

Building Citizens: Governmentality and Indian Education

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association
Vancouver, BC
April 12-15, 2017

I. Introduction

From virtually the moment of its independence from Britain, policymakers (as well as much of the general public) in the United States saw the “civilization” of Native Americans— the eradication of their traditional cultures and ways of life, and their complete assimilation to the culture of white settlers— as an act demanded by both necessity and philanthropy. Native peoples, it was believed, could not continue to live as they had in the past; the needs of white settlers, as well as the vague but powerful historical force called “progress,” would inevitably make the continuation of such cultures impossible. Native traditions, according to this view, were radically incompatible with the modern world, and one way or another would have to give way. The only question was whether this meant that only the cultures, or the people themselves, would disappear. Native Americans, such thinking went, were faced with a choice between civilization and extinction. Henry Pancoast, a Philadelphia lawyer working with the Indian Rights Association, put this choice starkly in 1882, after a visit to Sioux lands in the Dakota territory: “We must either butcher them or civilize them, and what we do we must do quickly” (in Adams 1995:2).

A number of different programs and policies were formulated over the years to promote Native American assimilation, from the creation of the Civilization Fund in 1819 to the General Allotment Act in 1887. As policies were developed and redeveloped, the legal and political status of Native American tribes was repeatedly redefined, from sovereign nations with exclusive jurisdiction over their own territory to wards of the federal government, subject to the plenary power of Congress. As the power of Native tribes to maintain their autonomy from the power of the U.S. government was eroded, the pressure placed on them to accept assimilation increased: if Indians were going to be politically and economically integrated into mainstream white society, then their way of life would need to conform with the expectations of that society.

Education was a central plank in the assimilation platform. Beginning in the colonial period, white settlers and policymakers saw formal education as one of the most effective means not only of providing Native Americans with the knowledge they needed to become part of white society, but also of changing their customs and habits to meet that society’s expectations. As Margaret Szasz puts it, “A number of colonial Euroamericans and Indians deemed Indian schooling as the ultimate tool for achieving cultural change among Indian people” (Szasz 2007:4). In part, education was seen as a way of transforming educated Indians into advocates of civilization to their own people. “Schoolmasters reasoned that if these youth could be taught to read and write, to cipher, to comprehend the Bible, and to change their ways accordingly, they might teach their own people to do likewise” (Szasz 2007:4). Then, too, Native children were seen as more plastic, more amenable (or perhaps vulnerable) to change than their parents and grandparents. While adult Indians, especially those who were older, might be unable to make the necessary changes, the civilization of Indian children would lead to a natural, generational phasing out of Native traditions.

However, the schools had to compete for influence with numerous other forces in a child’s life, most prominently their families. Speaking of early missionary-led efforts, Reyhner and Eder point out that “For most Indian students being taught by missionaries, parental influence far outweighed the influence of the missionaries. Since this frustrated their efforts at conversion to Christianity and the European way of life, missionaries soon sought to separate Indian children from their parents by placing them in white homes or in boarding schools” (Reyhner and Eder 2004:16). This tactic, adopted early, remains constant throughout the history of Indian education in the United States.

Among the most notorious, even infamous, aspects of Native education in the United States are the boarding schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While the underlying logic of the boarding school program was of a piece with earlier efforts, it took that logic to a new extreme, with Indian children sometimes forcibly separated from their families and

kept apart for years at a time, hermetically sealed (at least in theory) in an environment entirely controlled by federal policymakers and educational staff. With the influence of “the camps” thus excluded, Native children could be subjected to the full assimilative force of Euro-American education.

This paper will examine Indian education in the United States— and the federally-run, off-reservation boarding schools in particular— through the lens of Michel Foucault’s work on government. This approach locates such policies in the larger context of an expanding duty of states to care for the well-being of society as a whole. Modern government, according to Foucault, depends upon systematically amassing large quantities of consistent data about the governed. This requires that the population be “legible” to the state, and that in turn often necessitates programs and policies that aim to transform societies in order to increase their legibility. Indian Education policies, and the larger goal of assimilation or “civilization” more generally, should be seen as, in part, an effort at making Native Americans into legible, governable subjects.

I begin with a brief summary of Foucault’s idea of “governmentality,” showing how it depends upon the idea of a “population” that can be comprehended as a whole through the use of statistics. I then provide an overview of American policies of education for Native Americans, focusing on the off-reservation boarding schools as, in some ways, the ultimate expression of the logic that underlay these policies. Through the examination of the boarding schools in particular, I seek to show how not only the general ideas behind them, but also the specific methods they employed, reflect the imperatives of the modern governmental state.

II. Governmentality

In his writings on “government,” Foucault describes a historical shift in the conception of political rule from an emphasis on the control of territory to a concern with the overall well-being of the “population,” understood as people in their relations with each other and with their total environment (Foucault 2003:245). Foucault calls this a change from the model of “sovereignty” to the model of “government”. Where sovereignty was concerned with maintaining the rule of the sovereign, government is primarily concerned with the directing of the processes by which, e.g., wealth is produced, subsistence guaranteed, children produced, etc. – with arranging things so as to achieve “a suitable end” for all the things that are governed. (Foucault 2007:100). More generally, the purpose of governmental power is not, primarily, direct *control* of the governed, but their protection, security, and *improvement*.

As Foucault notes, this actually means that government pursues a number of different ends, complementary to its larger purpose: “[for] example, the government will have to ensure that the greatest possible amount of wealth is produced, that the people are provided with sufficient means of subsistence, and that the population can increase” (Foucault 2007:99). The problem is to hit upon a suitable “arrangement” of the complex totality of “men and things” with which government is concerned for achieving these ends. With this new purpose, the most significant power of the ruler is no longer the sovereign’s power to take life, to kill, but the ‘biopolitical’ power of government to *create* life (at the aggregate level) by improving the condition of the population (Foucault 2007:243-245).

The governmental shift was spurred in large part by the efforts of absolute monarchs to maintain control in times of substantial upheaval (Foucault 2007:249-251). From a demographic boom beginning in the seventeenth century through to the industrial revolution – with the accompanying growth and increased wealth of the middle class – in the eighteenth, new conditions represented significant challenges to absolutism, and rulers responded by extending state power downwards, to the individual level, in the form of discipline (Foucault 1977), and upward, to the level of the population, through regulation and government (Foucault 2007:249-250).

The shift is therefore as much about changing methods— or practices of rule— as it is about different goals. The processes government directs and optimizes exist only at the level of the population, and so dealing with these processes is not the same as dealing with individuals. The state does not, for example, construct a sewer system so that no individual will get sick; it makes sewers so that the overall incidence of disease in the population will be reduced. This is true even though the individual is the one upon whom power is directly exercised; the individual is the point of articulation at which government can take hold, so to speak, of the population.

This kind of technique is not primarily concerned with forcing individuals to behave in one way or another; instead, it tries to adjust the outcomes of the ways in which they choose to behave on their own. Government thus operates on the population through the freedom of individuals (Dean 1999:15). The classic example of this is the theory of the invisible hand, in which economic outcomes are the result of individual actors pursuing their own interests; government does not try to tell these individuals what to do, but rather operates on the economy by adjusting the conditions within which those decisions are made (Foucault 2007:22-23). Government in this sense is characterized precisely by projects like sewer construction, educational systems, and urban planning, which take for granted an idea of individuals who pursue their self-interest by use of a decision calculus, and attempt to alter that calculus without attempting to dictate individual actions directly. The development of governmental rule is therefore connected to the development of liberalism in political thought (Foucault 2007:47-48).

At the same time, however, individuals must be seen to have the *capacity* to make such choices. Children were therefore excluded, as were women, who were generally described as less rational, more governed by passion than reason. In other cases, individuals might require *training* to prompt them shape their choices into ones that could be aggregated into the picture of the population. A substantial group of people with radically different behavior, evincing radically different preferences and values, creates anomalies that make it impossible for the state to “see” the population as a whole. This, as I will show, is where institutions like the federal boarding schools play a role.

So, the “arts of government” that Foucault describes entail changes in the objects, ends, and methods of the exercise of political power. This dramatic shift in the conceptualization of political government was never, Foucault tells us, a purely theoretical exercise, even at the earliest stages; it was a change in the way things were actually done. One could see its influence in real terms in both the “development of the administrative apparatus of the territorial monarchies”, by which they came to exercise power in a much more continuous way over more of their territory, and in a set of analyses and forms of knowledge that began to develop at the end of the sixteenth century and increased in scope in the seventeenth century; essentially knowledge of the state in its different elements, dimensions, and the factors of its strength, which was called, precisely, ‘statistics’, meaning the science of the state (Foucault 2007:100-101; See Scott 1998 for more on this topic).

Population becomes the “final end of government”, the object upon which governmental interventions are designed to act in order “to improve the condition of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health”, as distinct from the health and well-being of every individual member (Foucault 2007:105). To govern – that is, to rule in a way that takes the total well-being of those ruled as its goal and purpose— is to rule through population. For Foucault, then, Machiavelli¹ marks the end of an era when the key political problem to be solved was

that of the safety of the Prince and his territory. Now it seems to me that ...we see the emergence of a completely different problem that is no longer that of fixing and demarcating the territory, but of allowing circulations to take place, of controlling

¹ More properly, perhaps, the popular *image* or Machiavelli.

them, sifting the good and the bad...in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are canceled out. No longer the safety (*sûreté*) of the prince and his territory, but the security (*sécurité*) of the population and, consequently, of those who govern it (Foucault 2007:67).

This problem, the security of the population, is solved through knowledge of its characteristics, its patterns and processes. This knowledge is produced through the set of techniques that Foucault broadly terms “statistics”. What is important about these techniques is that they take the population as their object – they presuppose its existence in the world as a natural, unified, discoverable entity. In so doing, they actually produce the population; they enact it as a reality that can be known, studied, and acted upon.

It is not, then, that the object of political rule is re-conceived as the population rather than the territory, and new methods invented for dealing with this new object; rather, new methods, prompted by social, economic, and demographic changes that challenged the power of absolute rulers, make possible the conception of the population as a new object of rule by making it *visible* as an artifact of statistical knowledge. The population is a set of representations tied to specific practices through which these representations are created and interpreted. Because the population is understood as natural or given, however, these techniques are understood as ways of measuring and intervening in what is already there.

The importance of the shift from sovereignty to government, then, is that it introduced into history a model of political power that depends on definition, on demarcating and “knowing” the object of the exercise of power. Foucault describes this in terms of systems of “veridiction”, by which he means systems apparently governed by their own, natural rules, rules that determine the right way to deal with those systems. Again, the example of the market is important; market forces of supply and demand, understood as natural or inevitable, provide a system of veridiction that determines what is the right thing for the government to do (Foucault 2008:32). The concern is therefore no longer with “justice” in the classical sense of a distribution of wealth that gives each individual what he or she deserves, but with conceding to the natural laws of the market and finding ways of improving economic outcomes *within* those laws. Western history, Foucault argues, is marked by a transition from systems of jurisdiction to systems of veridiction (Foucault 2008:33).

The natural laws and processes of the population, discovered through statistics, are one such system. In the model of sovereignty, the power of the sovereign was defined spatially, by the boundaries of the territory he could claim to control; in the model of government, the power of the ruler is defined by the characteristics of the population, which is both the means and the end of his rule. As Foucault also notes, this represents a change from a model in which the limit of the power of the ruler was the rights of the ruled, to a model in which the only principle that limits government is efficacy, the ability of a particular policy to improve the situation, as measured through statistics, of the population as a whole (Foucault 2008:10-11).

The idea of the population and its characteristics as a system of veridiction through which the right way to govern could be discerned depended explicitly on the idea that the population itself was a natural fact; the processes that characterize it must be natural in order to constitute a system of veridiction. Knowing the population, then, is not just instrumentally useful for affecting it; without the practices of rule through which it becomes known, there *is* no population.

My primary contention here is that it is both plausible and useful to think of Indian policy in the United States in terms of the *governmentality* of rule. More precisely, the effort to “civilize” or assimilate Indians—the explicit aim of Indian policy for over a century—was an effort to make them into *governable* subjects, individuals who were susceptible to state interventions designed to promote the best possible outcome for the complex of “men and things” which are its object. As I have said

above, governmentality depends on *knowledge* of the population— its size, its demographic makeup, its health, its education, its family relationships, its economic conditions, and so on. In order for such methods to function, therefore, the population must be *knowable*; it must be possible to observe and assess all of these characteristics, and to aggregate them into a picture of the “population” as a whole. Governmental power both *individuates* and *assembles* data; both tasks require that individuals be readily and repeatedly locatable and identifiable, and that their relationships to one another be similarly clearly defined. Excessive variation or difference within the population defeats such efforts, and must be limited. Assimilationist Indian policy, which includes Indian education, aimed at reducing the differences between whites and Indians by pushing individual behavior close to a (white) norm, thereby making Indian societies permeable to this kind of observation and assessment.

In looking at Indian education policies, in particular, the relationship between governmentality and discipline is crucial. The concern with the “security,” in this new broad sense, of the population does not replace discipline and its techniques. Rather, the methods and tactics of discipline continue, and what changes is what those methods are understood to be *for*. Discipline is incorporated into the overarching project of government: “...a technology of security, for instance, will be set up, taking up again and sometimes even multiplying juridical and disciplinary elements and redeploying them within its specific tactic” (Foucault 2008:8-9). This is despite the fact that government and discipline seem to be at least partly at odds, since “By definition, discipline regulates everything,” while “The apparatus of security... ‘lets things happen.’” (Foucault 2008:45). Government seeks to achieve security by making deliberate, informed use of the natural characteristics and tendencies of the population, while discipline seeks to alter the natural character of the individual through precise and continuous monitoring and regulation. Or, put much more simply, government seeks to work with reality, while discipline seeks to alter it (Foucault 2008:47).

In spite of the difference in underlying perspective, however, discipline and government may be complementary, and policies of Indian assimilation help to make this relationship clear. Individuals do not necessarily arrive into the field of view of the state in standard form, so to speak. They may, for instance, lack the kind of family surnames that clarify familial relationships— and with them interests in property— in modern, Western societies. In order to calculate, e.g., tax liabilities, it will therefore be necessary to assign names that durably identify them in a way legible to the state (see Scott et al. 2002 for examples of such programs in other colonial contexts). The fact that Native Americans did not use family surnames, and in fact might receive new names at various points in the course of a lifetime, was a constant source of frustration for white administrators seeking to keep track of particular individuals and their property (Szasz 2007:22). Writing in 1890, as the policy of land allotment was beginning to accelerate, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas J. Morgan, told his agents that

When the Indians become citizens of the United States, under the allotment act, 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 records and by general reputation. Among the other customs of the white people it is becoming important that the Indians adopt that in regard to names (in Prucha 1995:673-4).

In various ways, then, the conventions and practices of Native Americans living in “tribal” societies resisted attempts by white administrators to achieve a “synoptic” view of the population (the term is Scott’s; Scott 1998). In order for Indian societies to be seen as a whole, allowing the kinds of

measurement, assessment, and intervention that characterize the governmental state, the behavior of individuals would need to be adjusted. Discipline, which is first and foremost the breaking down of the individual into a number of more or less quantifiable attributes, each of which can be assessed and serve as a point of intervention, is concerned with exactly these kinds of individualized behavioral adjustments.

BIA schools, and boarding schools in particular, were sites for this disciplinary surveillance and adjustment. Discipline, Foucault tells us,

codifies in terms of the permitted and the forbidden, or rather the obligatory and the forbidden, which means that the point on which the disciplinary mechanism focuses is not so much the things one must not do as the things that must be done. A good discipline tells you what you must do at every moment...in the system of disciplinary regulation, what is determined is what one must do, and consequently everything else, being undetermined, is prohibited (Foucault 2008:46).

By prescribing (at least in theory) the use of every minute of a student's day, Indian boarding schools performed this restriction of behavior. What was left—the permitted—was what was compatible with “civilized” society, and more particularly with the methods by which governmental power sought to understand the characteristics of the population as a whole. In the following section, I will describe some of the ways in which the school performed this function, after a brief overview of the history of Indian education in the United States.

III. Education and Assimilation

1. *Early efforts*

As I have already suggested, white efforts to educate Native Americans by no means began in the 19th century with the federal program administered by the BIA. Education was an important element in the earliest efforts at “civilizing” Native Americans, begun well before the independence of the United States. These efforts, while less centralized and concerted than those under federal auspices later on, show certain revealing commonalities with the later program.

These early efforts were mostly a project of various missionaries or missionary groups, who understood civilization in terms of conversion to Christianity first and foremost. Living a genuinely Christian life was almost synonymous with being civilized; and, conversely, civilization was seen as impossible while Native peoples still held to pagan beliefs. Cotton Mather speculated that Indians had come to the Americas after “the devil decoyed [them] hither, in hopes that the gospel...would never come here to destroy his *absolute empire* over them” (Szasz 2007:106-7; emphasis is Mather's). In many cases, the goal of bringing Christianity and civilization to Native peoples was codified in colonial charters, as in Virginia and Massachusetts; in any case, the major missionary organizations all understood the conversion of the Indians as a central part of their efforts in the Americas (Szasz 2007:5; 46). At the same time, for many Protestant groups, especially the Puritan sects, it was impossible to achieve salvation unless one could read and understand the word of God for oneself (Szasz 2007:35). Therefore literacy, at the very least, was an essential part of both Christianization and civilization. Education and conversion, therefore, were always connected efforts.

Early efforts at educating Native Americans could only be sporadic, however, since missionary groups lacked both personnel and resources; in any case, few children of any race in the colonies received much in the way of formal education. As Szasz notes, only a “minority attended grammar

school, while an even smaller percentage of grammar school graduates went on to college.” For the majority, in contrast, “Whatever basic schooling they mastered was learned in the home or in the colonial equivalent of an elementary school.” By twelve or fourteen years of age, most had begun an apprenticeship or other form of what today would be called vocational education. The only real exceptions were children in urban areas— though these were an increasing proportion of the population by the end of the 18th century (Szasz 2007:31-2). Outside of New England, urban schools were almost exclusively run by particular religious denominations, with nothing approaching a public system of education (Szasz 2007:38).

So, early colonial efforts at the education and Christianization of Native Americans were characterized by isolated projects run by a handful of dedicated individuals. Among the best-known of these is John Eliot, who arrived in America in 1631 and established a school in Roxbury, Massachusetts; later “he instructed Pequot war captives ‘in the habits of industry’” and “encouraged converts to come together in small, self-governing towns where they could be instructed in Christian ethics and arts. In these ‘praying towns,’ Indians were to dress and live like the colonists” (Reyhner and Eder 2014:26). By 1674, there were fourteen such villages, with an Indian population of 1,111; each one had its own school, “generally taught by an Indian schoolmaster” (Szasz 2007:111). Most important for my purposes is that the praying towns were not defined only by their residents’ Christianity; they separated converted Indians entirely from traditional life, placing them in European-style dwellings, wearing European-style clothes, practicing Christianity, and attending schools that taught a European, Christian curriculum. Around a century later, Moravian missionaries in southern New England and the Mid-Atlantic region ran schools with some of the same methods. In particular, “they believed in what Richard Henry Pratt was later to call ‘total immersion.’ Conversion to Christianity was not sufficient; the Moravians also asked the Indians to change every aspect of their culture”; I might note, in particular, that “Upon baptism, all Indians acquired a Christian name” (Szasz 2007:203).

Another important figure was Eleazar Wheelock, born in Connecticut in 1711. Wheelock was one of the key figures in the First Great Awakening of the 1740s, and went on to provide education to a number of Native Americans, most prominently Samson Occom, would become an influential preacher in his own right. Wheelock founded established in Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1754, and the school “served as a hub or, at the very least, a focal point for most of the Indian schools established in the region during the period of the Great Awakening” (Szasz 2007: 200). Wheelock’s efforts there also illustrate patterns that would characterize Indian education going forward, including the idea “to remove children from their homes” to attend the school (Reyhner and Eder 2004:30; see also Szasz 2007:200). Wheelock’s reasons were essentially identical with those of later educators:

Throughout his career, Wheelock remained convinced that community schools could not compete with an educational environment in which children ‘are taken out of the reach of their Parents, and out of the way of *Indian* examples, and are kept to school under good Government and constant Instruction’ (Szasz 2007:234; emphasis is Wheelock’s).

Not until the twentieth century would this logic begin to be questioned, and then only gradually. In general, it was only because of the practical constraints of finance, staffing, and physical space that federal policymakers in the late 19th century did not place *all* Indian children in boarding schools. (Wheelock, for similar reasons, would attempt to establish community schools among the Iroquois in the 1760s, seeing them as preferable to no education at all [Szasz 2007:235-6]).

At Wheelock’s school, a strictly gendered approach to educating Indian children mean that while “the basics of a secular and religious education and husbandry were taught to boys. Girls were taught

subjects suitable for their future roles as wives and mothers” (Reyhner and Eder 2004:30). This pattern, too, was common the federal boarding schools over a century later. Finally, in addition to religious and academic education, Wheelock believed that if Indians were “...‘instructed in Agriculture, and taught to get their living by their labor,’ they would no longer ‘make such Depradations [sic] on our Frontiers’” (Szasz 2007:220). With few alterations, this statement could have been made in the 1870s, by one of the “Friends of the Indian” who passionately advocated allotment and an agricultural lifestyle as a means of civilizing Native Americans (see Prucha 1973; I discuss the centrality of agriculture to federal boarding schools below).

Many colonial institutions of higher education were also established with at least some intention to provide education to Native Americans. Harvard College, for instance, initially included an “Indian College,” funded by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, when it was founded in 1636 (American Indian Policy Review Commission report, in DeJong 1993:26). Moor’s Indian Charity School was moved in 1769 from Connecticut to New Hampshire, where it eventually evolved into Dartmouth College (*ibid*, 32). In Virginia, the College of William and Mary, chartered in 1693, “was partially dedicated to the education of Indian student,” and in its early years “provided schooling for more Indians than any other institution of higher education in colonial America” (Szasz 2007:67, 69). In general, attention to this purpose was short-lived, and few Indian students were ever enrolled in these institutions; even fewer completed degrees in them.

A final noteworthy commonality between the earliest efforts at Indian education and those of the federal schools under the BIA is that white educators were continually surprised and frustrated by the persistence of Indian cultures. As Szasz (2007:260) notes, “Those involved with Indian schooling were unable to account for the persistence of native cultures because they saw no merit in a way of life which, from their perspective, was the antithesis of civilization.” They were, in other words, blinded by ethnocentrism, taking it for granted that, once they became familiar with white ways of doing things, Indians would naturally *choose* to abandon their traditions. This blindness, too, would continue to characterize the efforts of federal educators.

In general, education of Native Americans continued to be handled by religious groups, with governmental support, into the final quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1819, the Indian Civilization Act established a fund of \$10,000 per year, primarily for education. However,

Although the funds were administered by the Indian Office under specific rules and regulations, the actual operation of the Indian schools was left to the religious organizations. Funds were secured by submitting a formal request to the Indian Office describing how the organization planned to use the financial subsidy in 'civilizing' Indian children (DeJong 1993:57).

Missionary organizations in effect contracted with the federal government to provide education to Native children. Through this practice, the ad-hoc pattern of the colonial and early republican period was, to an extent, regularized and brought under federal auspices, but the actual work of running the schools, and the curriculum taught in them, was still largely under the control of the missionary organizations. As Martha Layman suggests in her history of missionary education, “From the time of the passage of the Civilization Act in 1819 to 1873, when federal support of mission schools was discontinued, the missionary was the prime civilizing element among the Indian tribes” (in DeJong 1993:59).

2. *Government Schools*

The dominant position of missionary groups in Indian education continued until after the Civil War (see, e.g., Coleman 1993:38). At that point, several forces began to come together to put new pressure on Native lands and cultures, now primarily in the west.² The westward expansion of the white population, encouraged by the Homestead Act of 1862; the simultaneous expansion of the railroads, which would connect the new western settlements and their products with the large population centers of the east; and the military defeat of the plains tribes by the late 1870s all contributed to a general sense among policymakers that the previous policy of *separating* Indians from white society was no longer tenable. Herbert Welsh, one of the founders of the Indian Rights Association, described the Indian reservations as “islands, and about them a sea of civilization, vast and irresistible, urges” (in Hoxie 2001:12). These islands would eventually, inevitably be inundated, and so it was necessary to find a way of integrating Native peoples into the Euro-American mainstream, much more quickly than current policies seemed to be doing. Coercion would probably be necessary in achieving this, but the ends would justify the means; as Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis A. Walker (1871-1873) wrote in his annual report for 1872:

Unused to manual labor and physically disqualified for it by the habits of the chase, unprovided with tools and implements, without forethought and without self-control, singularly susceptible to evil influences, with strong animal appetites and no intellectual tastes or aspirations to hold those appetites in check, it would be to assume more than would be taken for granted of any white race under the same conditions to expect that the wild Indian will become industrious and frugal except through a severe course of industrial instruction and exercise under restraint (Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1872).

This new sense of urgency, and the accompanying willingness to take drastic action, drove the transition into what is now often referred to as the Assimilation Era, from the 1870s, through (arguably) the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934.³ During this period, the federal government, began a much more concerted program to actively promote Native assimilation, often coercively. Important developments of this period include the end of treaty making between the United States and Native American tribes in 1871; the passage of the Major Crimes Act in 1885; the subsequent validation of that law by the Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Kagama* the following year— in which decision the Court first articulated the so-called Plenary Power Doctrine; the passage of the General Allotment Act in 1887, as well as later elaborations that extended allotment to previously excluded tribes and weakened trust protections for Indian land holders; and, of course, the beginning of a network of federal schools, which would gradually replace mission schools as the main channel through which Native American children received white education.

Education remained central to the goal of “civilizing” Native Americans, and for familiar reasons. First, it was believed that children would prove more adaptable, and more accepting of the lessons of white society. Adams (1995:19) quotes Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Leupp (1905-1909) as saying that “our main hope lies with the youthful generations who are still measurably plastic.” Then, too, formal, structured education had the potential to work *quickly*, which was a

² Many eastern Indians, especially the tribes of the southeast, had been moved to new lands west of the Mississippi through the Relocation Act of 1830. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, most Indians— and, perhaps more importantly, most Indian *lands*— were in the west.

³ For some scholars (e.g., Bilosi 1991), the IRA represented much less of a break with the past than it might appear to; others point out that reforms began earlier, in the 1920s, during the tenure as Commissioner of Indian Affairs of Henry Rhoads (1929-1933). I would argue that, at least, the IRA marks the first time that federal Indian policy did not explicitly aim for the disappearance of Native Americans as distinct societies (see French 2016 for more on this point).

necessity when Indian lands and cultures were under increasing pressure. “By means of the common school, Indians could, in effect, be catapulted directly from savagism to civilization, skipping all the intervening stages of social evolution in between” (Adams 1995:16).⁴ Finally, education—in particular vocational training to prepare Indian children for the work force—would directly help to make Native Americans economically self-sufficient by providing them with skills that could be used to earn a wage, thereby reducing the financial burden on the federal government (Adams 1995:16-17).

The shift from funding of religious groups to government-run schools as the means of achieving these goals was spurred in part by the sense that contract schools under missionary control were simply unsuccessful, in terms of the assimilation of Native children. As DeJong points out, this was at least in part because “the Indian Office failed to set standards for mission school education.” That said, the results were discouraging:

The net result of almost one hundred years of effort and the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars for Indian education was a small number of poorly attended mission schools, a suspicious and disillusioned Indian population, and a few hundred alumni who for the most part were considered outcasts by whites and Indians alike (DeJong 1993:55).⁵

So, for a variety of reasons, the federal government began to place a new emphasis on education for Native American children, and also to move away from funding schools run by religious groups under contract to direct management. As a result, federal resources directed toward education increased dramatically during this period. Between 1877 and 1900, federal appropriations for Indian schools rose from \$20,000 to \$2,936,000; in the same period, the number of Native children enrolled in school went from 3,598 to 21,568 (Adams 1995:26-7).⁶ In contrast, among religious groups, by “1897 only the Catholic church continued to receive federal Indian funds, and those in diminishing amounts” (DeJong 1993:75). By 1900, government contracting with mission schools was ended altogether (Adams 1995:66).⁷

The schools established by the federal government for Native children were always of several kinds. Reservation day schools were located near Indian settlements, allowing children to return home after school each day. Boarding schools could be located either on the reservation or outside of it, and they generally received the lion’s share of funding. The 1887 report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (to take one example) showed that the government’s Indian schools cost \$1,166,025 to operate; “Of this money, about 94 percent went to operate the boarding schools; the remainder was used for day schools.” This was partly because day schools were simply cheaper to operate; there were in fact more day schools operating in that year (90, as compared to 68 boarding schools). (Reyhner and Eder 2004:73).

Despite their cost advantages, however, the reservation day school had a significant weakness, from the perspective of white policymakers: “by itself, it simply was not an effective instrument of

⁴ Adams here is referring to the work of Lewis Henry Morgan, whose influential 1877 book *Ancient Society* delineated a series of evolutionary stages, from savagism to barbarism to civilization, that all human societies supposedly had to go through.

⁵ It is also worth noting the competition between Protestant and Catholic organizations for funding, which further limited the contract schools’ efficacy and led to the withdrawal of several organizations; DeJong 1993, Szasz 1999, and Reyhner and Eder 2004 all discuss these disputes in detail.

⁶ Although the number of Indian children *not* enrolled in school remained a persistent problem as well.

⁷ One should not conclude from this that support for religious conversion and instruction was also ended; church attendance, for instance, was mandatory in federal boarding schools for many years after this, and most Native religious practices were banned or severely curtailed.

assimilation...efforts to raise up the child during school hours, it was argued, were obliterated at night by the realities of camp life” (Adams 1995:29). Day schools, in other words, did not do enough to separate Indian children from their “tribal relations”; the civilization program required that students’ behavior be monitored continuously, or as close to this as possible, so that civilization could become a *habit*. The disciplinary mechanisms of the federal schools would remain ineffective so long as there remains significant places or periods of time in which Native American children were beyond their reach.

Reservation boarding schools were a significant improvement in this regard, allowing more continuous and effective monitoring and control. Students could be kept at the school for most of the year, and the fact that they slept at the school meant that school staff could encourage civilized habits in such areas as grooming and hygiene much more effectively. In 1885, superintendent of Indian schools John H. Oberly (also Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1888-1889) said in his report of that year: “If there were a sufficient number of reservation boarding-school-buildings [*sic*] to accommodate all the Indian children of school age, and these buildings could be filled and kept filled with Indian pupils, the Indian problem would be solved within the school age of the Indian child now six years old”— that is, in about a decade (in Reyhner and Eder 2004:75). Thomas Jefferson Morgan, Commissioner from 1889-1893, similarly claimed that, with proper resources, Indian civilization could be achieved within a generation. Oberly’s report described the functions of the schools in this way:

These schools strip from the unwashed person of the Indian boy the unwashed blanket, and, after instructing him in what to him are the mysteries of personal cleanliness, clothe him with the clean garments of civilized men and teach him how to wear them. They give him information concerning a bed and teach him how to use it; teach him how to sit on a chair, how to use a knife and fork, how to eat at a table, and what to eat. While he is learning these things, he is also learning to read a write, and, at the same time, is being taught to work, how to earn a living (in Adams 1995:30).

The emphasis on personal hygiene is striking here, and it underlines the point that education would not simply provide Indian students with useful knowledge, but alter their way of life on a much deeper level. There is a clear parallel with Eliot’s “praying towns” or the tactics of the Moravian missionaries, described earlier, who insisted that “civilization” required that Native Americans must change every aspect of their way of life. The program here is not merely academic, or vocational; it is comprehensive, focused on making the Native child into a particular *kind* of person— one who could fit into white American culture, as well as its political and economic institutions.

However, reservation boarding schools also came to be seen by many as inadequate in the degree of supervision and control they made possible. Children in reservation boarding schools were frequently subject to “the phenomenon of the relapse, the tendency of the children to slough off newly acquired civilized habits in favor of tribal ones” after they had returned home for vacations (Adams 1995:31). The desire of parents to visit their children at school was also viewed “as a positive nuisance...the problem was that any contact whatsoever awakened in the children a natural longing for camp life” (Adams 1995:32). The off-reservation boarding school soon came to prominence as the best solution to these shortcomings. Of these schools, the first, and in many ways the prototype for all of those that came after, was Carlisle Indian Industrial School, established in an old army barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1879.

Carlisle was the brainchild of Army Captain Richard Henry Pratt, whose first experience with educating Native Americans involved a group of Indian prisoners from the Red River War of 1874. In the face of legal technicalities and at a loss for what to do with these men, the Army decided to hold them at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, under Pratt’s supervision. There, Pratt “decided

to carry out a bold experiment: he would turn his prison into a school for teaching civilization to the Indians” (Adams 1995:37-39; quotation from 39). This experiment involved opening the prison to visits from the public, and having the Native inmates wear military uniforms, monitor themselves with no white guards, and, perhaps most importantly, *work*. The work began with the polishing of “sea beans,” found along local beaches and sold to tourists as jewelry; over time, it included making canoes and bows and arrows, and “painting scenes of traditional Indian life.” The money from the sale of their productions went to the Indians themselves. In time, Indians were allowed to go out into the community as hired laborers— a practice that would later be reflected in the “outing system” at Carlisle (Adams 40-41; quotations from 41). After several months, “it appeared that Pratt...had wrought a near miracle. The Indians had arrived as savages; now they were decent Christian men walking the path of civilization” (Adams 1995:43).

Pratt’s efforts at Fort Marion reflected his belief in the central importance of two elements in any attempt to civilize Native Americans: the first, was regular, orderly habits, especially of work, and the second was regular, sustained interactions with white communities. Both would shape the program he created at Carlisle, and, in turn, the practices of other off-reservation boarding schools.

In 1878, Pratt received word that the prisoners were to be released, and obtained permission to seek further education for them elsewhere. After some difficulty in finding a place, the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, founded and led by Samuel Chapmen Armstrong for the education of African Americans after the Civil War, would take seventeen of the former prisoners. The program at Hampton was very similar to that prescribed by Pratt, both at Fort Marion and later at Carlisle, and was grounded in similar thinking: Armstrong believed that “blacks had emerged from slavery culturally and morally inferior to whites and only under the benevolent tutelage of whites could they hope to make genuine racial progress” (Adams 1995:44-45; quotation from 45). Also similar was Armstrong’s belief “in the principle of self-help and in preparing students to return home with useful skills, not with facts and ideas that they could put to no use” (Molin 1988:84; Reyhner and Eder 2004:115). Only a few weeks after the arrival of Pratt’s former prisoners, Armstrong suggested to the Secretary of the Interior that the number of Indians at Hampton should be increased, and funds were appropriated for an additional 50 Indian students, whom Pratt began actively recruiting from the West (Molin 1988:85; Adams 1995:47).

Not long after his arrival at Hampton, however, Pratt began thinking about leaving. He objected to the fact that, in his view, Indians (as well as African Americans) at Hampton were isolated from white communities, which he believed would limit their advance; he was also “not temperamentally suited to being second in command,” as he was in effect at Hampton (Adams 1995:47). The high profile of his efforts at Fort Marion and at Hampton had led to a general interest in Pratt’s approach, and so, after meeting with various government officials involved with Indian affairs, “Pratt was authorized to recruit 125 students for a new Indian school” (Adams 1995:48). Carlisle opened for its first class of students in November of 1879.

At his new school, Pratt continued and refined several of the ideas he had developed at Fort Marion and at Hampton. He took for granted the eventual disappearance of Native cultures and their replacement with white “civilization,” and, like the proponents of the Dawes Act a few years later, believed that the choice faced by Native Americans was between civilization and extinction. Carlisle’s purpose, as Pratt famously stated it, was to “kill the Indian...and save the man” (Adams 1995:52). He believed strongly in the power of environment to shape individual development, and that one could therefore shape the development of young Indians by controlling their environment. In particular, again, regular and sustained contact with white society was essential.

Pratt told a Baptist group, 'In Indian civilization I am a Baptist, because I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under holding them

there until they are thoroughly soaked.' Carlisle's slogan was, 'To civilize the Indian, get him into civilization. To keep him civilized, let him stay' (Reyhner and Eder 2004:143).

This “immersion method” was embodied in the way the school operated. Upon arriving at Carlisle, Indian students immediately received a short haircut (traumatic for many, since long hair had religious significance for many tribes) and had their “home clothes” taken from them in exchange for a military-style uniform. Students were organized along military lines into platoons and companies, with each commanded by an older “student officer,” and required to march everywhere they went—from dormitory to classroom, classroom to cafeteria, and so on—in formation. Pratt saw the military routine as a way to “instill the personal discipline necessary to succeed in the white man’s world” (Trennert 1988:6; see also Riney 1999:8). Students were also “not allowed to speak their native languages or to practice native singing, dancing, or religion” (Lomawaima 1994:5).

In addition to military regimentation and discipline, work and vocational education were also central to Pratt’s program. Starting at Hampton, he and Armstrong had divided students’ day between academic work and vocational training, with half of the day given to each; this practice was continued at Carlisle. Mornings were spent in the classroom, and during the afternoon “boys worked on the farm or learned to be blacksmiths and carpenters, while the girls received instruction in household skills” (Trennert 1988:6). This “half-and-half” approach would be carried on at other off-reservation boarding schools. Another idea developed at Fort Marion, the “outing system,” placed Indian students in white homes or businesses as workers during summer vacations. The system became perhaps the most well-known piece of the Carlisle approach, and was also adopted, if inconsistently and at smaller scales, at other off-reservation schools.

Policymakers were initially optimistic about the challenge of assimilating Indians through off-reservation boarding schools, at least partly because Carlisle seemed to be making significant headway. In 1887, Superintendent John B. Reilly said of Carlisle:

This school has continued to attract wide attention and affords the best illustration of the transformation that always follows when Indian children are placed in a position favorable to their civilization. No one examining the work of the pupils in the classrooms, on the farm, and in the shops can fail to be impressed with the belief that the great majority of its pupils would, if the same incentives to exertion were open to them that are usually held out to white pupils of the same age, make reliant and self-respecting citizens (Superintendent of Indian Schools, Annual Report, 1887).

Although the apparent success of Pratt’s program was eventually revealed as superficial,⁸ it was in large part due to the influence of Carlisle that “by the late nineteenth century the large, off-reservation boarding school appeared to be the wave of the future (Coleman 1993:42). By 1902, there were 25 such schools in operation (Adams 1995:56). Most, in contrast to Carlisle, were relatively close to reservations, though many (such as the Phoenix and Rapid City Indian schools) were located within or close to white settlements (Reyhner and Eder 2004: 149). Often, students enrolled or “enlisted” for a term of three to five years, and some would not return home for the whole of that time (Riney 1999:7). Though none of these would be as large or as well-known as Carlisle, they were widely seen the best possible venue for the program of civilization through education. Their greatest advantage,

⁸ In particular, in 24 years under Pratt, 158 students graduated from Carlisle; none until 1889 (ten years after opening) and only six in 1893, Pratt’s last year in command of the school (Reyhner and Eder 2004:139). This is despite the fact that, at its height, over 1000 students were enrolled at the school.

obviously, was that they distanced Indian students from home and community, and allowed much greater and more continuous control over their behavior. As Foucault notes, “Discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a space heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the projected place of disciplinary monotony” (Foucault 1977:141). The description of the daily routine of the off-reservation schools, below, will show how apt a description this is.

Before going in to more detail about the educational practices of the off-reservation schools, it is important to make clear that they did not *replace* day schools or reservation boarding schools. All three continued to function simultaneously, and the relationships between them shifted over time. Thomas Jefferson Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1889-1893, tried to systematize this relationship, proposing that the youngest children should attend day schools, older ones the reservation boarding schools, and the oldest and most advanced students the off-reservation schools, which would only ever be able to accommodate a small proportion of Indian children (See Adams 1995:61-2; Riney 1999:21-22). However, practical considerations limited the implementation of this plan, and others like it that would follow in succeeding decades. In reality, the various types of federal schools were often in competition for students and resources, and the parents of Native American children were savvy in using the gaps in the system to get what they believed to be best for their children (see Trenner 1988:36-40 on competition between schools, and Riney 1999:32-42 for examples of the ways in which school administrators were forced to bend policy to accommodate the wishes of Indian parents). So, although my focus is on the off-reservation boarding schools, it is important to keep in mind that many of the practices used in those schools were not unique to them, and that they functioned as one part of a larger, complex, and frequently fragmented system of federal Indian education.

3. All the Bells and Whistles: Education in the Off-Reservation Schools

i. Military Discipline

As I have already suggested, the aim of federal Indian schools generally was the complete transformation of individual Native Americans, and with them, eventually, of Native societies as a whole. A complete cultural and social revolution was envisioned. With this in mind, the most visible aspects of Native traditions were addressed first. As at Carlisle, immediately upon arrival students would receive a short haircut and a school uniform, as well as (in theory) a set of dress clothes and work clothes, and their “home clothes” would be taken from them and locked away, accessible only when returning to the reservation.⁹ At the Phoenix Indian School, students were allowed to keep their own clothing “only long enough to have a photograph taken,” which would be used to create a “before and after” contrast with the image of them in “civilized” clothing (Trenner 1988:115). Students who did not have one might also be assigned an English name (Coleman 1993:83). As Coleman puts it, “The assault on traditional culture began symbolically, with the transformation of the outer child,” and— at least in theory—proceeded inward from there (Coleman 1993:80).

One element of boarding school education that stands out in all accounts is the fact that the schools were run along military lines. This went well beyond the uniforms. As at Carlisle, students were required to march in step from activity to activity, divided into companies under the command of student officers, and required to line up for inspection each morning before breakfast. Students

⁹ As with most policies with regard to Indian education, there were some exceptions; Riney (1999:57) notes that students at the Rapid City Indian School were allowed to keep their own clothes and to wear them during weekend trips into town.

who ran away from school (a constant problem at many schools) were referred to as “deserters,” and most schools maintained a “brig” or jail of some sort for the confinement of those guilty of major infractions.

Since Carlisle was a school founded by a military officer, and housed in military barracks, perhaps the adoption of military-style regimentation, uniforms, and discipline are not surprising. Administrators in other schools, however, also saw such techniques as extremely effective in training Indian children in the habits of civilized life. For example, Harwood Hall, the second superintendent of the Phoenix Indian School, explained to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in a letter in 1897:

Too much praise can not be given to the merits of military organization, drill and routine in connection with the discipline of the school; every good end is obtained thereby. It teaches patriotism, obedience, courage, courtesy, promptness and constancy; besides, in my opinion, it outranks any other plan or system in producing and developing every good moral, mental, and physical quality of the pupil (in Trennert 1988:48).

The belief in the value of military discipline reflected the fact that “[w]hite stereotypes of Indians invariably included elements of ‘wildness,’ of disorder and a lack of discipline or self-restraint...white educators saw powerful meaning in military drill as the antithesis of the supposed Indian character” (Riney 1999: 140). As far back as the early 1600s, John Smith (famous for his role in the story of Pocahontas) described Indians as “inconstant on everie thing, but what feare constraineth them to keepe” (in Szasz 2007:50). This was seen as especially true of Native children, whom both the early missionaries and later federal educators believed were allowed to “run wild” (Coleman 1993:ix). Missionaries “criticized Indian cleanliness and ceremonies, but they were even more critical of the apparent lack of discipline among Indian children. Contrary to European practice, in many tribal cultures the use of corporal punishment was unacceptable...” (Reyhner and Eder 2014:15). So, federal officials saw themselves as supplying a specific deficiency of Native cultures. Introducing habits of reliability and constancy among Indian children through strict discipline naturally became an important pedagogical goal of Indian education.

The assumption that control of children’s bodies could be used to shape their minds was also reflected in the classroom itself. At the Rapid City Indian School, in addition to harsh discipline that could include corporal punishment, teachers “enforced extraordinary control over children’s movements, such as requiring them to sit perfectly still and not look anywhere but at their desks or at the front of the room” (Riney 1999:78). This perhaps does not quite rise to the level of requiring that students “sit with the left leg somewhat more forward under the table than the right [while] a distance of two fingers must be left between the body and the table...” and so on, as prescribed in an eighteenth-century manual quoted by Foucault, but the difference is one of degree rather than kind (Foucault 1977:152).

ii. Keeping Time

This emphasis on military order and routine, by which students’ bodies were carefully monitored and managed, carried over into a concern with the similarly careful management of students’ time. The off-reservation boarding school, where students were most thoroughly separated from their families and communities, was the place in which these aims could be realized most completely—and therefore where the disciplinary mechanisms of Indian education are the most visible.

One of the most visible (and, indeed, audible) aspects of time management in federal boarding schools was the complex, precise schedule applied to students' days, and the marking out of periods within those days using bells, bugles, or whistles (Coleman 1993:86). At every point in the day, the proper use of students' time was prescribed (Trennert 1988:117). Albert H. Kneale, teacher in Indian schools beginning in 1899, wrote that "Our every action of every day was prescribed by a bell, and the bell was controlled by a clock— there was the rising bell, the breakfast bell, the work bell, the school bell, the recall bell, the supper bell, the night school bell, the retiring bell," while "At the Navajo boarding school in Fort Defiance, Arizona, in 1903, the schedule listed twenty-three bells..." (Reyhner and Eder 2004:163) Students at Chilocco were awakened by reveille at 5:30 AM, "the first of twenty-two bugle calls punctuating the daily schedule" (Lomawaima 1994:13). The school day of students at the Rapid City Indian School stretched from 5:30 AM to 9:00 PM, and was divided into increments marked by a complex system of both bells and steam whistles. "No new student could hope to understand Rapid City's complex schedule without considerable practice and coaching" (Riney 1999:117).

All of these mechanisms for dividing and regulating time clearly echo Foucault's comments about the adaptation of the time table to both factories and schools, and the gradual refinement of the divisions of time in order to maximize the precision with which it was managed (Foucault 1977:149-150).

iii. *Work*

The focus of the off-reservation boarding schools was vocational rather than academic, and this would become more true over time rather than less. Schools adopted the "half-and-half" program from Carlisle, but gave even greater emphasis to vocational training. As Trennert (1988:46) notes in his description of the Phoenix Indian School,

the literary [i.e., academic] program never amounted to anything extraordinary...students spent no more than a few hours each day in the classroom...[and] most of the academic work focused on teaching the English language and a few rudimentary subjects such as arithmetic, geography, and American history.

From the beginning, an essential element of the federal program for Indian education was not simply that Indians should go to school and acquire academic skills, but that they should learn productive labor— agricultural labor in particular. Agriculture had long been seen as a necessity for Indian civilization, and indeed survival. As farmers, Native Americans would be economically self-sufficient and acquire the habits of industry and discipline that modern society demanded. At the same time, they would require less land, leaving more open to white settlement (Adams 1995:6; see also French 2015). From the earliest white settlement, the supposed failure of Indians to cultivate their land was seen as weakening their claim to it; John Quincy Adams, for example, argued in 1810 that Indians, as hunters, "have no idea of a title to the soil itself. It is overrun by them, rather than inhabited" (quoted in Perdue 1999:120).

The policy of allotment was intended to force Indians to turn to agriculture by leaving them with few resources other than a plot of land, which was to become their private property. In 1885, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price argued that "It should be industriously and gravely impressed upon [Native Americans] that they must abandon their tribal relations and take lands in severalty, as the corner-stone of their complete success in agriculture, which means self-support, personal independence, and material thrift" (Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,

1885: iv).

Indeed, policymakers had continually emphasized manual labor and vocational training throughout the nineteenth century. Commissioners of Indian Affairs beginning with Thomas Hartley Crawford (1838-1845) emphasized training in manual labor in Indian schools as the most practical approach. The next Commissioner, William Medill (1845-1849), wrote in his 1845 annual report:

Experience has clearly demonstrated the superiority of schools conducted on the manual labor system. The mere teaching of letters to the savage mind is not sufficient to give new direction to his pursuits, or render him useful to his people. It is known that strong prejudices exist among many of the tribes against schools, and it is only by actual observation, by demonstrating the advantages of learning, that the Indian can be made to feel its importance. This can only be done by combining with letters such studies as call forth the energies of the body, and inspire a taste for the arts of civilized life... (in Reyhner and Eder 2004:46).

This emphasizes the fact that, as Riney notes, manual labor in schools was seen as both direct training for employment and a pedagogical technique in itself. “Regardless of the value of the crafts, the belief went, manual training bred necessary traits of character” in addition to essential “work skills that would facilitate their assimilation” (Riney 1999:76). (Since much of the work that students actually spent their time doing at many schools involved basic maintenance and chores, like laundry and cleaning, that were necessary to keep the school running, belief in the pedagogical value of work in itself was sometimes convenient as well). As one superintendent of the Phoenix Indian School put it, “Indolence is the cankerworm of progress, so our pupils are taught to kill the worm” (Trennert 1988:68).

With this background in mind, it is no surprise that federal Indian schools placed great emphasis on labor in general and agricultural training in particular. As time went on, in fact, vocational training gradually supplanted academic work, which became more basic and took up less of students’ time. This emphasis underlines the fact that Indians were not simply being educated for education’s sake; they were being made into *workers*—economically productive individuals whose labor would produce quantifiable, calculable outputs and contribute to the overall economic well-being of the population. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan, speaking to an audience in Phoenix in support of the establishment of a boarding school there, portrayed “Uneducated native children...as obstacles to progress, while those with training would become producers and wage earners contributing to the general prosperity” (Trennert 1988:22). This emphasis clearly reflects the governmental imperatives that underlay Indian policy in general. White policymakers, who believed that Native American cultures put insufficient pressure on individuals to work, indeed wanted to make them work *more*, but the governmental imperatives of the state also required that this labor take a form that could be measured, assessed, compared, and adjusted for maximum efficiency. Even if policymakers could have been convinced of the amount of labor that was involved in traditional Native ways of life (a tall order), the lack of quantifiable production, or (often) of a marketable surplus, would have led them to rule that labor invalid.¹⁰ By commercial agriculture on privately-owned land suited these requirements, as did the practice of a trade or even wage labor, much better than traditional, subsistence forms of production.

The boarding school at Chilocco, Okalahoma, was founded in 1885 as the Haworth Institute, but its name was later changed to the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School, and farming and agricultural training remained the central focus of the school through the 1930s (Lomawaima 1994:9).

¹⁰ We might think in comparison of the devaluing of the care work and household labor typically done by women.

Farming was also central to most of the other schools, and even those where the land was not particularly suited for agriculture, like Rapid City, maintained a farm if only for teaching purposes.

Work would also encourage the *individualization* of Native American children. A persistent perception among white policymakers was that the failure of Indians to advance to “civilization” was due in part to the fact that “tribal life placed a higher value on the tribal community than individual interests. Never was this more true than in the economic realm” (Adams 1995:22). Once again, this belief was reflected in the arguments for allotment as well. In 1876, Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Q. Smith likewise claimed that that “It is doubtful whether any high degree of civilization is possible without individual ownership of land” (quoted by Prucha, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Otis 1973:4). Senator Dawes himself made the point clearly in a speech to the lake Mohonk conference of 1888, in which he said that what was needed was to:

Take him [the Indian], though grown up and matured in body and mind, take him by the hand and set him upon his feet, and teach him to stand alone first, then to walk, then to dig, then to plant, then to hoe, then to gather, and then to *keep*. When he begins to understand that he has something that is his exclusively to enjoy, he begins to understand that it is necessary for him to preserve and keep it, and it is not a great while before he learns that to keep it he must *keep the peace*; and so on, step by step, the individual is separated from the mass, set up upon the soil, made a citizen, and instead of a charge he is a positive good, a contribution to the wealth and strength and power of the nation (Dawes 1888:29-30; emphasis in original).

The description of the tribe as a “mass” here is revealing, and consistent; Theodore Roosevelt would famously describe the Allotment Act as a “mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass” (Roosevelt, Annual Message to Congress, 1901). As long as they lived within their “tribal relations,” individual Native Americans were relegated to being part of an undifferentiated mass; civilizing them meant separating the individual from this mass, and teaching him to distinguish his own interests from those of the group. Education, Adams explains, would do this in a couple of ways; first, by teaching Indian children to work, which would allow them to create products, and wealth, in which they had invested sweat and toil, and second, by directly “inculcat[ing them] with the values and beliefs of possessive individualism” in the classroom (Adams 1995:22). Merrill Gates, chairman of the Board of Indian Commissioners, argued that the key to civilizing the Indian was “to *awaken in him wants*. In his dull savagery he must be touched by the wings of the divine angel of discontent” (in Adams 1995:23; emphasis is Gates’s). By familiarizing Indian children with the material advantages of white civilization, and emphasizing that those advantages came to those who worked for them, schools could help to achieve this. This was done directly in many cases by the fact that students were often paid for their labor, especially those who worked for white employers through the outing system (e.g. Coleman 1993:114).

Put together, the combination of military discipline and regimentation, surveillance, precise time management, and the emphasis on labor and vocational training paint a clear picture of what “civilization” meant to the white policymakers who ran the off-reservation boarding schools. The focus was not only on what should be abandoned (Native American cultures and traditions), but what, specifically, should be adopted. It was not sufficient for Indians to become *different*; nor would the emulation of just any part of white society be acceptable. (Indeed, limiting the influence of less respectable elements of white society was a constant work for BIA officials, in and out of the schools). The habits and ideas that Native children were supposed to adopt were precisely those that would allow them to fluidly become an element in a population whose characteristics could be measured through statistics, and shaped through the policies of a modern, governmental state.

IV. Conclusion

The preeminence of off-reservation boarding schools in the federal Indian education program was relatively short-lived. Even at the very beginning of the twentieth century, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Leupp (1905-1909) sought a shift toward day schools (Reyhner and Eder 2004: 106). There were several reasons for this. First, day schools, again, were much cheaper to operate than boarding schools (either on- or off-reservation), and the struggle with inadequate appropriations was a constant theme for BIA officials. Second, Leupp believed that civilization would be more effective if educated Indians were able to influence their own people; it was therefore preferable to have them living on the reservations. Leupp referred to day schools as “outposts of civilization,” which, because they were “Situated near the homes of the old people, they are centers from which radiate some measure of better living, better morals, and better habits generally” (in Reyhner and Eder 2004: 106).

At the same time, the shift away from boarding schools also reflected diminished expectations for Indian civilization. After more than two decades, it was becoming clear that the boarding schools, including Carlisle, had not in fact worked the miracle that was expected of them. And both the public and policymakers increasingly felt that, at least in the short term, Native Americans could not be expected to reach white standards of education or “civilization” (Reyhner and Eder 2004:107-108). This more pessimistic outlook was seen as early as 1901, in the *Uniform Course of Study* (UCS) created by Superintendent of Indian Schools Estelle Reel. The UCS “discouraged ‘theoretical and experimental work’ in favor of ‘habits of industry, cleanliness, and system,’” and “reflected [Reel’s] limited view of Indian capabilities” (Reyhner and Eder 2004:97-98). As it was implemented, the level of academic work taught in Indian schools was reduced to the most basic levels of literacy and numeracy.

Though some contemporaries, like Pratt and Thomas J. Morgan, criticized Reel’s approach, and would continue to do so, views similar to hers were finding favor at the highest levels, and Leupp’s approach to Indian education would seem to reflect it. A statement he made before the House of Representatives in 1905 makes this fairly clear:

The Indian is a natural warrior, a natural logician, a natural artist. We have room for all three in our highly organized social system. Let us not make the mistake, in the process of absorbing them, of washing out of them whatever is distinctly Indian. Our aboriginal brother brings, as his contribution to the common store of character, a great deal that is admirable and which needs only to be developed along the right line. Our proper work with him *is his improvement, not transformation* (in Reyhner and Eder 2004:109-110; my emphasis).

As this statement also suggests, declining expectations had the “unintended side effect” of diminishing the emphasis on the eradication of Indian cultures (Reyhner and Eder 2004:108). Reel’s plan, in fact, included the use of traditional Native arts and crafts in the classroom. This opening to Native traditions, however limited, may have helped make the later transition to a much more Indian-centered (if still highly selective) curriculum under Commissioner John Collier in the 1930s. However, any improvement in this regard must always be seen against the backdrop of a growing pessimism about the academic capacities of Native American children.

Indian boarding schools are among the most infamous of the many measures adopted by federal policymakers in pursuit of Indian assimilation in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. The coercive practices used to bring students into the schools, the ethnocentrism and racism that

prompted administrators to ban native languages and religious practices, and the fact that the targets of the policy were children— sometimes very young children— have all solidified the impression of the boarding schools as among the most destructive of government institutions (which indeed they were) affecting Native Americans.

The schools, however, were of a piece with the perspectives and approaches of policymakers more generally. I have tried to show that this approach was oriented not only by the belief that Indians needed to assimilate to white American society, but that “assimilation” was defined in ways that were consistent with longer-term historical developments in the understanding of what political authority is for, and how it should operate. This approach locates assimilationist Indian policies, including the boarding schools, in the larger context of an expanding duty of states to care for the well-being of society as a whole. Modern government, according to Foucault, requires a population that is “legible” to the state, and that in turn often necessitates programs and policies to transform societies to increase their legibility. Education policies, and the larger goal of assimilation or “civilization” more generally, should be seen as, in part, an effort at making Native Americans into legible, governable subjects. They stand out primarily in that their emphasis was on the bodies and minds of individual Indian children, who, if brought into the closed, disciplinary space of the boarding school, could be subjected to continual surveillance and adjustment in order to transform them into governable subjects.

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