a number of school superintendents were having difficulty keeping older boys in school, in part because of their aversion to losing their hair.¹³

Perhaps the most serious rebellion occurred at the opening of Pine Ridge Boarding School. Anticipating that the Sioux would not take kindly to having their braids cut off, the plan of operation was for each child to be called individually into a room where a teacher and a matron, supplied with a pair of scissors, would carry out the hair removal beyond the view of the anxious onlookers who were outside pressing against shade-drawn windows. But just as the first child was seated, a breeze swept aside the window shades, revealing the horrible sight of the matron about to slice off a long braid. According to one account:

Like a war whoop rang out the cry: "*Pahin Kaksa, Pahin Kaksa!*" The enclosure rang with alarm, it invaded every room in the building and floated out on the prairie. No warning of fire or flood or tornado or hurricane, not even the approach of an enemy could have more effectively emptied the building as well as the grounds of the new school as did the ominous cry. "They are cutting the hair!" Through doors and windows the children flew, down the steps, through the gates and over fences in a mad flight toward the Indian villages, followed by the mob of bucks and squaws as though all were pursued by a bad spirit. They had been suspicious of the school from the beginning; now they knew it was intended to bring disgrace upon them.¹⁴

According to Luther Standing Bear, a revolt against Pratt's haircutting order by Carlisle's first recruits nearly occurred as well. On the evening after the boys were informed that their hair must be cut, they held a secret "council." Standing Bear remembers Robert American Horse proclaiming, "If I am to learn the ways of the white people, I can do it just as well with my hair on." Almost to a person, the assembled boys shouted "Hau," signifying their agreement. But this resolve weakened the next

day as, one by one, they were summoned to the barber's chair. The question remained whether any of the boys would actually make a stand.¹⁵

Pratt knew nothing about any of this. Instead, thinking that all was going smoothly with the barbers, he left for a scheduled trip to Indian Territory, leaving the school under Mrs. Pratt's charge. It was after his departure that one of the older boys steadfastly refused to have his braids removed. Wishing to avoid an incident, Mrs. Pratt sent the barbers away, declaring that the fate of the one holdout would be resolved upon her husband's return. Late that night, however, Mrs. Pratt and the white staff were awakened suddenly by a general commotion. The long-haired recalcitrant had undergone a change of heart. Securing a knife, he had walked out on the parade ground to publicly cut off his braids. Since by Sioux tradition the cutting off of hair was always associated with mourning, the boy's dramatic act spontaneously evoked a characteristic response from those in the barracks. Boys and girls alike now filled the night air with a shrill wailing that was both eerie and not a little unsettling to the staff. Mrs. Pratt feared that the nearby residents of Carlisle might be aroused, provoking even a worse situation. Finally, however, order was restored.¹⁶

The second step in the civilization process called for changing the students' dress. It made little difference whether students arrived wearing elegant buckskin or threadbare trade blankets; shortly after their arrival, their traditional clothing was exchanged for the standard school uniform. Indian service regulations held that each boy should be provided with two plain suits, with an extra pair of trousers, and each girl with three dresses. In some instances, boys also received a Sunday suit of better quality. The annual clothing ration also included the necessary underwear, nightclothes, and finally, boots.¹⁷

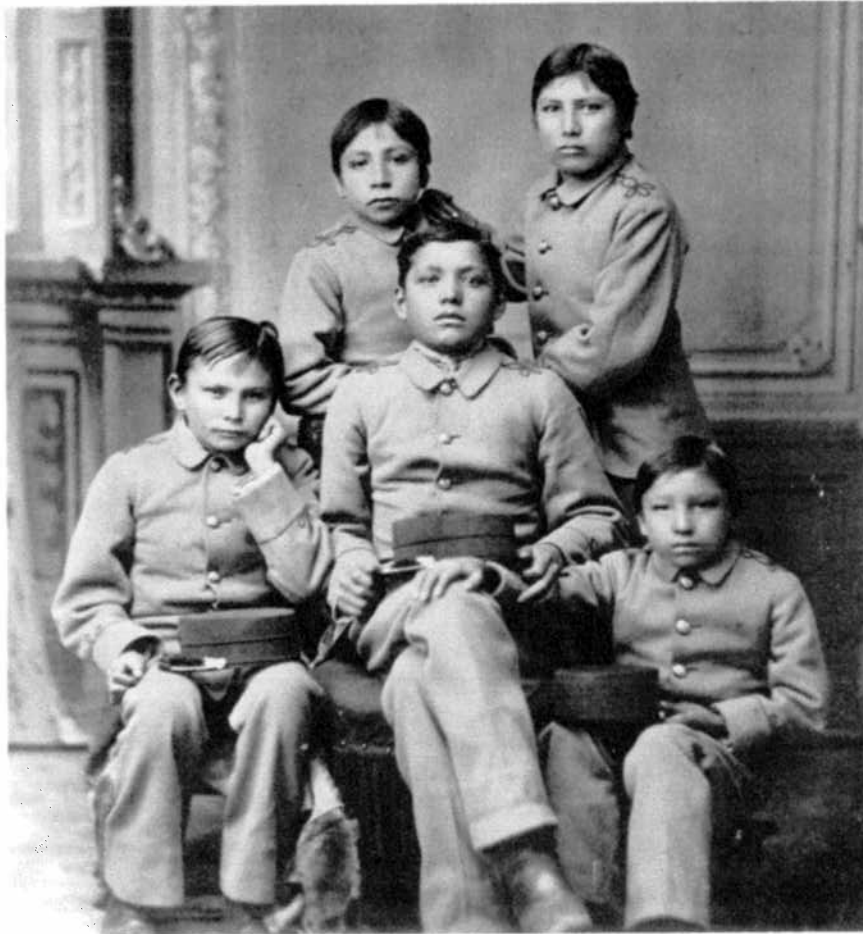
In spite of such standards, considerable variability in the quality of clothing existed among schools. Generally speaking, students at off-reservation schools were better provided for, in part because such schools were showcases for the government's Indian policy. Another factor was that these schools possessed large sewing and tailoring classes, where capable students were expected to turn out sufficient uniforms and dresses to meet the school's needs. A number of schools—Carlisle, Haskell, Genoa, Phoenix, and others—were well-known for their handsome and smart-looking dress. At Carlisle, for instance, the shoulders of the boys' dark blue uniforms were decorated with red braid, with student officers sporting red stripes as well. Carlisle girls, meanwhile, had their dark blue cloaks lined in bright red. In 1893, the superintendent of the boarding school at Albuquerque reported that since the Indian girls had recently taken to comparing their own dress with the pervading style of white girls, they had been allowed to adorn their school dresses with a few ruffles and a bit of lace. This change, it was noted, had "made a vast differ-



Navajo student Tom Torlino as he appeared at the time of his arrival at Carlisle, ca. 1880. (Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)



Navajo student Tom Torlino as he appeared three years after his arrival at Carlisle. (Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)



Sioux boys in their Carlisle uniforms, ca. 1880. (Bureau of Indian Affairs photo no. 75-1P-1-12 in the National Archives)

ence in the general feeling among the girls, who are much more willing and cheerful.”¹⁸

The situation was decidedly different at remote reservation schools. Students often had to make do with tattered clothes, oversized boots, and beaten hats, while an overworked seamstress patched, mended, and prayed daily for a new clothing allotment. “Wearing mended clothes may implant habits of economy and be of some practical value,” one agent complained in 1897, “but the wearing of crownless, brimless, and otherwise illshapen hats, and the continued wear of boots and shoes long after



As this group photograph of young women at the Fort Yuma School illustrates, the prescribed dress for female students ca. 1900 was sometimes attentive to the demands of both institutional uniformity and Victorian femininity. (Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society Library)

they have served their purpose, lessens the wearer’s self-respect, lowers the school in his estimation, and in short, creates a formidable barrier to the attainment of the end and aim of education.” Sometimes, students gave up a finer quality of clothing than what they received in return. One Hopi boy, for instance, recalls being separated from a “beautiful new blanket with colored stripes” that his grandfather had specially woven for him in exchange for the standard school issue—in this case, a blue shirt, mustard-colored pants, and heavy shoes. As for the fate of the blanket, “I saw it later, in the possession of the wife of the superintendent.”¹⁹

Students reacted differently to this aspect of their transformation. According to one school official: “A school uniform is a great cross to Indian pupils. One Indian never likes to appear like any other.” Besides going against the grain of Indian youngsters’ individuality, some articles of white clothing were resented simply because they were uncomfortable. Stiff boots and woolen underwear were clearly in this class. And of course

many students must have seen the emphasis on uniform dress for what it was: yet another aspect of the school's design to turn Indians into carbon copies of their white overseers. Still, it appears that this aspect of the transformation process was less traumatic than the haircutting policy. Indeed, some appear to have experienced a certain excitement in dressing up like whites, even though, as we see below, the occasion was sometimes marked by a good deal of confusion.

How proud we were with clothes that had pockets and boots that squeaked! We walked the floor nearly all that night. Many of the boys even went to bed with their clothes all on. But in the morning, the boys who had taken off their pants had a most terrible time. They did not know whether they were to button up in front or behind. Some of the boys said the open part went in front; others said, 'No, it goes at the back.' There is where the boys who had kept all their clothes on came in handy to look at. They showed the others that the pants buttoned up in front and not at the back. So here we learned something again.²⁰

Yet another assault on tribal identity came in the form of new names. The policy of renaming students was motivated by several concerns. First, many students arrived at school with names the teachers could neither pronounce nor memorize. Most teachers had little patience with such names as Ain-dus-gwon, John Sang-way-way, Wah-sah-yah, Min-o-ke-shig, and Mah-je-ke-shig. As one Indian Office official observed at a national educational conference, "a teacher would be at a disadvantage in trying to be either affectionate or disciplinary with an eight-syllabled girl like Sah-gah-ge-way-gah-bow-e-quay." Second, some students had names that, once translated, were perceived to be ridiculous and occasionally humiliating—such as Mary Swollen Face, Nancy Kills-a-Hundred, Sam Slow-Fly, John Bad-Gum, Ada Parts-His-Hair, and Lizzie-Looks-Twice.²¹

Finally, renaming students was part of a conscious government policy to give Indians surnames. As Indians became property owners and thoroughly imbued with the values of possessive individualism, it would be virtually impossible to fix lines of inheritance if, for example, the son of Red Hawk went by the name Spotted Horse. "When Indians became citizens of the United States under the allotment act," Commissioner Morgan informed agents and school superintendents, "the inheritance of property will be governed by the laws of the respective states, and it will cause needless confusion and, doubtless, considerable ultimate loss to the Indians if no attempt is made to have the different members of a family known by the same family name on the records and by general reputation." For this reason, Indian Office employees in the field were instructed to move

forward with the renaming process. The work proceeded slowly, and although most of the responsibility fell to the Indian agent, school officials also played a vital role, particularly in the early years.²²

The renaming process followed several patterns. One pattern was to use the original untranslated Indian name, although sometimes in shortened form, as a surname. When practical, this was the preferred policy of the Indian Office. In a circular issued in 1890, Commissioner Morgan admitted that in many instances "the Indian name is difficult to pronounce and to remember," but then went on to say that "in many other cases the Indian word is as short and as euphonious as the English word that is substituted." Fourteen years later, an Indian Office official reiterated the point by saying: "Let the Indian keep both his personal and race identity . . . for the sake of his property it is necessary that he adopt our system of family names, but that is no reason why we should ruthlessly thrust upon him our English names when his own will answer just as well, even better. We want to educate the Indian—lead him on, not stamp him out."²³ By this liberal policy, if it may be termed as such, a Kiowa man with the name of Richard Sitahpetale or a Navajo woman called Ruth Chesehesbega could make their way in civilized society as easily as a Richard Smith or a Ruth Miller.

Another pattern was to use the translated Indian name as a surname. Under this system a Robert Redhawk or a William Swiftriver would do nicely. But such translations were not always workable. As noted earlier, some Indian names, once translated, appeared to be ridiculous and even uncouth, others were too long, and many simply could not be translated without losing their original meaning. As Alice Fletcher pointed out, the translated Dakota name Young-Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses conveyed little of the meaning behind the original, which actually meant "the young man whose valor is such that even the sight of his horses brings fear to his enemies." In such instances, if the Dakota original was short and pronounceable, it should be retained. Otherwise, it should be abandoned.²⁴

A third pattern was to give children completely new names. At this point, agents and superintendents were presented with several options. One approach, recommended by John Wesley Powell, was to select from the tribal vocabulary names for geographical forms and animal life with which Indians could readily identify. For instance, the Sioux word for Roanhorse might be received with greater enthusiasm than Miller or Erickson. Another option was simply to randomly bestow common American names such as Smith, Brown, and Clark. Still another method, and one practiced for many years with conscious intent, was to rename students after famous historical figures. Harriet Patrick Gilstrap tells us that when her father, the agent at Sac and Fox Agency, gave the Indians

NUMBER	INDIAN NAME.	ENGLISH NAME.
17	Ai-la	Preston Lusk
18	Kute-qui-ah-a-mah	Walter Dent
19	Tu-wah-ki-ka	Paul Jones
20	Ni-te-mai	Roque Semblan
21	Ku-ke-tee	Albert Gallatin
22	Si-lug-pi	Gusie Lee
23	Ma-ku-si	Michael Angelo
24	Ah-say-no	Perry Douglas

This detail from the 1889 roster at Keams Canyon Boarding School, an institution enrolling mainly Hopi, illustrates one pattern for renaming—assigning names of prominent historical figures. (Courtesy of the National Archives)

new names, “first came the names of the presidents, then the vice-presidents, then prominent people of the day.”²⁵

But the Indian Office increasingly frowned on such ridiculous changes, and some schools made a conscious effort to retain at least a modicum of the Indian name. Thus, Hampton Institute was critical of the fact that two of its new transfer students had arrived with the names Julius Caesar and Henry Ward Beecher. Such names were nonsensical, declared the *Southern Workman*. A more humane approach was the Hampton method. When a boy arrived at the school with the name Hehakaavita (Yellow Elk), an inquiry about the boy’s father’s name evoked the response “Good Wood.” Hence, the boy’s new name became Thomas Goodwood. On another occasion, the son of an old chief, Medicine Bull, was given the new name of Samuel M. Bull. Such alterations, Hampton held, met the necessity of assigning a new name yet recognized the individuality, if not the heritage, of the student. Besides, renaming alone would not civilize savages: “Old Sitting Bull would be nonetheless a savage were he to take to himself the most honorable name we know . . . George S. Bull Washington.”²⁶

Whatever process superintendents used in bestowing new names, the fact remains that it constituted a grave assault on Indian identity. This is true

for two reasons. First, as George A. Pettit has made clear in his landmark study *Primitive Education in North America*, traditional Indian names and the naming process itself were fundamentally connected to the process of cultural transmission and served a variety of educational purposes: as a stimulus to self-improvement, as a reward for a special achievement, and finally, as a means of transferring the traits of a revered relative or tribal figure to a member of a new generation. Because some Indian youth were sometimes given a series of names in the course of their development, and since the giving of names was frequently ritualized in elaborate ceremony, tribal naming practices were clearly central to the perpetuation of cultural outlook.²⁷ Second, as already discussed, a major justification for changing names was the argument that assigning surnames was an essential step in transforming Indians into self-reliant property owners. Thus, the renaming process was pregnant with cultural significance.

It is difficult to judge how students actually experienced the renaming process or what meanings they ascribed to it, but three instances from Carlisle are suggestive. Luther Standing Bear recalls that after a few days at Carlisle the interpreter announced: “Do you see all these marks on the blackboard? Well, each word is a white man’s name. They are going to give each one of you one of these names by which you will hereafter be known.” The first boy stepped forward and with a long pointer touched one of the names, which was written on a piece of tape and attached to the back of his shirt.

When my turn came, I took the pointer and acted as if I were about to touch an enemy. Soon we all had the names of white men sewed on our backs. When we went to school, we knew enough to take our proper places in the class, but that was all. When the teacher called the roll, no one answered his name. Then she would walk around and look at the back of the boys’ shirts. When she had the right name located, she made the boy stand up and say “Present.” She kept this up for about a week before we knew what the sound of our new names was.²⁸

Another boy at Carlisle was given the name “Conrad.”

Dear Captain Pratt:

I am going to tell you something about my name. Captain Pratt, I would like to have a new name because some of the girls call me Cornbread and some call me Cornrat, so I do not like that name, so I want you to give me a new name. Now this is all I want to say.

Conrad²⁹

Jason Betzinez, an Apache youth from Geronimo's band, was more fortunate. Shortly after arriving at Carlisle,

Miss Low selected for me the name of Jason. She said that Jason was some man who hunted the golden fleece but never found it. I thought that was too bad but it didn't mean anything to me at that time so I accepted the name. In the intervening years I believe that the story of Jason and his search for the golden fleece has set a pattern for my life.³⁰

In this instance the name "Jason" served the same instructional function that many tribal names had served in traditional Indian life; it gave meaning and guidance to his life. The object of Betzinez's search and that of the famous mythological figure were, of course, altogether different. The Jason of Greek lore sought the golden fleece; Jason, an Apache thrown into the strange world of the white man, would seek something far more precious, his very identity. Still, the Carlisle Apache's new name could serve as a metaphor for his life, and for that matter, for countless other Indians as well.

ADJUSTMENTS TO NEW SURROUNDINGS

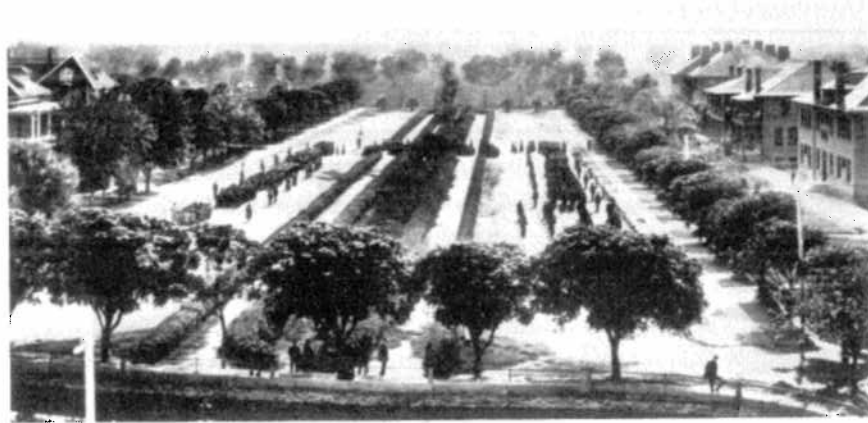
Meanwhile, students were adjusting to their new physical surroundings. Since the overriding purpose of the boarding school was to bring about the student's civilization, it logically followed that the physical environment should approximate a civilized atmosphere as closely as possible. At the very least, physical facilities should be of firm structure, should be large enough to house the students enrolled, and should reflect a mindful consideration for sanitation and hygiene. This was the ideal. Unfortunately, it was not always achieved. In 1882, Indian Commissioner Price lectured Congress, "Children who shiver in rooms ceiled with canvas, who dodge the muddy drops trickling throughout worn-out dirt roofs, who are crowded in ill-ventilated dormitories, who recite in a single school-room, three classes at a time, and who have no suitable sitting-rooms nor bathrooms, are not likely to be attracted to or make rapid advancement in education and civilization." According to Price, the Indian Bureau was currently forced to use facilities "which long ago should have been condemned as unserveable and even unsafe."³¹

In the next decade living conditions improved markedly, especially at off-reservation schools. Touring several schools in 1892, Special Indian Agent Merial A. Dorchester found that the best ones provided each girl with a single bed, washstand, towel, bowl and pitcher, and brush and

comb. Some dormitories had sliding curtains between the beds, "making a retired place for each girl, which helps her on the line of modesty." Others were divided into small rooms where the girls "are taught how to arrange and beautify them in a pretty and hygienic manner." Superintendent of Indian Schools William Hailmann also stressed the progress being made when he addressed the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1897. In school after school, he explained, the kerosene lamp was giving way to the electric light, the wood stove to steam heat, the bathtub to the "needle bath." At remote reservation schools, however, such renovations were slow in coming. Just a year after Hailmann's optimistic assessment, Commissioner William Jones admitted that too many schools suffered from a "deplorable deficiency" in providing Indian youth with acceptable living facilities.³²

Adjusting to a new physical environment also meant adjusting to new conceptions of space and architecture.³³ The boarding school, the new recruits quickly learned, was a world of lines, corners, and squares. Rectangular dormitories and dining rooms and square classrooms were filled with beds, tables, and desks—all carefully arranged in straight rows. Whites, Indians surmised, largely conceived of space in linear terms. This was no mean observation, especially for students who came from cultures where definitions of space and the meanings assigned to it were radically different. For Lakota students, for instance, the essential touchstones of cultural reality—the sky, the sun, the moon, the tepee, the sundance lodge, and the "sacred hoop"—were all circular phenomena. Thus, an old Lakota, Black Elk, would tell John Neihardt in 1931: "You will notice that everything the Indian does is in a circle. Everything that they do is the power from the sacred hoop." But now, Black Elk would lament, his people were living in houses. "It is a square. It is not the way we should live. . . . Everything is now too square. The sacred hoop is vanishing among the people. . . . We are vanishing in this box."³⁴ Although the circle held less symbolic significance in other cultures than it did for the Sioux, the larger point should not be missed: conceptions of space are not neutral.

The same could be said for the layout of school grounds. "Our sense of place—of space—is largely determined by the manner in which we see ourselves in relation to nature," writes Jamake Highwater. In the landscaping of school grounds, Indian students received another lesson on white civilization's attitude toward space and nature. In his annual report in 1898, Commissioner William Jones informed superintendents that in order to impress upon the minds of Indian youths a new conception of "order," "system," and "the beautiful," they should attempt to reconstruct "unsightly banks and rugged hillsides so as to make them more pleasing to the eye." Elsewhere, superintendents were instructed, "The grounds



At boarding school, Indians and nature were made to conform with white concepts of order, space, and beauty as evidenced in this scene at Phoenix Indian School, ca. 1900. (Bureau of Indian Affairs photo no. 75-PA-1-2 in the National Archives)

around the buildings must receive proper attention, insofar that agreeable designs in landscaping be improvised, diversified with flowers, shrubs, and trees and swarded areas, producing pleasing and attractive surroundings." In other words, weeds, cactus, and earth must give way to manicured lawns, pruned trees, and contoured gardens. The lesson in all this was clear: nature existed to serve man's ends. In the interest of symmetry and order, the wild must be tamed, just as the Indian must be civilized.³⁵

Adjusting to the white man's food—and the lack of it—was another challenge. According to official policy as stated in 1890, "Good and healthful provisions must be supplied in abundance; and they must be well cooked and properly placed on the table." Moreover, schools were urged to offer a varied menu and to use the school farm and dairy to furnish the necessary amount of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. Although coffee and tea could be served on occasion, milk was deemed preferable. In those instances where school farms produced great amounts of fresh produce and where dairy, stock raising, and poultry departments were going concerns, the stipulated standards were met. One Navajo boy who attended the school at Fort Defiance recalls: "When I entered school there was plenty to eat there, more food than I used to get at home. . . . So I was happy about that; I was willing to go to school if they were going to feed me like that."³⁶

But most would remember this aspect of boarding school life with considerable bitterness. Sometimes this displeasure stemmed from being forced to abandon traditional foods for those of the white man. Others

complained about the way the food was cooked. Perhaps the most serious complaint was that they left the table half-starved. A Klamath Indian, who was detailed as a meat cutter at his boarding school, recalls that the best cuts went to the employees, while the children got only the necks and ribs. He remembers, "I learned to steal at school to keep from going hungry." Don Talayesva, a Hopi, vividly recalls his first meal at Keams Canyon Boarding School. It was a hearty breakfast consisting of coffee, oatmeal, fried bacon and potatoes, and syrup. Not a bad breakfast by white standards perhaps, but Talayesva found the bacon to be too salty and the oatmeal too "sloppy." Lunch was worse.

We went to the dining room and ate bread and a thing called hash, which I did not like. It contained different kinds of food mixed together; some were good and some were bad, but the bad outdid the good. We also had prunes, rice, and tea. I had never tasted tea. The smell of it made me feel so sick that I thought I would vomit. We ate our supper but it did not satisfy me. I thought I would never like hash.

Helen Sekaquaptewa, who attended the same school, recalls: "I was always hungry and wanted to cry because I didn't get enough food. They didn't give second helpings, and I thought I would just starve. You can't go to sleep when you are hungry."³⁷

Were Indian children underfed? The evidence seems to suggest that conditions varied greatly from school to school. But there is little doubt that great numbers suffered from undernourishment. From the very beginning, Pratt found the school service per capita food allowance inadequate and managed to have Carlisle put on army rations, a unique distinction that the school enjoyed during its entire existence. Estelle Brown says that she was at her first post only a week when she realized that the children were undernourished. "I did not know that for sixteen years I was to see other children systematically underfed." Describing her experience at another school she comments, "I knew these girls were consistently overworked, knew that they were always hungry. Simply, they did not get enough to eat. We all knew it; most of us resented it, were powerless—or too cowardly—to try to do anything about it."³⁸

So students endured it as best they could. Some resorted to stealing, a risky enterprise. Others were occasionally the beneficiary of a small gift of Indian food brought by a relative on a visit to the agency. One Sioux girl who attended boarding school in the early 1920s recalls: "There was a place called the trunk room. That's where we kept our steamer trunks. They were filled with dried foods like *papa* and *wasna* because our parents thought that the white people wouldn't feed us right." After school,



"Ready for Dinner." Crow Agency Boarding School, ca. 1900. (Bureau of Indian Affairs photo no. 75-EXE-CROW-8B in the National Archives)

she relates "we would get the keys to our trunks from the matrons. And we'd go down and open our trunks and eat the Indian food." But in the main, students were dependent upon the often inadequate school ration, causing the girls at one school to compose the jingle: "Too much government gravy / Make me lazy."³⁹

As students soon learned, they were not only expected to eat new foods but to eat them in a special manner. In short, they must acquire the food rites of civilized society. Enter the world of knives, forks, spoons, tablecloths, and napkins. In the finer schools, tin plates and cups would eventually give way to glassware and white china. Thus equipped, the school dining room became a classroom for instructing Indians in the rudiments of middle-class table manners. Frank Mitchell recalls:

One of the problems we faced . . . was that we did not know how to eat at a table. We had to be told how to use the knife, fork and spoons. And when we started eating, we were so used to eating with our fingers that we wanted to do it that way at school, and we had to be taught. Although we had things there to eat with, like a fork, we had never used them at home, so we did not know what they were or how to use them; so we always wanted to stick our fingers in our

food. Of course, it took some time before we got used to how we were to conduct ourselves with these different things.⁴⁰

Food not only had to be eaten in a certain manner but it had to be eaten at precise intervals in the day, which typified another distinctive feature of boarding school life—the relentless regimentation. As every new recruit soon discovered, nearly every aspect of his day-to-day existence—eating, sleeping, working, learning, praying—would be rigidly scheduled, the hours of the day intermittently punctuated by a seemingly endless number of bugles and bells demanding this or that response. As one school official observed, the Indian "knew he was coming to a land of laws, but his imagination could never conceive of such a multiplicity of rules as he now finds thrown about them; bells seem to be ringing all the time, and the best he can do is to follow his friendly leader." Follow his "friendly leader" is exactly what Jim Whitewolf did on his first day of boarding school.

Logan was still with me. He told me that when the first bell rang, we would go to eat. He said that when we got down there he would tell me what to do. The second bell had rung and we were going to dinner. We all lined up according to height. Logan told me to watch the others who had been there some time already. Some fellow there gave a command that I didn't understand, and I saw all the others were standing there at attention with their arms at their sides. Then this fellow said something else and we all turned. This fellow would hit a bell he was carrying and we were supposed to march in time to it. I didn't know at the time what it was for. My legs just wouldn't do it so I started walking. When we got to the eating place, there were long tables there in rows. . . . When we got to a certain table he told me to just stand there. There was a lady there in charge who had a little bell and, when she hit it, everybody sat down. . . . I watched the others and did what they did. After we sat down they rang the bell again and everybody had his head bowed. . . . The bell rang again and we started eating.⁴¹

As Whitewolf's narrative suggests, the boarding school environment was patently militaristic. This was especially the case at off-reservation schools, where students organized into army units and drilled in elaborate marching routines. On special celebrations, when marching students shouldered rifles, brass bugles gleamed in the sunlight, drums pounded out marching rhythms, and school banners flapped in the breeze, the military atmosphere was only enhanced. No aspect of school life left a more profound impression on students. One Hopi who attended an off-reserva-

tion school at the turn of the century remembers that it was like “a school for Army or soldiering.” “Every morning,” he recalls, “we were rolled out of bed and the biggest part of the time we would have to line up and put guns in our hands.” In broken English a former student at Albuquerque recalls:

We would be in the school, but part of the time we can practice something else. That was being soldiers with the gun. Line up with it different ways, learn how to handle gun, like we being soldiers. This was sure hard thing for me to do. The most hard thing was to do this early in the morning early while it was cold; hands cold on the guns. We got more than one captain to take care of these soldiers. Then we boys made a lot of mistakes when we doing that. Sometimes we don't take the right step like they wanted us to. The ones that don't know how to do, the captain would go up to this boy and take him by the shoulders and shake him and tell him to do like the way he was told to do. The ones that are making a lot of mistakes, they can be punished for it.

While learning to march, one student at Chilocco acquired a lifelong nickname—Dizzy. Years later he would recall: “I remember, many times [the] company commander saying ‘You dizzy bastard, get in step!’ And it kind of stuck with me.”⁴²

Although spared the burden of bearing rifles, girls were subjected to the same drill routines. In fact, for Anna Moore Shaw, who attended Phoenix Indian School, the cadence of military marching was so internalized that it was hard to walk in a normal manner.

At first the marching seemed so hard to learn, but once we had mastered the knack, we couldn't break the habit. Sometimes on our once-a-month visit to town, a talking machine would be blasting band music outside a store to attract customers. Then we girls would go into our act; try as hard as we could, we just couldn't get out of step. It was impossible! We'd try to take long strides to break the rhythm, but soon we would fall back into step again. How embarrassing it was!⁴³

Why were schools organized like military training camps? Part of the answer lies in the sheer organizational problems created by having to house, feed, teach, and, most significantly, control several hundred “uncivilized” youths. Good health, neatness, politeness, the ability to concentrate, self-confidence, and patriotism were also attributed to military regimen. The superintendent of Haskell even reported in 1886 that by or-



Students at Sherman Institute, one of the Indian Bureau's showcase schools, performing their marching routines, ca. 1910. (Courtesy of Harvey Oster)

ganizing the school into a battalion of five companies, he had managed to break up persisting tribal associations; forcing students to sleep in dormitories and to sit in the mess hall by their assigned companies required them to converse in English.⁴⁴

But there were deeper reasons for the military atmosphere, reasons related to policymakers' perceptions of the “wildness” of Indian children. Indian children, it was argued, were products of cultures almost entirely devoid of order, discipline, and self-constraint, all prized values in white civilization. It was a well-known fact, according to Commissioner Morgan, that Indian parents “generally exercise very little control over their children and allow them the utmost freedom.” Part of the problem, policymakers surmised, stemmed from Indians' unfamiliarity with the white man's clock and once exposed to it, their general disdain for it. From a less ethnocentric perspective, anthropologist Bernard Fontana has made a similar observation, namely, that Indian and white societies have historically subscribed to different conceptions of time. Whereas white society has increasingly become governed by “clock time,” Indians have traditionally been oriented to “natural time.” “In devising a mechanical means of arbitrarily segmenting the day into regularly spaced units,” writes Fontana, white society has “made an artifact of time. . . . Our notion of time and our

methods of time-keeping are the very underpinnings of our entire industrial system." Indians, on the other hand, have traditionally lived out their lives in accordance with natural phenomena. Fontana makes an important point. The cultural and psychological distance separating the two orientations was immense, as this Arapaho remembrance makes clear:

It was a long time before we knew what the figures on the face of a clock meant, or why people looked at them before they ate their meals or started off to church. We had to learn that clocks had something to do with the hours and minutes that the white people mentioned so often. Hours, minutes, and seconds were such small divisions of time that we had never thought of them. When the sun rose, when it was high in the sky, and when it set were all the divisions of the day that we had ever found necessary when we followed the old Arapaho road. When we went on the hunting trip or to a sun dance, we counted time by sleeps.⁴⁵

Until the students' concept of natural time was supplanted by that of clock time, school authorities reasoned, it would be next to impossible to develop in them an appreciation for the importance of promptness and punctuality, key values in civilized life. "Make the most of time," one school newspaper exhorted. "You have no right to waste your own time; still less, then, the time of others. Be punctual in the performance of all your duties." By constantly marching and drilling, the clocklike, mechanical movements on the drill field would hopefully carry over to other areas of student behavior. As students internalized the measured units of the clock, so too would they come to discipline and regulate their bodies and lives. "Be punctual to the minute. Even a little beforehand is preferable to being behind time. Such a habit . . . no doubt will mean a great deal to you in the after life"—that is, life after boarding school.⁴⁶

Part of being civilized, the logic went, was being able to follow orders in a hierarchical organization, and what better training than that gained on the drill field? Thus, when Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger spoke to Phoenix Indian students in 1909, he referred to the school's military organization to make his major point: "We have got to become men and women and we have got to take our place in line in life, just as you take your places in the ranks of your companies. You have got to march through this world; the world expects you to do something, not simply to play and not simply to have pleasure." Or as students at one school were reminded:

Obedience is the great foundation law of all life. It is the common fundamental law of all organization, in nature, in military, naval, com-

mercial, political, and domestic circles. Obedience is the great essential to securing the purpose of life. Disobedience means disaster. The first disastrous act of disobedience brought ruin to humanity and that ruin is still going on. "The first duty of a soldier is obedience" is a truth forced upon all soldiers the moment they enter upon the military life. The same applies to school life. The moment a student is instructed to do a certain thing, no matter how small or how great, immediate action on his part is a duty and should be a pleasure. . . . What your teachers tell you to do you should do without question. Obedience means marching right on whether you feel like it or not.⁴⁷

THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE

The military atmosphere of schools was reinforced by a stern discipline policy, and central to that policy was the threat of corporal punishment. In this connection, it should be emphasized that often there was very little congruence between actual school practice and official Indian Office policy. By 1890, the official position of the government was that corporal punishment should be resorted to "only in cases of grave violation of rules" and even then it was to be administered or supervised by the superintendent. For students twelve years and older, however, who were "guilty of persistently using profane or obscene language; of lewd conduct; stubborn insubordination; lying; fighting; wanton destruction of property; theft, or similar misbehavior"—in other words, just about everything—superintendents were permitted to inflict corporal punishment and even to imprison students in the guardhouse. But even then, no "unusual or cruel or degrading punishment" was to be exercised.⁴⁸

More and more, the Indian Office began to emphasize "moral influence" as the most effective means of enforcing discipline. In 1891 the Superintendent of Indian Schools even argued that the "element of perversity" was not as prevalent in Indian children as white children. Many of the discipline problems with Indians, he asserted, stemmed from simple misunderstandings, the inability of students to comprehend and respond to commands given in a language still foreign to them. Teachers must be patient.

But a year later Commissioner Morgan was not so sure. Although in favor of exhausting "moral measures" and light punishments before resorting to severer ones, he emphasized that the boarding schools were full of Indians who "are naturally brutish and whose training has developed their anima and left their higher nature underdeveloped . . . and can be reached apparently in no other way than by corporal punishment, confinement, deprivation of privileges, or restriction of diet." Still, by 1896

the Indian Office was able to announce that corporal punishment was “steadily yielding along the line to more thoughtful and humane methods of discipline.” In 1898 the *Rules for the Indian School Service* stipulated, “In no case shall the school employees resort to abusive language, ridicule, corporal punishment, or any other cruel or degrading measures.”⁴⁹

So much for official policy. In reality, many agents and superintendents continued to apply the strap. One Hopi woman who attended boarding school after the turn of the century recalls, “Corporal punishment was given as a matter of course; whipping with a harness strap was administered in an upstairs room to the most unruly. One held the culprit while another administered the strap.” One Navajo woman would never forget the punishment she and some other girls received for leaving the school to pick apples in a nearby canyon. That evening the matron lined up the girls in the dormitory. “She told us to pull our blankets down and lie on our stomachs. She had a wide strap in her hand. She began whipping us one by one, and we screamed with agony.” A former student at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, recalls: “Generally, the officers in charge of the companies gave the whippings. They either used a board or a belt. They had what they called a ‘belt-line’; everybody took off their belts and they ran the student right down through the company.”⁵⁰

Eastern reformers generally abhorred such punishments and the Indian Rights Association made a point of exposing the contradiction between official policy and actual practice. The association’s most effective technique was to independently investigate and publicize instances of outrageous cruelty. In 1903, it found a notable example in the person of George Harvey, superintendent of Pawnee Indian School. The target of two Indian Office investigations besides the association’s own independent inquiry, Harvey was charged with a number of infractions. All paled, however, beside his inhuman treatment of an Indian girl who had a “slight difficulty” with the school laundress. As related in the association’s annual report:

Virginia Weeks, the pupil in question, was an orphan of the Pawnee Tribe, about eighteen years of age, of rather fragile body, she being consumptive. The girl’s testimony was that in punishment for the offense the superintendent took her to his private office and locked the door so that no one could witness the chastisement; that he beat her with a yard stick, throwing her to the floor and jerking her about; finally took her to the laundry where the offense was committed, demanding that she apologize to the employee with whom she had the difficulty. This she refused to do, and the superintendent then took her to the barn, where he could not be seen, and beat her with a strap about five feet long, which he held by the loose ends in his hand so

that the doubled portion could be applied to her body. After beating her with the strap for some time, he again asked if she was willing to apologize. Still refusing, the superintendent continued the whipping until he beat her into submission, whereupon he returned to the laundry and she repeated after him the words of apology demanded.⁵¹

Harvey was eventually forced from the Indian service, but the association continued to call attention to other instances of blatant brutality. In 1912, it told of a thirteen-year-old boy who was held, handcuffed, and almost beaten into “insensibility” with a strap. The result was that “the boy collapsed, lay on the floor almost helpless, and that, after sixteen days, twenty-six cruel scars remained upon his body, and eleven upon his right arm.” Two years later, it was reported that at the Walker River Agency School in Nevada, the superintendent, unable to identify which one of ten girls had stolen a can of baking powder, decided to punish the entire group. “The superintendent ordered these girls, who were between thirteen and eighteen years of age, stripped of clothing to the waist, and each was flogged with a buggy whip on the naked body.” With charges, of course, came investigations. Investigations, in turn, resulted in resignations, transfers, and dismissal. Meanwhile, Indian children continued to be whipped.⁵²

Corporal punishment was just one way of disciplining students. Although placing students in a school “jail” or “guardhouse” was officially discouraged in the late 1890s, this also remained a standard form of punishment.⁵³ Actually, school officials employed a variety of techniques to keep students in line. Boys might be forced to march back and forth for long periods in the school yard in girls’ clothing. Girls, on the other hand, were directed to hold their arms out at length for aching long periods, to cut the school grass with scissors, or to wear a sign saying, “I ran away.” For minor infractions in the classroom, teachers resorted to time-worn techniques for maintaining control: palm slapping, standing in the corner, and the dunce cap. Disobedience could also result in being assigned to extra chores like scrubbing the floors or cleaning up the school grounds.⁵⁴ One woman who attended a boarding school in Oklahoma recalls that students who spoke Kiowa were made to brush their teeth with harsh lye soap. “The kids would end up with the whole inside of their mouth raw.” At Albuquerque, the punishment for speaking Indian was a meal of bread and water.⁵⁵

It must be said that many conscientious employees went out of their way to avoid corporal punishment. As early as 1886, an agent in Nevada claimed that he didn’t believe in whipping and prided himself for being able to reason with his Indian students. If all else failed, he resorted to a

reprimand before the entire school. This was particularly effective, he claimed, for it not only humiliated the offender, but also had the virtue of informing the entire school about the seriousness of the offense. Indeed, this method of discipline was so effective, he claimed, that not a single student had been slapped, cuffed, or whipped over a two-year period. The superintendent of Arapaho Boarding School, at first skeptical of the Indian Office's directive against corporal punishment, was also eventually won over. Good discipline had been established in the school for the entire year without resorting to the strap. The single exception was an instance "where a teacher in a fit of passion slapped a boy in the face and in return received a severe blow on the forehead with a slate."⁵⁶

One of the more effective devices used to maintain discipline was to involve the students themselves in the enforcement of rules. Pratt can probably be credited with this idea, as he implemented it at Carlisle scarcely a year after the school's opening. Using a court-martial format, Pratt selected several cadet officers, who were also among the older and most intelligent students, to sit as judges. Precautions were also taken to make sure that as many tribes as possible were represented. Charges were brought, witnesses were examined, a defense was made, guilt or innocence was established, and punishments were handed out. Pratt reserved the right to overrule the court. The court-martial system soon spread to many of the larger schools, and occasionally it was found to work wonders. At the turn of the century, when a new agent, Albert H. Kneale, arrived at Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, he found conditions to be "notoriously bad" at the boarding school. Faced with the problem of habitual runaways, the former agent had barred the dormitory windows and padlocked all the doors, but to no effect. Kneale struck upon the idea of relying on the honor system. The bars and padlocks were removed, the students organized into companies with elected officers, and a group was designated to pass judgment and carry out punishments for infraction of rules. Kneale then got every boy to pledge obedience to the rule of this group. It worked.⁵⁷

COPING WITH DISEASE AND DEATH

"We can not solve the Indian problem without Indians. We can not educate their children unless they are kept alive." This sensational insight, offered by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells in 1916, might merit consideration as the most obvious statement ever to be issued by a government agency except for the brutal fact that Indian populations generally and Indian children specifically were being ravaged by disease. The situation was especially acute at boarding schools, where epidemics of tu-

berculosis, trachoma, measles, pneumonia, mumps, and influenza regularly swept through overcrowded dormitories, taking a terrible toll on the bodies and spirits of the stricken. Tragically, school carpenters were sometimes asked to apply their skills to coffin-making. Every off-reservation school had its own graveyard. Thus, disease and death were also aspects of the boarding school experience.⁵⁸

For Pratt, the health of his students was not just a humanitarian concern, but a political one as well. In the early years, when Carlisle depended upon tribal leaders for recruits, it was vitally important that students be returned as healthy as when they had left. Unfortunately, in the first year alone, six boys died. Another fifteen students were sent back to their agencies because of poor health, and several of these died shortly after their return. In the winter of 1880 the situation worsened. In mid-December, just a day apart, Pratt lost Maud Swift Bear and Ernest White Thunder, both from Rosebud, the largest single contributor of students. Pratt now had reason to worry that his base of support at Rosebud, always tentative at best, might collapse altogether.⁵⁹

The circumstances surrounding Ernest White Thunder's death are somewhat unclear, but the bits and pieces of evidence are suggestive. Pratt writes in his memoirs that when Chief White Thunder agreed to turn over his son, Pratt had promised, "I will be a father to [him] and all the children while they are with me."⁶⁰ Although Ernest's feelings about going with Pratt are unknown, it is fair to assume that since so many Sioux were going with their chiefs' blessings, he probably looked upon it as a kind of adventure or perhaps, like Luther Standing Bear, as an act of bravery.

There is no information about Ernest's attitude and behavior in the next few months, but by February it seems clear that he had developed an intense dislike toward the entire Carlisle routine and was terribly homesick. The chief learned about this firsthand in a letter from his son but also secondhand from other parents at Rosebud. When he received a letter from Pratt reporting that Ernest was becoming obstinate and uncooperative, the disappointed father wrote his son.

My Son: I want to tell you one thing. You did not listen to the school teacher, and for that reason you were scolded. . . . At this agency are over 7000 people and there are four chiefs. These chiefs sent their children to school and others followed their lead.

I want Capt. Pratt to take good care of the children of the chiefs. Your letter did not please me and my people. When the children went to school, many of the people found fault with us for letting them go; and now if what your letter says is true they will find still more fault. Capt. said he would take care of the children the same as

if they were his own, . . . I want you to attend to your books and let play alone.

If you can write a word in English I want to see it and I will be glad. You wrote to me that you were all soldiers and had uniforms. I send you \$200 for you to get a large picture in your uniform so that I can see it. I am ashamed to hear every day from others in the school that you act bad and do not try to learn. I send you there to be like a white man and I want you to do what the teacher tells you.

I hope Capt. Pratt will not lose patience with you and give you up for, when I come in the Spring I shall talk to you. You had your own way too much when you were here. I want Capt. Pratt to know I shall talk to you in the Spring and if you don't mind then I shall fix you so you will. I hope you will listen to your teachers for it makes me feel bad when I hear you do not.

Remember the words I told you; I said if it takes five or ten years, if you did not learn anything you should not come back here. Your grandfather and mother would be glad to hear from you if you can write a word in English. When you get this letter take it to Capt. Pratt and have him read it and I hope he will write to me. That is all.

Your Father White Thunder⁶¹

Pratt did more than read it. In an apparent effort to bring the chief's son into line by humiliating him, he had the letter published in the school newspaper. But there is another news item about Ernest White Thunder on the same page, and it indicates something about the boy's response to his father's deaf ear.

The son of White Thunder has been exceptionally idle, and sometimes disobedient. In answer to some complaints which he made, he received the letter which is published in another column. When asked by his teacher to whom he would write the letter which each student is required to send home at the close of the month, he replied with the utmost nonchalance, "I have no friends to write to; I had one aunt once, but the bears eat her up."⁶²

When the chiefs came in the spring, Ernest met with the same response he had received by mail: White Thunder was adamant that his son should remain. Determined to go home, in a desperate act Ernest stole aboard the train as it pulled out of Carlisle. Discovered en route, he was taken off the train at Harrisburg and sent back to Carlisle.⁶³

There was more than a little irony in these events. Chief Spotted Tail, who was part of the same delegation, was appalled by what he saw. In par-



Ernest White Thunder, Carlisle, 1879. (Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)

ticular, he resented the fact that Sioux boys were being made to drill like white soldiers. And so he removed his own children, informing Pratt that he was taking them home even though they liked the school. Ernest White Thunder, on the other hand, was being forced to stay when he hated it. All this must have eaten away at the boy as he lay awake at night nursing a deep resentment toward both his father and Carlisle. At some point, resentment turned to a deep depression.

The next report about Ernest is that he is severely ill. On December 6, Pratt informed Washington that the outcome was not promising: "White Thunder's son is very sick and I doubt if he recovers. I consider that it is

entirely his own fault as I explained to you. He is still very obstinate [and] seems to rather want to die." A few days later Pratt, with a "sad breast," wrote the chief that his son was dead.

All the time since he got sick I have done everything I could to make him get well. . . . I had to make him go to the hospital and had to take his clothes away from him to keep him in bed. He would not eat and he would not take medicine unless I made him and then he would spit it out. All the time he had the Doctor to see him often every day and night. Whatever was good we got for him, oranges and grapes, and other nice things he had always. After he had been long sick as I told you then he wanted to get well and he began to eat and to take medicine, but he had got so weak that all our care would not save him.

Pratt went on to explain how "all these boys and girls are like my children. It is this that makes me so sorrowful when I tell you about your son." Ernest's friends, especially the sons of American Horse and High Wolf, had been with him almost to the end, but nothing could save him. "Your son died quietly without suffering like a man. We have dressed him in his good clothes and tomorrow we will bury him the way the white people do."⁶⁴

The following day Pratt wrote the chief again. In a long letter, he began by saying:

I had them make a good coffin and he was dressed in his uniform with a white shirt and a nice collar and necktie. He had flowers around him that some of the ladies brought for the white people love to get flowers for their friends when they are buried. Six of the Sioux boys who were Ernest's good friends carried the coffin into the chapel and then the people sang about the land where people's spirits go when they are dead. And the minister read from the good book and told all the teachers and the boys and girls that some time they would have to die too. He told them they must think a great deal about it and they must be ready to die too, because none of the teachers or scholars could tell when the time would come for them to die.

Pratt explained how the minister prayed to the Great Spirit that the sorrow of Ernest's friends and relatives would pass away and that White Thunder's people "might learn from the good book about the good land of the spirits where good people go when they die." Indeed, teaching Ernest about the Jesus book was the "best thing" the school had done for the chief's son, for "it was what the good book says that we wanted him

to know so he could tell you and all your People when he went back because it is that book which makes the white people know so much as they do."⁶⁵

And then Pratt moved on to a matter that was troubling him greatly: how would the news of the two deaths be received at Rosebud? Addressing the issue as delicately as he knew how, Pratt proceeded:

I look upon this detachment of children away from your people somewhat as you would upon a party sent out to gather a quantity of buffalo meat or even sent out to make war upon some other people or to capture horses from some other people. You know how that is my friend, how that very often there are some who never come back and such is the course of things in this life. We must expect death to come to us in a good cause as well as in a bad cause. . . . Never in all the history of your tribe have you sent parties away from it on a better mission than this one and while my heart is pained and sad for the loss that you yourself have sustained in it I am sure your strong good sense will stand by what the Government is trying to do for you and help make it strong. I would be glad to have you write to me and tell me what you think and how you feel about it.⁶⁶

Pratt's letters to Swift Bear are much in the same vein, except that in the case of Maud he was able to argue that the girl's death had nothing to do with her coming east. He reminded Swift Bear that his daughter's lungs were full of disease when she arrived at Carlisle. "Very slowly for years," he explained, Maud's lungs "had been getting worse so that she never could have breathed like other well girls. They were all sore inside." When the tuberculosis turned to pneumonia there was nothing the doctors could do to save her. "This disease would not have been so bad if she had been well like the other girls but it was because her lungs were not sound that it made her die." Surely Swift Bear understood this, Pratt pleaded. "And because you know this I hope you will still help about this good work . . . by making the hearts of the other people strong."⁶⁷ A month later Pratt got what he wanted. White Thunder wrote back: "You, my friend, are a good man. For that reason you now have with you children of three of the chiefs. Therefore, my friend, take good care of those children. They belong to us who are chiefs. I am White Thunder who say this."⁶⁸

The correspondence surrounding the deaths of Ernest White Thunder and Maud Swift Bear indicates a good deal about the health issue as a political question, but it reveals little about how such deaths affected the psychological atmosphere of school life. The toll must have been considerable. There is no reason to doubt Pratt's statement to Swift Bear that

"the teachers and the scholars all loved Maud and their hearts are full of grief because she is dead. The Sioux girls cried all night." Moreover, Luther Standing Bear, who was at Carlisle during this episode, remarks that deaths like that of Ernest White Thunder "worked on our nerves to such an extent that it told on our bodies."⁶⁹

What was the death rate in Indian schools generally? This is surely an important question, but unfortunately an impossible one to answer. Some of the early reports, especially from off-reservation schools, are alarming. Superintendent Armstrong, for instance, reported in 1881 that of the forty-nine students collected by Pratt three years previously, ten had either died at school or shortly after their return home. Unlike Armstrong, however, most superintendents only reported the deaths of those students who were actually attending school; it was a common practice to dismiss the sickly students. Although this occasionally could be justified on the basis that removing contagious children from the school was necessary to the overall health of the school, it also had the practical effect of lowering the death rate.⁷⁰

Although schools were periodically struck by epidemics such as measles, influenza, and mumps, the most persistent threats to Indian health were tuberculosis and trachoma. Tuberculosis was the most menacing. In its most life-threatening form, pulmonary consumption, the disease attacked a child's lungs, slowly eating away at the afflicted's strength. When it ran its course, coughing, spitting up blood, and hemorrhaging finally resulted in death. Another form of the disease, scrofula, attacked the lymph glands, causing eruptions or running sores in the regions of the lower face and neck. Less life-threatening, scrofula was still debilitating. Both forms of tuberculosis were highly contagious. After the discovery of the tubercle bacillus in 1882, a growing consensus emerged in the medical community that the best defense against infection was strict hygiene, a nutritious diet, plenty of exercise, and well-ventilated living quarters. Unfortunately this understanding only slowly permeated the Indian service.⁷¹

Because the Indian Office made no systematic effort to gather figures on the state of Indian health until after the turn of the century, it is impossible to estimate with any precision the extent of infection in either the Indian population in general or in Indian schools in particular. What is clear is that the infection level at some schools reached astounding proportions. In 1897, the superintendent at Crow Creek, South Dakota, reported to Washington that practically all his pupils "seem to be tainted with scrofula and consumption." This fact, he went on to observe "steadily and unavoidably affects school work, and subtracts from the results of every kind which might otherwise be achieved." Moreover, the omnipresent reality of disease and death made for a depressing atmosphere.

When a pupil begins to have hemorrhages from the lungs he or she knows, and all the rest know, just what they mean, in spite of everything cheerful that can be said or done. And such incidents keep occurring, at intervals, throughout every year. Not many pupils die in school. They prefer not to do so; and the last wishes of themselves and their parents are not disregarded. But they go home and die, and the effect in the school is much the same. Four have done so this year. As many more have gone out who undoubtedly will never be able to return; and others, in still larger numbers, have had hemorrhages from the lungs, or the terrible scrofulous swellings which we know, and they know, practically certify to their fate. Keeping them in school at all sometimes becomes a rather painful task.⁷²

Conditions were indeed horrendous at Crow Creek. Two years later, when Estelle Brown arrived to teach kindergarten, she found that the faces of her pupils shone "with mercuric ointment generously spread over their scrofula sores." In a brutally frank admission, she says that she put the sores to use as identifying marks for remembering the names of her students: "The sores helped. I separated the children with visible sores and so came to identify Sophie Ghost Bear by the running sore on the right side of her neck, Elaine Medicine Blanket had her sore on the left."⁷³

Slowly, the Indian Office began to collect reliable data. A survey of Indian service physicians made in 1904 brought the acknowledgement by Commissioner William Jones that tuberculosis was indeed a serious health hazard to Indians, including schoolchildren. A more extensive study funded by the Smithsonian Institution in 1908 studied five reservations and concluded that on average only about 20 percent of the Oglala Sioux, Menomini, Quinaiet, Hupa, and Colorado River Mojave populations were absolutely free of tubercular symptoms. Schools, moreover, were cited for their ineffectiveness in combating the disease. At year's end Commissioner Leupp proclaimed that "the tuberculosis scourge is the greatest single menace to the future of the red race" and shortly thereafter launched the first systematic attempt to eradicate the disease altogether.⁷⁴

The second disease that afflicted large numbers of children was trachoma, or "sore eyes." Shortly after the turn of the century, medical research revealed that trachoma was caused by a specific microorganism and was highly contagious. Until then, Indian service physicians had limited knowledge of the disease. Trachoma proceeds in several stages: the formation of granules on the inner eyelid, followed by the secretion of a pus-like fluid; the growth of blood vessels and ulcers on the cornea; the thickening, drooping, and inward turning of the eyelid, causing greater irritation to the cornea; and finally, the scarification of the eyelid and cor-

nea, resulting in the growth of an opaque substance over the latter. At first irritating, then painful, trachoma is characterized early on by partial loss of sight and if untreated can result in total blindness.⁷⁵

Trachoma was virulent on both reservations and in Indian schools, and, as this remembrance of Jim Whitewolf indicates, it was directly connected with the Indian youth's capacity to benefit from schooling.

My eyes bothered me. Those days all the children seemed to have sore eyes. I lost the sight in my left eye. I was taken to the eye doctor, and he said that I had bad eyes. They told the agent about it. After that they never bothered me about going back to school. For about two years my eyesight was very dim. I stayed close to home then. I didn't do much of anything. They took me to an Indian woman doctor. She took a piece of glass from a bottle and cut away some white substance that was growing over my left eye. After that I could see better. After she had cured me, my father gave this woman a horse. That was more valuable than money then. Some of the Apache doctors then would require you to bring four things, but this woman didn't. She gave me some stuff, like salt, from the creek and something else to mix with it and told me to put this in my eye. I used this until I saw that my eyesight was all right, and then I quit. I would just go around to dances and visiting, but I never returned to school.⁷⁶

In 1912, Congress funded a major study of trachoma to be conducted by the Public Health Service, and only then did policymakers come to appreciate the magnitude of the situation. For three months thirteen physicians moved through twenty-five states examining 39,231 Indians. The results were truly astounding. Of those examined, 8,940 individuals, or 22.7 percent, were afflicted. Even more shocking was the level of contraction among schoolchildren. Of the 16,470 pupils examined, 4,916 were infected, a staggering 29.8 percent. Moreover, out of the 133 schools surveyed, 37 had a trachoma rate of over 50 percent. In Oklahoma the situation was especially desperate; in the thirty boarding schools examined, 69.14 percent suffered from the disease.⁷⁷

In self-defense, the Indian Office offered its account of the poor state of affairs. How, it asked, could schools maintain high health standards when Congress continued to deny the necessary resources—sufficient boarding facilities, adequate food supplies, and qualified doctors?⁷⁸ Second, Indian children often came from filthy, disease-ridden households where knowledge of hygiene was completely absent. It was difficult enough to control and fight infection once the school year was under way; the problem was hopelessly exacerbated at reservation boarding schools where children returned to camp for periodic vacations.⁷⁹ Finally, both Indian parents and

students alike were still under the influence of savage superstitions. According to Joseph F. Murphy, medical supervisor of the Indian service, the average Indian was “still a believer in the charms and incantations of his untaught medicine man.” Parents, agents reported, frequently requested permission to remove a sick child to the village camp so tribal healers could apply their timeworn magical arts.⁸⁰ As for the students, they frequently had little faith in white doctors, failed to heed their prescriptions, and all too often displayed a fatalistic attitude toward disease and death. (Indeed, one Navajo woman admits: “I never went to the hospital when I was sick, because I was afraid of the doctors. Also, I had been told that many people died there, and that there must be a lot of children-ghosts.”)⁸¹

But in spite of these explanations, by the turn of the century it was clear that the boarding school itself was a major contributor to the spread of disease. Institutions where no measures were taken to disinfect tubercular sputum, where infected hand towels, drinking cups, schoolbooks, and the mouthpieces of musical instruments passed freely among children, where the diet lacked nourishment, and where two or three students often were forced to sleep in a single bed were hotbeds of contagion. Moreover, off-reservation school presented particular problems: they removed students to a new and sometimes unhealthier climate; the exhausting regimentation wore down the students' resistance; and they exacted severe emotional pain by cutting the children off from family and community. Cora Folsom, director of Hampton Institute's Indian program, would confess in her memoirs, “Homesickness with them became a disease; boys and girls actually suffered in the flesh as well as in the spirit; could not eat, would not sleep, and so prepared the way for serious trouble.” Whereas the white student away at boarding school certainly experienced homesickness, “an Indian throws himself flat upon the bosom of mother earth and, scorning the weakness of tears, lies there in dumb misery for hours together, oblivious to dampness, to cold or heat.”⁸²

By 1910 the campaign to improve Indian health moved into high gear. Superintendents were instructed to guard against overcrowding, to sleep one to a bed, to isolate infected students, to periodically fumigate school supplies, to strategically place cuspidors throughout the school, to introduce personal hand towels in bathrooms, and where possible, to construct open-air sleeping quarters. At a few locations sanitoriums and eye hospitals were constructed. The Indian health service also experimented with various types of eye operations. Most involved inverting the eyelid and then either scraping the inner surface or expressing the infectious matter through a squeezing process accomplished by the utilization of specially designed forceps. Periodic applications of cocaine were used to kill pain. Following the operation patients were kept in a darkened room

and for the next few mornings awoke with their eyelids glued together by secretions from their healing wounds. All and all, trachoma operations were both painful and frightening, but when properly carried out were apparently effective.⁸³

Much of the health campaign was in the form of preventive education. Superintendents introduced "swat the fly" programs and urged girls to join "little mother leagues." Posters, manuals, stereopticon slides, health talks, and essay contests were used to drive home the message of good hygiene. Students were regularly enjoined not to borrow handkerchiefs, not to spit on the floor, and not to blow their nose in the air with their fingers.⁸⁴ Instilling fear was also a useful pedagogical device.

I am lurking in the dark,
 I am watching for my prey,
 I will attack and leave my mark,
 I am watching for you every day.
 When your strength is getting weak,
 Then I'll take a chance at you,
 I'll feed on blood and pale your cheek,
 I'll devour your lungs through and through.
 Yes, I'll fight with all my might,
 Against your strength, your bones, your flesh,
 When your room is dark as night
 Instead of clean and nice and fresh.
 I sit upon the food you eat,
 Sometimes within the water you drink,
 In filth and dirt I do retreat,
 With joy on yon black grave's brink.
 I am a fiend within the air,
 I ride on particles of dust,
 I'm here, I'm there, I'm everywhere,
 Your ignorance is my sole trust.

Do you know the cause of destruction
 In your Lungs, such an oasis,
 Of blood and pus and corruption?
 I am TUBERCULOSIS.⁸⁵

Considerable headway was made just prior to World War I, but the war effort soon forced a reordering of congressional priorities. Appropriations for Indian health, which had jumped from \$200,000 in 1914 to \$350,000 in 1917, stabilized thereafter, and little progress was made in the immediate postwar era. The impact of this was revealed in a major sur-

vey of Indian health conditions carried out by the American Red Cross in 1922 at the request of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles Burke. The Red Cross selected Florence Patterson, an experienced public health nurse, to conduct the investigation. Beginning her study in October, Patterson spent nine months in the Southwest surveying conditions for over 40,000 Indians, including schoolchildren. The final report reached the commissioner's desk in June 1924. Burke had wanted a strong report to support increased appropriations. What he got, however, was a stinging criticism of the entire health program. Burke buried the report, and it never saw the light of day until 1928.⁸⁶

The Patterson report was especially critical of boarding schools. Tuberculosis and trachoma rates were again up. At the Pima and Mescalero Apache schools, for instance, 50 percent of the students had contracted trachoma. Even at Phoenix Indian School, which possessed a special eye hospital, 20 percent of the students were infected. Once again, there was the familiar litany of causes: poor diet, overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and the exacting routine of school life, including the heavy work schedule. Indeed, after reviewing a single day's schedule, Patterson issued a blistering indictment of the entire boarding school concept:

This program, combined with the strain of bells, bugles, and horns, forming in line five or six lines each day, and the mental struggle to combat physical fatigue, could not fail to be exhausting, and the effects were apparent in every group of boarding school pupils and in marked contrast to the freedom and alertness of the pupils in the day schools. One gained the impression that the boarding school child must endure real torture by being continually "bottled up" and that he somehow never enjoyed the freedom of being a perfectly natural child. One longed to sweep aside his repressions and to find the child. As a small child he had undergone a terrific shock in adjusting himself to the school life and routine so difficult from any previous experience in his life. Again, after several years of nonreservation boarding school life, he would have to face a similar shock in returning to reservation life, from which every effort had been made to wean him.⁸⁷

In making these comments, Patterson was going beyond the hard evidence of her investigation and relying on her trained instincts for detecting a fundamentally unhealthy environment. In doing so, she spotted what most students already had discovered firsthand: life at an Indian boarding school was not easy.