Learning Legacies
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CHAPTER FOUR

Reclaiming Voices from Indian Boarding School Narratives

Pratt: It was a transformation, you must admit. When you first came to the school, you were . . .
Luther Standing Bear: A savage?
Pratt: You were . . . unschooled, unsophisticated. You were an Indian.
Luther: I still am. Imagine.
—N. Scott Momaday, The Moon in Two Windows

“Your quotation, ‘Kill the Indian, save the man,’ binds you to the attitudes that were already in place in your time, attitudes that would subject Indian people to cultural genocide. . . . I voice this letter to you now because I speak for me, no longer invisible, and no longer relegated to the quiet margins of American culture. . . . Writing is a way for me to claim my voice, my heritage, my stories, my culture, my people, and my history.”
—Laura Tohe, “Introduction: Letter to General Pratt,”
No Parole Today

Learning to Listen Across Cultures

On Wednesday, April 6, 2011, I attended a half-day workshop at the national convention for the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), a division of the National Council of Teachers of English. Facilitated by a group of Native scholar-teachers, the program introduced attendees to resources for teaching writing, rhetoric, and culture from a perspective honoring American Indian communities. The presentation team embodied the rich diversity among Indian nations while communicating shared value systems to inform the teaching of participants, most of whom (like me) were white Euro-Americans.
Part of what drew me to the session was its title: “Standing Peachtree: Trading Ideas about American Indian Rhetorical Texts with ‘All Our Relations.’” The ending words referenced the conference theme, selected by Malea Powell (mixed Miami/Shawnee/Euro-American),¹ that year’s conference director/organizer. The opening terms, meanwhile, combined a “Peachtree” allusion that resonated for me as a former Atlanta resident, aware of the city’s many Peachtree streets and avenues, with a reminder that before white Georgians settled in the region, the area had been the longstanding home of Native Americans.² While a faculty member at Kennesaw State, before moving to Texas, I had devoted a good deal of energy to teaching about these earlier residents, the Cherokee who had also lived (and still live) in my own original home state of North Carolina. For example, the Keeping and Creating American Communities (KCAC) grant-funded program, referenced in chapter 2, included study of Cherokee history and literature. That project had made me eager to learn more, especially about approaches that would encourage students to connect with Native people today, rather than thinking of Indian Country as only a culture long “removed.”

My first moments in the workshop were disconcerting, I admit. I slipped in after the session had already begun, since my plane from Dallas/Fort Worth arrived late. The packed room percolated with unfamiliar language. Professor Qwo-Li Driskill had immersed everyone in a lively introduction to Cherokee vocabulary. As s/he circled the tables, s/he prompted dialogue through repetition.³ I had trouble joining in the conversation. Having missed the first example exchanges, I strained to listen. I stumbled over words. Though a veteran of foreign language immersion courses in both French and Italian, I found the Cherokee sound sequences difficult to process.

My struggle to understand reminded me how hard it must have been for Indian boarding school students when they first arrived at unfamiliar places where only English was spoken. At the same time, I realized that the nods and smiles from Professor Driskill, reinforced by an openness to the occasional question in English, represented a far cry from the brutal approach to “English only” employed in settings like Carlisle Indian School in the late nineteenth century. Here, in this supportive workshop, there were no suggestions that our lack of knowledge of the new language marked us as uncivilized, no associated requirements that we change our familiar clothing, or give up home-taught social practices, as part of a cross-cultural curriculum. The contrast was striking, even as the good-natured efforts of
my fellow students, being gently corrected by our teacher, underscored the value of honoring a language we would never master ourselves.

Unlike students at assimilation-oriented boarding schools “for” Native Americans, I have never been pressed to give up my home language completely. The closest I’ve ever come to that experience hardly compares as an assault on my self-image. As a teacher just moved to mid-Michigan from coastal Georgia years earlier, I had sat nervously through a principal’s debriefing after his first observation of my middle school classroom. I was relieved that he had nothing but praise to share—until he issued a seemingly nonnegotiable closing directive: “You need to lose that southern accent right away. The kids and parents will never respect you if you go on sounding like that.”

Reluctant to resist overtly, I commiserated at home that night with my husband, also a southerner, who had been warned repeatedly that his career in television news required him to develop a Midwestern nonaccent accent. Somehow, I argued, I couldn’t see the harm in asking my Michigan students to listen to a Carolina voice. Flashing back to that memory in the midst of lively Cherokee language sounds circulating around the room, I called up a more pleasant classroom scene than that painful assessment from my former school administrator. At another Michigan school several years later, in a more welcoming multicultural environment, several of my students regularly teased me on Monday mornings. “You’ve been talking to your sister again, on the phone, over the weekend; your accent is always more pronounced on Mondays.”

Native American students who were placed in boarding school settings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries didn’t get to talk with their families on the weekend. They didn’t get to reconnect regularly with their home cultures. For long stretches of time, sometimes for years, even, they were cut off from their families, discouraged or even forbidden to return home in the summers. Reconnecting with home, after all, would get in the way of assimilation.

In that context, this chapter turns to a more vexed, and highly punitive, approach to cross-cultural teaching than those examined up to now, to consider the legacy wrought by the culture-suppressing curricular program carried out in residential schools aimed at young Native Americans. The teaching sites at the heart of the previous two chapters—Spelman and Hull-House—were both implicated in debates about the best ways to educate the students they served. In both cases, we can point to ways in which white social power shaped the content, guided the instructional strategies,
and affected the resources available for cross-cultural teaching. But in both those other cases collaboration across racial, ethnic, regional, and generational lines supported educational aims shared by all participants, by white teachers and minority students alike, even during their nineteenth-century founding years. In addition, from the start, both these institutions, Spelman and Hull-House, served learners who chose to attend.

In contrast, the foundational site for defining the Indian assimilation agenda—Carlisle—could hardly be described as fostering collaborative learning or as building a supportive community. The Indian assimilation program embodied in Carlisle, and extended to its many imitators, was imposed on Native students as part of a large-scale, national-level effort to address the so-called Indian problem through cultural erasure. Further, although some Native parents “chose” to send their students to residential schools, they did so in response to overwhelming material and political pressures that had deprived tribal communities of land, resources for sustaining daily life (including basics such as food, clothing, and housing), and self-governance. Thus, the cross-cultural teaching situation represented by the Indian boarding school movement was, at its core, purposefully destructive. This stance is clearly signaled in the infamous statement by the founder of Carlisle, Richard Henry Pratt, to whom Laura Tohe’s “letter,” excerpted at the head of this chapter, is addressed. The learning legacy of Indian boarding schools like Carlisle, therefore, exemplifies what my introduction termed a “Negative Archive.” And yet, ironically, this legacy has been a highly generative one, producing two distinctive brands of counter-narratives.

Through the history of assimilationist boarding schools aimed at Native Americans, we can trace both the power of dominant narratives shaping those programs and the growing force, over time, of counter-narratives resisting that movement. The dominant narrative—including related beliefs about “savage” Indian identity and supposedly limited learning capacities—was not always articulated in an explicitly suppressive form. Similarly, resistant responses were (and still are) expressed in mixed messages as well as forceful, overt defiance. As such, the counter-narratives opposing the residential school movement’s agenda have also come in multiple forms, ranging from attacks on the abuses linked to the program to the presentation of alternative positive models for cross-cultural teaching.

Both elements in this two-pronged rhetorical engagement with the Negative Archive of boarding schools—generating critique and offering positive alternatives—can align with a strategy for Native intellectual lead-
ership outlined by Robert Allen Warrior in *Tribal Secrets*. Warrior argues for a Native commitment to seeking intellectual sovereignty by drawing from both Indian and Euro-American resources. Part of that process, he suggests, involves using the tools of the oppressor’s own education system (which, in the context of this chapter, is embodied in the assimilationist boarding school movement) to build “technical and critical knowledge of how the society that dominates us works.” This stance, he notes, results in “critical knowledge of what has happened in this history of that dominating society that helps explain the situations in which we find ourselves.” Adopting such an approach to knowledge building (and associated social power), Warrior suggests, does not translate to accommodation or an uncritical assimilation. Instead, by avoiding the false dichotomy of either “abandoning ourselves to the intellectual strategies and categories of white, European thought” or “declaring that we need nothing outside of ourselves and our cultures in order to understand the world and our place in it,” true intellectual sovereignty combines knowledge-making systems from the white world with situated practices from Native cultures.

Accordingly, this chapter and the next recognize the ongoing narrative/counter-narrative interplay between Euro-American/settler/dominant education systems and Native visions for learning across cultures. Chapter 4 will demonstrate how Native writers have forcefully critiqued the boarding school system and its heritage, sometimes by applying Euro-American analytical tools to revise its history, thereby reconfiguring a Negative Archive. Chapter 5 will focus on alternative educational models for cross-cultural instruction grounded in Native practices of cultural transmission: more than a rejection of the oppressive heritage of the assimilationist boarding school program, this creative Archive presents its own positive vision for teaching and learning. In chapter 4, the counter-narratives under review generally assume a resistant stance somewhat similar to those used by chapter 2’s African American women writers seeking to “counter” the negative discursive power of demeaning representations and longstanding social policies directed against them. Often located within institutional settings shaped (and constrained) by white values, these learning legacies have frequently constructed self-consciously hybrid voices. In chapter 5, somewhat parallel to the distinctive social practices imported into settlement education programs by immigrants themselves, as referenced in chapter 3, I celebrate alternative knowledge systems and associated teaching models drawn from Indigenous traditions to offer up alternative pathways for cross-cultural learning.
In both chapter 4 and chapter 5, I assume a position of learner rather than expert. Thus, in chapter 4 I review powerful critiques of boarding school ideology mounted by Indian writers in the assimilation era and more recently, and I point to the layered legacies of these critiques as an Archive applying strategies of rhetorical pragmatism that other marginalized peoples can tap into when seeking their own educational sovereignty. In chapter 5, I affirm both the vision and particular practices of teaching as modeled by Native educators from the past and today. Embracing this rich legacy’s focus on story-based knowledge-making, and on empathetic listening and dialogue to build community across cultures, I call for a related revitalization of American education, overall.

Two figures will stand out in this chapter as writers and as teachers: Zitkala-Ša and Elaine Goodale Eastman. Starting from contrasting perspectives, each of these women produced widely read accounts of the program enacted at Carlisle Indian School, the most influential site of assimilation teaching of its day. Each author published significant narratives responding to Carlisle-inspired agendas. Zitkala-Ša, a Yankton Sioux whose career included acclaimed musical performances and community leadership as well as print-based authorship, generated numerous counter-narratives invoking blends of the rhetorical approaches described above. She attacked the abuses of assimilation-based teaching, on the one hand, and provided adaptable alternative models, on the other. Her impact on other Native women writers has been so extensive that Laura L. Terrance describes Zitkala-Ša as an “intellectual ancestor” and asserts: “As Native feminists we are her descendants” (“Resisting Colonial Education,” 625). Elaine Goodale Eastman, who may be best known today for her writing partnership with her husband, Charles (Ohiseya) Eastman (Santee Sioux), also published her own writing, some of it promoting a complex brand of assimilation education both linked to and resisting the Carlisle model. Although her impassioned attacks on the military assault at Wounded Knee and other pro-Indian writings prompted intense criticism from whites during her own lifetime, Goodale Eastman’s texts, overall, reflect the internal struggles among many self-anointed “friends of the Indian” who fell far short of fully empathetic intercultural awareness. Juxtaposing these two teacher-authors, we gain a heightened sense of the practical and rhetorical challenges facing all those involved in Indian education during that pivotal era.

With writings by Zitkala-Ša and Elaine Goodale Eastman as key examples, this chapter will focus on Natives’ and others’ critiques of (and resistance against) dominant narratives linked to assimilationist boarding
schools. In my own teaching, I’ve come to recognize the power of analyzing negative examples. A professional development exercise often assigned to both preservice and current teachers today asks them to articulate a philosophy by writing out a description of classroom activities and linking it to an associated value system. Once I started using this technique in my methods classes for future teachers, or when facilitating sessions with practitioners, I noticed that their “visioning” texts frequently revisited their most painful experiences as learners—a “bad” teacher, unsupportive school, or inflexible, constraining curriculum. At first I found this pattern puzzling. Gradually, I grasped the efficacy of the negative example as a tool for reflection and future action. Although “majority” students and teachers would very rarely, if ever, have a past history with abusive education comparable to Indian residential school settings, their reevaluations of problematic moments in their learning histories can still be a powerful tool for projecting forward to future teaching. In this sense, the Indian boarding school movement provides striking negative cases from which we all can learn. Thus, an important body of writing to examine within the context of this book’s project is the still-growing set of narratives condemning the many abusive elements in assimilationist education. Through this Archive, despite its origins in pain, we can find adaptable ways to resist oppressive teaching—whether a particular classroom tactic such as silencing minority views through micro-aggressions; or a larger strategy such as suppressing inquiry-based teaching by overvaluing standardized assessments; or a pervasive political agenda pushing refugees from “outlier” homelands to erase their home cultures (as, say, seen in a headscarf or observed in a type of prayer or practices via key foodways) from public school classrooms.

Boarding Schools’ Enforced Assimilation

The troubling history of boarding schools for Native American youth has been well documented, but it certainly merits summarizing here, both in terms of its starkly abusive elements and as a site that did empower some students as individuals and as members of a Pan-Indian community.8 Overall, the assimilation program for Native education evolved within a larger framework of US-Indian relations.

In Education for Extinction, David Wallace Adams connects the initial impetus to educate Indians to government policy seeking “civilization” of Native peoples, as articulated in early nineteenth-century writing by Thomas Jefferson and enacted legislatively soon afterwards via an 1819
congressional appropriation for a “Civilization Fund.” Adams indicates that this “civilization” phase of Indian education by US whites was “carried out mainly by missionary societies,” whose (at least partially) altruistic efforts were often undermined by land-hungry white settlers (6). The next stages were far more aggressive and more directly linked to military conquest. Through the 1870s, Adams suggests, subjugation replaced civilization as the overarching goal of whites to address what was frequently dubbed the “Indian problem.” On the one hand, well-meaning (if politically limited) white reformers like Helen Hunt Jackson sought to advocate for Native peoples. On the other hand, once Indian nations had been contained militarily, government policy shifted to ensuring long-term control through an aggressive enterprise pressuring Native youth to reject their own culture.

Significantly, the federally funded, government-run version of the assimilation movement arose at a time when debates about the best educational programs for African Americans had led some leaders to promote “industrial” or vocational curricular models as a preferable alternative to providing blacks with access to liberal arts learning, as outlined in chapter 2. Parallel to such institutions as Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee, the curriculum developed in many federally sponsored boarding schools for Native Americans emphasized “training” for manual labor—such as farming skills for boys/men and bourgeois homemaking ones for girls/women. Even in its most benign forms, such as those touted by Washington’s famous Atlanta Exposition speech, this curriculum carried with it inherent limits. In line with racial ideology of the period, to focus exclusively on industrial training presupposes the incapability of minority students to attain higher levels of intellectual achievement.

At the same time, whatever the specific content of an “industrial” curriculum, these schools operated under the assumption that the values and social practices associated with white “civilization” were so obviously superior that students would—sooner or later—embrace white ways and reject their own racial identities. The recurring use of “before and after” photographs to convey a contrast between African Americans and Natives who had not completed such a schooling process, versus those who had, constantly reinscribed this ideology for the public. For just one example, we can look to the photographs in the Hampton Album of Frances B. Johnston.

The two groups targeted for industrial education—African Americans and Indians—actually came together at Hampton Normal and Agricultural
Institute, which was established with a goal of serving African Americans but began enrolling Indians in 1878. General Samuel Chapman Armstrong (1839–93), a child of missionary parents who had worked for the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in Hawai‘i, was the influential principal of Hampton. As a Yankee officer during the Civil War, Armstrong had volunteered to lead one of the first contingents of black soldiers. After the war, he drew on his missionary impulses and his army leadership skills (including a stint as head of a local Freedmen’s Bureau) to preside over a new school for the freedmen in Hampton, Virginia, which opened in 1868.

The motivation behind the expansion of the Hampton student body to include Native Americans was an alliance between Armstrong and Richard Henry Pratt, who would soon adapt the Hampton program to found a separate institution, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, in Pennsylvania. Armstrong’s rationale for expanding Hampton to serve two racial minorities was both idealistic and pragmatic. “Armstrong firmly believed that his philosophy at Hampton could be applied to all ‘backward races,’” says biographer Robert Francis Engs, who suggests a link between Armstrong’s conflation of Hawaiian and African American racial identities and the assumption that the Hampton curriculum would be equally appropriate for blacks and Native Americans. The decision to bring Indians to Hampton was also grounded in the very practical benefit of generating income. Lacking an endowment, Armstrong was always on the lookout for funds. Being able to charge the government for Indian students helped Hampton’s bottom line.13

If Armstrong was ambitious for Hampton, Pratt had his own craving for a national-level leadership role addressing the “Indian problem.” Accordingly, just as Hampton became the template for a number of other institutions offering African Americans industrial/vocational education, Pratt’s Carlisle would play an influential (and pernicious) part in shaping other Indian boarding schools.

That Pratt’s initial efforts at Native American “education” originated in his being the jailer for prisoners captured during Western Indian wars is, of course, telling, given the ways that his eventual leadership of Carlisle would take on a military-cum-incarceration tone. Charged in the spring of 1875 with transporting a band of defeated warriors to Fort Marion in coastal Florida, Pratt soon attracted the attention of wealthy, prominent white vacationers in the area by experimenting with a combination of military drills, basic literacy instruction, and work assignments outside the fort
for his charges. By 1877, Pratt had used his growing network of supporters to gain access to Hampton for a number of his prisoner-students, and, in alliance with Armstrong, had convinced officials in Washington to approve government funding for Indian students, with Pratt himself heading west into Dakota Territory to recruit a cohort.

Before long, it was clear to many at Hampton (including Booker T. Washington, then serving as a “house father” in one Indian dormitory) that the two groups of students had very different needs, as seen in everything from varying food preferences to the contrasts in language backgrounds. Thus, although Indians continued to be enrolled at Hampton, and government subsidies for that purpose continued until 1912, Pratt pressed for a separate school in Carlisle, in what had been a military barracks. Carlisle opened in 1879, with Pratt himself at the helm until 1904, by which time attendance had risen to over 1,000. Having been promised additional funding for more than the 150 students with whom he began, assuming the experiment showed signs of success (from the perspective of white political leaders, that is), Pratt was highly vested in demonstrating the efficacy of his curriculum. As for its forerunner at Hampton, therefore, the public relations enterprise for Carlisle was crucial to its growth—as well as to replicating the industrial training program at other boarding schools founded in succeeding years across the West. From this need, the dominant narrative of assimilationist Indian education emerged.

The figure of Pratt himself was at the center of this public relations campaign, which convinced government leaders to support increased appropriations, including a supplement to Pratt’s own military salary. Expansion at Carlisle and implementation at other institutions in the East (Pratt’s preference) lost ground, however, once the actual dollar cost that would be required to educate all Indian youth in facilities far from their Western homes began to sink in among political leaders. Philosophical differences also played a part in the gradual decline of Pratt’s influence. Even as they continued to praise Pratt for his work, leaders like John Oberly (an Indian commissioner under Grover Cleveland) argued that on-reservation schools would be more efficient than institutions in the East. Commissioner Thomas Jefferson Morgan (under President Benjamin Harrison) also advocated on-reservation day and boarding schools. Predictably, Pratt opposed such moves, arguing that residential schools far from the reservation were essential to ensuring full assimilation.

Pratt’s intense, uncompromising, and aggressive personality also played a part in the increasingly conflicted relationships with government offi-
cials that eventually led to his being removed from leadership at Carlisle in 1904. By then, however, the Carlisle model had already spread to numerous other institutions. More importantly, perhaps, the ideology driving Pratt’s program had taken hold in the larger culture in ways that would constrain American Indians’ access to intellectual sovereignty and political agency—as well as delimit whites’ perceptions of Native people—for generations.

Documenting Boarding Schools’ Impact

Many scholars have underscored the debilitating effects assimilationist boarding schools had on Native students and their families. Caskey Russell (Tlingit, Alaska), for example, has chronicled ways in which “Indians are still haunted by the boarding school legacy”; he notes that the oppressive practices of the system have left “today’s Indian children with a strong distrust of the American education system,” impeding their opportunities to succeed academically even now. In Education for Extinction, David Wallace Adams casts the residential schooling system as a horrific extension of the efforts to eradicate Indian culture on Western battlefields:

For tribal elders who had witnessed the catastrophic developments of the nineteenth century—the bloody warfare, the near-extinction of the bison, the scourge of disease and starvation, the shrinking of the tribal land base, the indignities of reservation life, the invasion of missionaries and white settlers—there seemed to be no end to the cruelties perpetrated by whites. And after all this, the schools. After all this, the white man had concluded that the only way to save Indians was to destroy them, that the last great Indian war should be waged against children. They were coming for the children. (336–37)

Similarly, Ward Churchill’s Kill the Indian, Save the Man, which draws on Pratt’s own language for its title, chronicles what its subtitle characterizes as The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools. As noted in George Tinker’s introductory essay, Churchill shows “that the Indian schools were consciously designed as part of the colonizers’ imperial project” (“Preface,” xiii). David H. Dejong has called attention to the many health issues associated with boarding schools. Having documented various manual labor situations (such as “steam-filled laundries”) as par-
particularly harmful, he points out that “[s]ome schools became synonymous with death and disease,” with epidemics of tuberculosis and smallpox only made worse by the push to boost enrollments. Along with overcrowding, he notes, unhealthy diets contributed to many students’ ill health, as did such draconian practices as nailing windows shut to discourage runaways.19

Much of the criticism of boarding schools has focused on the programs’ undermining of home-based (both parental and tribal) teaching of children, as well as the brutality evident in the forcible round-ups that were frequently a part of the so-called recruitment of students. Thus, Ward Churchill has argued: “There can be no question whether the transfer of children upon which the residential school system depended was coercive, that it was resisted by indigenous parents and others adults—and often, to the extent that they were able, by the youngsters themselves—or that physical force was used to overcome that resistance” (Kill the Indian, 16). Charles L. Glenn’s review of scholarship on residential schools in both Canada and the United States stresses the “damage to the relationships between Indian children and their parents, their ancestral culture, and their ability to function as members of their tribal societies.”20

Consistent with Glenn’s move to address both US and Canadian settings, recurring themes in the scholarly critiques of the boarding school programs—whether run as religious or secular enterprises—echo much postcolonial writing about settings beyond North America.21 For example, in both fiction and nonfiction texts, African author Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o has mounted vigorous depictions of colonizers using schools to support an agenda of conquest in places like his native Kenya.22 Similarly, scholars have traced telling parallels between the enforced round-ups and residential teaching of Aboriginal children in Australia and those in the United States.23 Rauna Kuokkanen has identified connections linking writing by Indigenous women resisting the colonial educational enterprises in two seemingly diverse contexts: one in Shirley Sterling’s My Name is Seepeetza (1992), grounded in experiences of First Nations Salish students, and a counter-narrative by Kerttu Vuolab emanating from faraway Finland.24 Native writer-teachers are drawing on similar parallels in their own curricula, as Esther Belin outlines in describing her work on the reservation in Torreon, where she linked Native Americans’ experiences of colonization to those addressed by Trinh T. Minh-ha, bell hooks, and Gloria Anzaldúa.25

Some studies of Indian boarding schools have suggested that the shared experience of attending a residential school did promote cross-tribal solidarity, thereby enhancing the ability of Native students—eventually as
adult leaders—to battle white domination politically. Glenn balances his description of residential schools’ negative impact with reports from Cherokee anthropologist R. K. Thomas and Devon Mihesuah’s historical study of the Cherokee Female Seminary (Cultivating the Rosebuds), both of which indicate some students capitalized on boarding school experiences in positive ways (Glenn, 81–82). Tsianina Lomawaima’s interviews with alumni of a residential school in Oklahoma for They Called It Prairie Light establish that some students nurtured interpersonal ties and fostered community through such tactics as forming gangs based on tribal affiliations.26

Rather than view this research as undermining rightful critiques of the residential schooling enterprise, I propose starting with these assumptions:

• that core goals of assimilationist boarding school programs were unethical;
• that some students’ maneuvering strategically toward an individual agency and group solidarity does not affirm the underlying aims of the assimilation movement;
• that some individual schools did not (fully) fit the dominant pattern associated with Pratt’s Carlisle model;
• that individual teachers (some of them, increasingly over the years, themselves Indians) labored to counteract the worst dimensions of assimilationist practice even while acting, officially, as agents of those institutions.

Along those lines, scholars are underscoring the variations across individual schools, as well as different teachers’ and students’ experiences.27 Brenda J. Child’s Boarding School Seasons employs letters from students and their family members that she uncovered in government archives to survey the responses of Ojibwe students to schools like Carlisle, Haskell, and Flandreau. Taking the full range of this correspondence into account, Child notes that assimilation-oriented schools “dismantled the economies of self-sufficient people who had for generations successfully educated their children in the cultural knowledge, values and economic tradition best suited to the integrity of the woodland environment”; she describes the coercive tactics used to recruit and isolate students, including withholding rations from parents who resisted having their children taken away.28 But Child’s research has also revealed that some twentieth-century Indian students chose residential schooling as a preferable alternative to public schools where they tended to be victimized by racism (22); that clusters of siblings
and cousins at the same school developed ways to maintain a strong sense of family (23); that some students found boarding schools “useful” when their families faced personal crises or economic pressures (24); and that the schools did provide access to skills that might enable students to earn a living (24).  

_Pipestone_, a memoir published in 2010, exemplifies how some students effectively navigated the boarding school experience. Adam Fortunate Eagle finds features to celebrate in revisiting his decade (1935–45) at Pipestone Indian Training School. _Pipestone_ includes scholar Laurence Hauptman’s “Afterword” analysis of the lead author’s narrative. Hauptman argues that Fortunate Eagle’s account “challenges some of our long-held assumptions about federal Indian educational policies and young children’s experiences at these boarding schools” (171). Hauptman goes so far as to suggest that the Native writer’s leadership of the Alcatraz Island takeover in the 1970s, his powerful abilities as a speaker in support of Indian rights (including his successful cultivation of humor as a teaching tool), and his influence on Native American Studies curriculum all have roots in boarding school attendance (172–74). This argument contextualizes Fortunate Eagle’s student experience within a broader history that stresses how curricular programs and teaching practices did evolve over time (rather than maintaining a “pure” vision of a Pratt-like agenda). Hauptman additionally points to individual “administrators and teachers with varying educational philosophies” approaching their work differently in diverse institutional settings that, he believes, have erroneously been overgeneralized (175–76). Thus, while acknowledging Fortunate Eagle’s own portrayal of the negative dimensions of Pipestone, including its marginalizing curriculum, Hauptman urges readers to see this first-person narrative as a corrective demonstrating how a leader like Pipestone superintendent J. W. Balmer “was no Pratt,” how positive changes in policies around Native language use reflected a major shift in philosophy, and how, by the Depression-era time period, in this school, students were not isolated but instead encouraged to connect with the outside world while maintaining strong tribal affiliation (176–78). Significantly too, Hauptman asserts, “the existence and roles of Indian employees” at numerous residential schools have been underexamined, so that their influence on students, the institutions themselves, and society’s views about educating Native learners has been underappreciated (178).

Implicit in Hauptman’s analysis of Fortunate Eagle’s memoir is an affirmation of Native peoples’ active agency in educational settings. Whether
as students or teachers, Indians involved in boarding school culture sought ways to claim as much control as possible over their experiences and, thus, to have an impact on individual institutional settings as well as the larger social framework driving such programs. A key avenue to cultural agency was (and is) through the creation of texts resisting the ideology, teaching practices, and history associated with assimilation education. And an essential context for appreciating the rhetorical pragmatism and sophistication of such texts lies in the dominant storyline embodied in Carlisle.

Propaganda for Indian Boarding Schools

Pratt’s determined efforts to cast himself and Carlisle as “killing” Indians in order to “save” them drew rhetorical energy from familiar portrayals of Native peoples as needing to be saved—as frightening savages or hapless victims, incapable of transitioning on their own to a more “civilized” white-dominated world. Mass media, a growing presence in American life at the turn of the twentieth century, played a major role in strengthening such stereotypes. After all, as Philip J. Deloria has pointed out in Playing Indian, by the late nineteenth century, images of Indians were already firmly ingrained in the national consciousness in ways that served whites’ self-images and their visions of US identity.

In The Newspaper Indian, John M. Coward has shown how popular periodicals reflected and shaped the way that many nineteenth-century readers viewed Native Americans and, as a result, how whites responded to various attempts at solving the “Indian problem.” As Coward indicates, mass-market representations of Indians invoked stereotypes. Coward further suggests that many nineteenth-century portrayals of Indian violence capitalized on whites’ need to demonize communities like Sioux, Cheyennes, and Utes as perpetrators of events like the Battle of the Little Bighorn (1898). In contrast to this trend, as the Indian Reform movement gained steam, an alternative stereotype of Indians as helpless, innocent victims of exploitation began to circulate. One thing these two overgeneralized versions of Native people had in common was portraying “Indians as a large but coherent race, not as individuals” (201). Depictions drawn from both of these patterns helped marshal support for the boarding school movement.

Carlisle had an especially sophisticated approach to public relations—techniques for managing the assimilation narrative that simultaneously accrued symbolic capital for similar institutions as well. Utilizing both internally produced publications and savvy self-presentation for external
media, Carlisle generated texts that drew on the stereotypes Coward has tracked across the late nineteenth century. Several rhetorical patterns in this campaign—such as photographs of transformed students embodying social values like hard work and well-groomed cleanliness—can be traced back to equally well-organized presentations of Hampton Institute for white middle-class audiences. However, other elements selling Carlisle’s program used prevalent ideas about Native Americans, in particular, such as the supposed necessity to constrain their otherwise “savage” natures through strict, regimented learning.

Consistent across all publication sites, portraits of Carlisle’s program emphasize a “before and after” plotline and an implied benefit to the larger society achieved through Indian assimilation. As Amelia Katanski explains in Learning to Write “Indian,” “to make it appear that the schools did succeed in their mission of cultural genocide, Pratt and his cohorts needed to shape representations of their students” to embody “total transformation.” Internally produced publications designed for dissemination beyond Carlisle reiterated this message, often using what Katanski has called a “ventriloquized” Indian voice in the school’s newspaper, initially Indian Helper (1885–1900), renamed Red Man and Helper in 1900. Katanski shows how Carlisle’s public relations managers, especially head of publications Marianna Burgess, appropriated student writing and thereby created “paper Indians” to broadcast the school’s message to readers, including congressmen whose legislative support was essential (47ff). On a larger scale, these publications also garnered support for imitator programs.

On one level, such publications paralleled the cultural work of institution-produced periodicals like the Spelman Messenger and the Hull-House Bulletin, as outlined in chapters 2 and 3. A big difference between those publishing programs and Carlisle’s, however, was the latter’s being tied to a federally mandated policy of assimilation aimed, ultimately, at the eradication of its students’ personal identities. Spelman and its publication grew out of a shared commitment involving African American leaders like Father Quarles as well as white partners like Packard and Giles, at an institution dedicated to collaborative race uplift. Georgia’s black women community leaders helped shape the curriculum and its promotional narrative. Similarly, though Jane Addams opened Hull-House and launched its programs out of a sense of noblesse oblige, over time she developed a more collaborative spirit and strategy for community education grounded in reciprocal learning. The public relations campaign for Carlisle, in con-
contrast, consistently reinscribed a “natural” racial hierarchy to justify ongoing suppression of Native culture.

Accordingly, Jessica Enoch has noted the important role that Carlisle’s two periodicals, *Indian Helper* and *Red Man and Helper*, played in spreading its message. “Through these newspapers, Pratt created his own aggressive system of propaganda, which articulated and disseminated Carlisle’s master narrative by convincing readers of both the necessity and the good of the work done at the off-reservation school.” As Enoch observes, these publications actually had two audiences: Indian students, teachers, and alumni, on the one hand, and potential white supporters, on the other. Internally, Enoch suggests, one recurring character in the periodicals, the “Man-on-the-band-stand,” continually reiterated surveillance—reminding students that it was impossible to escape the omnipresent scrutiny of the institution. For white readers, meanwhile, the publications justified the curriculum and rebutted its opponents via success stories.36

*Stiya*, a novel by Carlisle teacher and publications manager Marianna Burgess (writing as “Embe”), recycles many arguments evident in the periodicals being printed at the school. Originally published in 1891, *Stiya* imagines a Pueblo girl returning home from Carlisle and struggling to maintain the new identity she had developed in the East. Besides being handed out to students who were about to leave school, thereby supposedly preparing them for what might be a challenging transition,37 *Stiya* also served as propaganda for white readers.38 To counter assertions that Carlisle alumni often went “back to the blanket,” the novel offered a fictional narrative complement to the many official school reports and newspaper accounts touting assimilation. Having adopted white ways, ranging from her clothing and language use to her eating habits and ideas about acceptable home furnishings, Stiya was appalled by her Pueblo family’s behavior. Gradually, however, she won them over. Her father moved from what Stiya viewed as shiftless laziness to job-seeking provider; her mother (though still wearing Indian dress) now “kept her home and the dishes nice and clean.” When two of her Carlisle teachers came to visit, Stiya was proud to show off Anglo-type furnishings in her home and a newly acquired sewing machine. Spreading her influence to include young cousins, Stiya had become a model alumna, ready to advise others: “If every returned girl could resist the first efforts of her home friends to drag her back into the old Indian ways and make them feel in a kind but decided way that they were no longer right for her, she would eventually enjoy untold satisfaction and happiness.”39
Managing Public Perceptions

In publications like the *Indian Helper* and *Stiya*, officials at Carlisle reached out to audiences beyond the school. These texts had relatively limited circulation, though.\(^{40}\) Granted, Pratt was astutely sending copies to such prominent supporters as Thaddeus Coleman Pound, who, Scott Laderman reports, “became a legislative champion of the early off-reservation boarding school movement in the House,” and of Carlisle in particular. Bombarding influential figures like Pound with rhetorical ammunition, Laderman explains, Pratt’s persistent publicity campaign enabled other leaders’ efforts to cast the assimilation agenda as humanitarian, masking its connections with such imperial enterprises as expanded white settlement of the West.\(^{41}\) Yet Pratt was wise enough to know that even larger audiences needed to be cultivated; congressmen, after all, listen to the voices of their constituents, so additional political networks had to be addressed too.

As one example, we can cite a technique also regularly employed at Hampton: inviting potential supporters to visit and then to write about the school. In *Twenty-two Years’ Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute*, Armstrong and others acknowledged the importance of “its open doors to the visitors who come in increasing numbers—hundreds during each year—to see its work for themselves” (iii). Pratt emulated (and collaborated with) his mentor Armstrong in this public relations effort, as illustrated by an enthusiastic essay Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) president Frances E. Willard wrote in 1889 for *The Chautauquan* after touring Carlisle.\(^{42}\)

Similarly, Jonathan Baxter Harrison drew on his visits in a publication commissioned by the *Boston Herald*. In his 1887 book, *The Latest Studies of Indian Reservations*, Harrison repeatedly strayed from his announced assignment to report on reservation life in the West and focused, instead, on the assimilation curriculum. For instance, Harrison asserted, “There is no adequate justification for the Western hostility to the Eastern Indian Schools. . . . [T]heir work is still indispensable. Their influence as advertisements of the general Indian problem and situation would, alone, amply justify their existence and cost.”\(^{43}\) Though he recommended increased use of day schools on the reservations, Harrison insisted that the basic model for teaching Native children should be based on Carlisle. To support that assessment, Harrison described tracking down former students of Carlisle and Hampton during his reservation visit and finding them working, consistent with their training, as “tin-smiths, harness-makers, carpenters, etc.”
(149). In cases where alumni of the Eastern assimilation programs had, instead, become “pathetic cases,” he opined that these situations arose from the limited “employment for educated young Indians on the reservations,” made worse by “a general prejudice . . . against the young men who have returned from the Eastern schools” (149). For Harrison, this situation, rather than highlighting problems with the assimilation curriculum, instead could be remedied by alumni remaining in (or returning to) the East, rather than “wasting their years to no worthy end” on the reservation (150).

Elaine Goodale (later Eastman) became a reliable contributor to Carlisle’s public relations campaign. Goodale was already well known for having published collections of poetry in a precocious childhood voice long before she began work at Hampton in 1883. She was also a stalwart supporter of assimilationist education. She disagreed with Pratt on several major fronts, however. For one, she favored Hampton’s initial approach of allowing Indian students to blend English-language learning with use of their mother tongues—a practice later forbidden by government mandate.44 Second, having followed up her time at Hampton with a stint in Dakota Territory—first on a six-week learning tour arranged by Armstrong and funded through periodical feature-writing, then as a day school instructor for the Sioux, and later as a government inspector of other schools and an in-service leader—Goodale advocated reservation-located teaching to maintain strong familial and tribal ties. A related distinction between her own teaching approach and Carlisle’s is evidenced by her efforts to immerse in tribal culture, including traveling during the summer with her Dakota neighbors, as well as learning the Dakota language.45

Despite their differences on some issues, Goodale and Pratt shared affiliation with the Indian Rights Association, which sponsored an eight-page pamphlet tracing (and praising) the history of Carlisle in 1886, before Goodale took on her supervisory position in the West. With Helen W. Ludlow (a colleague at Hampton who had also written a history of that institution), Goodale cowrote the pamphlet, full of accolades for Carlisle and for Pratt himself. Ludlow’s section offered a romanticized version of Pratt’s time in Saint Augustine as a seemingly beneficent jailer for Indian warriors, some of whom eventually became students at Hampton. Goodale followed up that report with a glowing description of Carlisle. Celebrating “the four hundred dark faces and bright uniforms, the industrious labor, the accurate drill, the vigorous teaching, the perfect discipline,” she also touted the outing system that assigned students to work for white Pennsylvania farmers. Navigating the complex terrain of racial hierarchy endemic to the curricu-
lum, she noted: “We are struck at once with the fact that the minimum of allowance is made here for the Indian boys and girls as Indians. They are expected to do well as a matter of course, without any consideration at all! Their labor is put right into competition with white labor.” At the same time, she intoned: “The Indian youth is not, on the face of it, the equal of the Anglo-Saxon youth,” yet simultaneously asserted that if we “will only tell him that he is, and tell everybody else that he is,” then “the chances are that you will make him pretty nearly so!”

Pratt continued to cultivate Goodale, recognizing her value as an advocate. After wedding Charles (Ohiseya) Eastman, she had the added rhetorical authority of being married to a much-admired “assimilated” Indian. Furthermore, she was a tireless and prolific writer. Both before and after her marriage, she generated essays and feature stories for Eastern periodicals whose readership was crucial to Pratt’s agenda. During a period when her husband held a position lobbying for Indian causes in Washington, for example, some of her proassimilation texts folded accolades for Carlisle within feature stories summarizing activities in Congress for publications like the New York Evangelist and The Advance. Other pieces focused specifically on Carlisle, as in “A New Method of Indian Education,” which described the “outing” program to readers of Outlook, or her report on the 1900 commencement ceremonies, entitled “A New Day for the Indian.”

Goodale Eastman was under no illusions about Pratt himself being a volatile lighting rod whose personality repelled many potential supporters; on a personal level, she clearly preferred her mentor Armstrong. Nonetheless, she wrote a book-length biography of Pratt in the 1930s. Becoming increasingly conservative in her own views on white-Indian relations, she was by then opposing changes in federal policies on Indian education that could undermine the assimilation programs. Thus, a strident essay like her 1934 “Collier Indian Plan a Backward Step” and a letter to the New York Times in the same year, written to oppose “Reviving Indian Customs,” were consistent with her moves to cast the Carlisle founder as an heroic figure in Pratt: The Red Man’s Moses. To some extent, Goodale Eastman was likely responding to the powerful mythology that had already grown up around Pratt, similar to the phenomenon Michael A. Elliott, in Custerology, has astutely described as developing (and still operating) around George Armstrong Custer in the years after Little Bighorn (2).

So, in her “Foreword,” Goodale Eastman struggled to paint a balanced portrait acknowledging both the enormity of Pratt’s character and the controversies associated with his educational agenda. She termed
him “a crusader, an idealist, a man of compelling personality,” but she also noted that his work “for the first Americans” garnered “reproach” as well as praise. Characterizing him as both “visionary and fanatic” (7), she admitted that many found him “temperamentally extreme and intransigent” (10). Similarly, though she praised Pratt for affirming Indians’ capacities for learning and for citizenship “at a period when red men were almost universally despised as an ‘inferior race,’ and hated as dangerous enemies” (8), she also observed that he was “influenced by the dominant social and political philosophy of his time” (10), and in some ways she distanced herself from him. Still, choosing such an affirmative subtitle for her book as *The Red Man’s Moses* marked an affiliative stance in line with the Eastman family’s relocation to New England and the schooling of her own children there. The many positive elements in her narrative also underscored how powerful Pratt’s persona remained, even in the mid-1930s, a decade after his 1924 death. Her biography’s continued endorsement of enforced assimilation, meanwhile, demonstrated the dominant narrative’s tight hold on so many white leaders of her day—even someone who, at other times, had written passionate critiques of the military’s assaults on Native people (at Wounded Knee and elsewhere) and equally insistent assertions of Indians’ distinct cultural values. Thus, in a *New York Times* review of the biography soon after its 1935 release, we encounter an assessment suggesting that, in regard to assimilation’s overarching goals, both Pratt and Goodale Eastman were in tune with their times. 51

**Painting a Periodical Portrait**

The persistence of such positive images for Pratt and Carlisle well into the twentieth century can be traced back to astute media management in the early days of the institution’s history. One telling example of the ongoing rhetoric Carlisle’s public relations effort funneled into mass circulation venues appeared in an 1884 issue of *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Magazine*, in an article entitled “Indian Education.” I want to devote close attention to this text not only as a sign of Pratt’s successful promotion of Carlisle but also as a foundation for tracking discursive patterns in subsequent counter-narratives from Native authors like Zitkala-Ša and her rhetorical heirs.

The article’s first paragraph situates its subject within ongoing conversations about Indian education and makes clear that the author views assimilation as beneficent:
The subject of Indian education is just now attracting an unwonted degree of attention from public men and the country at large. The sentiment that it is cheaper—as it is certainly more humane—to educate and civilize these “wards” of the nation than to exterminate them by ball and cartridge, is everywhere growing, and the liveliest interest is beginning to be felt in the experiments which are being made at Hampton, Va. and Carlisle, Pa., in the education of Indian youth. So far as now appears, these experiments have more than realized the expectations of those who instituted them.

Identifying Native Americans as “‘wards’ of the nation” invokes the familiar stereotype of Indians as child-like figures in need of white guidance and ignores the sovereignty of Indian nations. Linking “educate and civilize” as coordinate terms, similarly, positions both the assimilation program at Carlisle and its rationale in a framework appealing to “public men and the country at large.” Contrasting that agenda with what’s cast as the only alternative available (that is, “to exterminate”) positions the Carlisle curriculum as “certainly more humane,” thereby suppressing any impulse readers might have to consider the residential program as itself inhumane.

After having characterized the Carlisle program as “successful” under guidance by “Captain R. H. Pratt, U.S.A.,” the report offers a history of the institution that is actually a narrative of Pratt’s personal leadership “in behalf of the down-trodden race,” dating back to his 1875 supervision of prisoners at Florida’s Fort Marion. To de-emphasize the incarceration context for that “industrial training . . . experiment,” the article quickly shifts its historical overview to Pratt’s having taken “seventeen Indian pupils to General Armstrong at Hampton Institute, in Virginia” and then to “the old historic military barracks at Carlisle” in 1879, where Pratt’s own program had its “auspicious beginning.” The narrative then focuses on Carlisle’s continued growth, via the data point of its enrolling “433 pupils, representing thirty-six different Indian tribes” at the time of the article’s 1884 publication. A catalogue of tribal groups follows, including “the Sioux, Navajos, Apaches, Utes, Kiowas, Comanches, Arapahoes, Crows, Shoshones, and Pawnees.” The report then recalibrates its stereotyping strategy from the earlier “wards of the nation” image to another representation of Native youth then familiar to Frank Leslie’s readers: these “young Indians,” notes the story, are from the “most troublesome” tribes. “Veritable savages the young pupils are, upon their first arrival at the school.” Descriptive details
support this assessment of their “before” status, which is then, the article avers, undone through assimilationist teaching:

It is only with great difficulty that they can be induced to sleep in a bed; and teaching them the use of the knife and fork at table is one of the first signal triumphs of civilization. But the rapidity with which they adapt themselves to their new surroundings, the eagerness and intelligence with which they absorb the instruction afforded them, are extraordinary and touching. The improvement is physical as well as mental; and the bright, intelligent, well-mannered and altogether fine boys and girls which these young Indians become after an astonishingly short period of training furnish living refutation of the slanders heaped upon the race.

Here, the Frank Leslie’s writer melds a complex pair of characterizations. Before Carlisle enrollment, these Indian youth are “wild,” their habits “uncivilized,” as marked by their attire. In contrast, after “an astonishingly short period of training,” they become “living refutation of the slanders heaped upon the race.” The catalyst for this transformation is Carlisle itself, which the article portrays as inculcating “mastery of the English language” along with basic academic subjects (such as “reading, geography, arithmetic, grammar and writing”) and “industrial education” that will eventually enable “self-support.” The reporter touts training for the boys in such practical skills as blacksmithing, wagon-building, carpentry, tinsmithing, shoe-making, tailoring, and print-shop work, as well as farming. The account also extols how the girls become both “tidy and industrious” through their own gendered skills development. Noting the “importance of the careful training which the Indian girls receive,” the writer asserts, in line with Burgess’s Stiya, that “with the Indians, as with other peoples, the home influence is the prevailing one. No real progress was made until girls as well as boys received civilized training.” By claiming that the young female students actually “choose what suits them best at the start” from such work options as sewing, cooking, and doing laundry, and that they “seldom” change to different options later, the author short-circuits any questions about the girls being taken advantage of as unpaid laborers. Overall, the enthused journalist praises the industry of Carlisle boys and girls: “they work with a will, and the products turned out from the various workshops are of the very best quality.”
In line with Katanski’s analysis of student writing being used to garner support for assimilation education, this *Frank Leslie’s* piece describes “a neat eight-page monthly” that is written and printed by students. By citing letters from alumni, parents, and other relatives of students, the story maintains “that there is an awakening among the Indians in favor of education, and that they heartily appreciate the benefits of industrial training for their young.” Indeed, says this reporter, “Those who have returned to the agencies [i.e., the reservations] from the school are industrious and efficient workers, doing whatever they can to earn money and help themselves to independence; and they are of great service to the Government and to their people, in that they urge others of their tribe to follow the white man’s example and learn to take care of themselves.”

Additional details in the article praise the “influence of education and contact with civilized surroundings” as the mediating factor between the before characterizations ascribed to the Indian children—wild savages, with one “pretty little girl,” even, having arrived with a “human scalp” memento as well as “bows and arrows”—and the after portrait of re-formed “Carlisle schoolchildren” as “well-behaved and gentle creatures.” Central to this story of “the transformations wrought at Carlisle” is another implicit contrast—one between this supposedly remarkable educational program and any teaching they would have received in their tribal communities, via acculturation that apparently would only have reinforced uncivilized tendencies. After all, when they first arrive at Carlisle, “To them a house is a prison.” They eschew knives and forks, and they sleep not in beds but on the ground in a savage “wigwam life.”

Illustrations associated with this affirming narrative about Carlisle’s curriculum reinscribe the article’s themes. A before-and-after pair of pictures at the top of the page contrasts a group of “Indians Just Arrived” with the same “Group in School Dress Two Years Later.” Whereas the first image shows so-called blanket Indians, the second presents neatly uniformed students consistent with Carlisle’s military ethos. Additional illustrations show lines of “Pupils on the Way to Supper,” two male students working “In the Saddlery” and another pair “In the Tin Shop.” (References to several images are included within the article. For instance, the story approvingly highlights the illustration documenting “the boys and girls in their simple and neat clothes, marching across the yard to supper.”) At the bottom of this page, one image depicts girls seated at table, “At Prayer” before a meal; another limns “The Dawn of Civilization—An Indian Belle at Her Toilet” (as, standing at a mirror framed by a bow and arrows, she
Figure 4.1. “Educating the Indians—Scenes at the Government Training School at Carlisle, Pa.—From Photographs and Sketches by Joseph Becker,” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper (March 15, 1884). Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia. **Per L, Mar. 15, 1884, #1.
braids her long hair). A third represents a classroom scene. Taken together, these ties between print and visual descriptions reinforce the article’s praise of assimilation education.

The classroom scene at the bottom of the full page of images is particularly telling. Three young Indian students face a white woman teacher, who holds a book in her hand and prepares to write on a chalkboard at the front of the classroom. Already on the blackboard is a command to “stand up,” and above that is a framed inscription: “My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.” Bound up with the religious language of the motto is an equation of the students with “sheep” who need to follow the leadership of whites, adopting such mandates as the order to “stand up” and follow directions. The figure of the white female teacher here both underscores and obscures the racial hierarchies at work in the illustration and within the curriculum. Standing tall herself above her young male Indian students, the white woman holds sway over them; at the same time, with the tool of her dominance objectified as a book (rather than a more overtly coercive weapon like a gun), the violence of forced acculturation that would be so incisively critiqued in future counter-narratives by Native writers is rendered into a seemingly gentle cross-cultural intervention. Overall, packagings of the assimilationist teaching agenda like the story-plus-images blend of this 1884 *Frank Leslie’s* text gradually assembled an archive of white-managed promotional literature gaining more rhetorical power with each new iteration.

**Zitkala-Ša’s Boarding School Counter-narrative**

Individually and collectively, dominant narratives like the *Frank Leslie’s* article summarized above promoted an agenda of assimilationist education consistent with the enthusiastic reports penned by Elaine Goodale Eastman. Missing from such texts were the direct, unfiltered accounts of Native students and teachers themselves. They might appear in passing as characters reinforcing the normative storyline, as in Goodale Eastman’s “From Washington” *Advance* column of 1898, where she notes: “Among the teachers, by the way, we noted three young women of Indian blood, one of them a graduate of Carlisle and of the Custer Normal School. I remember reading of Miss Simmons, who is from White’s Institute, that she carried off the prize in an intercollegiate oratorical contest, not very long ago” (356). However, Natives’ own critiques of boarding school programs did not reach many white readers during this period—at least not
until the early months of 1900, when that same “Miss Simmons,” now writing under a self-assigned Indian name of Zitkala-Ša, burst onto the literary scene and into the politics of assimilation education in the august pages of *Atlantic Monthly*.\(^{54}\)

In 1884, the year of the *Frank Leslie’s* “Indian Education” accolades for Carlisle, Gertrude Simmons was attending boarding school herself, at White’s Manual Labor Institute, a Quaker mission school in Wabash, Indiana, where she enrolled for three years. After a year and a half back home with her mother, she moved to another boarding school on the Santee Reservation, where she remained until 1890. By 1891, she was back at White’s, a decision biographer Doreen Rappaport attributes to Zitkala-Ša’s love of learning—including the opportunity for music instruction—outweighing the many factors that would have discouraged her from reenrolling.\(^{55}\) After graduation in 1895, she began classes at Earlham College, where she excelled at oratory, as she would later recount in her *Atlantic* series. She was unable to complete her course work due to illness, but after a period of recuperation, she accepted a teaching position at Carlisle in 1897. She resigned in 1899 to study music at the New England Conservatory of Music, where her expenses were initially covered by a white Quaker patron. The loss of her patron left the young woman with few avenues for self-support. Fortunately for many readers then and since, she chose a route parallel to Goodale Eastman, who during this same period was also writing about Indian issues as a way of generating income, in the latter’s case to help support a growing family.

In her 1900 *Atlantic Monthly* narratives, Zitkala-Ša confronted Anglo-American middle-class readers with a disturbing portrait of the assimilationist teaching they had long been encouraged to support. Over three months, she presented an indignant memoir of her own experience within that brutal system in “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” (January), “The School Days of an Indian Girl” (February), and “An Indian Teacher among Indians” (March). Through this series, she planted the seeds for a sustained, strategic counter-narrative response to oppressive education of Native peoples.

Zitkala-Ša was not the only Native author of her era to confront the boarding school experience in texts aimed at white readers. But her work claims close attention for several reasons. For one, the *Atlantic Monthly* was a particularly influential publication at the cusp of the twentieth century, when her stories appeared, so we can trust that the original audience represented just the kind of readers an Indian advocate would be most eager
Figure 4.2. Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Simmons). Gertrude Kasebier Collection, Division of Culture & the Arts, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
to reach. More recently, the compelling nature of Zitkala-Ša’s narrative—
its intense images and righteously angry tone—has helped claim a secure
position for her serialized memoir in American literature curricula, par-
ticularly since an expanded canon has brought minority writers’ counter-
narratives to such venues as the Heath, Bedford, and Norton anthologies.56
The middle essay in this series, “School Days of an Indian Girl,” focused
most specifically on the author’s boarding school experience: she vividly
described such cruel and identity-threatening practices as having her hair
forcibly cut, being punished for failing to speak English, and being cast
into a rigid daily routine at odds with her upbringing. This middle essay
and a closing section of the first story, which depicts her journey to the
boarding school, have also drawn extensive scholarly attention, adding lay-
ers of interpretive resources to her learning legacy.57
Elements in Zitkala-Ša’s “School Days” offer an uncannily direct re-
response to the Frank Leslie’s story summarized above. For example, as a
counterpoint to the depiction of young girls enthusiastically embracing
work in the laundry or kitchen, Zitkala-Ša describes one of her own kitchen
assignments: to “mash turnips for dinner,” a hot and difficult task allotted
to her, not as a learning experience but as punishment for “disregard[ing]
a rule which seemed . . . very needlessly binding” (AIS, 93). In place of the
image of a patient white woman teacher nurturing several students’ read-
ing skills in a classroom setting, in Zitkala-Ša’s narrative we see “a paleface
woman” infuriated by the young girl’s purposefully overmashing the tur-
nips. Similar anecdotes emphasize the power of the white teachers over
their charges, as well as physical abuse linked to pupils’ difficulties with
the unfamiliar English language (a brutal “whipping” of Zitkala-Ša’s friend
Thowin [93]). Whereas the Frank Leslie’s story presents instruction in Eng-
lish in a brief reference along with other basic academic subjects, Zitkala-
Ša’s account stresses how the sudden immersion into a setting where one’s
own language is forbidden leads to fear, punishments, and cultural disloca-
tion (93). Similarly, whereas the Frank Leslie’s writer approvingly describes
a scene of “boys and girls in their simple and neat clothes, marching across
the yard to supper,” the “School Days” account laments the “Iron Routine”
of “cold winter mornings,” with “a small hand bell . . . vigorously rung for
roll call,” as individuals are reduced to lists of names to be checked off,
so that Zitkala-Ša found herself “actively testing the chains which tightly
bound my individuality like a mummy for burial” (97). In place of “the little
colour-black heads reverently bowed for a moment, while grace is said” in
the 1884 periodical portrait, the 1900 Atlantic essayist recalls how confused
and frightened she was at her first dining hall meal: having “marched in,” she responded to a ringing bell by sitting down, only to find that all the others remained standing. When a man’s booming voice recited puzzling words, while “all the others hung their heads over their plates,” Zitkala-Ša “caught the eyes of a paleface woman” staring so disapprovingly that, in retrospect, the Native writer remembers “crying instead” of eating, feeling fear instead of the sweet devotion the Frank Leslie’s reporter had seen (90). In place of the Leslie’s article describing new arrivals as needing to be taught how to use a “knife and fork at table” so as to achieve “one of the first signal triumphs of civilization” (59), Zitkala-Ša’s counter-narrative makes clear that she certainly knew how to use those instruments, but hesitated because of timidity, exhaustion, and embarrassment (90). Similarly, where the full-page illustrations for the 1884 story included the pleasing image of an “Indian belle” combing her long hair in front of a mirror, Zitkala-Ša’s memoir presents the appalling “Cutting of My Long Hair” (89) as an assault with “cold blades of the scissors against my neck” as they “gnaw off” her treasured “thick braids” (91).

As a central dimension of the assimilationist agenda being advocated in the Frank Leslie’s narrative, that author had confidently asserted how Indian relatives, back at the reservations from which Carlisle students came, “heartily appreciate[d] the benefits of industrial training for their young.” The 1884 article also posited how, after this purportedly forward-looking educational experience, former students “returned to the agencies from the school” well prepared to be “industrious and efficient workers,” achieving individual “independence” while also providing “great service to the Government and to their people, in that they urge others of their tribe to follow the white man’s example and learn to take care of themselves” (59). In contrast to this enthusiastic description, in a section entitled “Four Strange Summers,” Zitkala-Ša’s middle essay characterizes the dislocation students face when they return to their families. Despondent and unable to feel at home there now, Zitkala-Ša bemoans her mother’s ineffectual efforts to offer comfort—a cycle that leads to the older woman’s own sorrowful weeping. Overall, in place of the celebratory tone in the pro-Carlisle reportage, what readers encountered in Zitkala-Ša’s “School Days” counter-narrative was an overriding mood of frustration, loss, suffering, and despair.

**Continuing Counter-narratives as Protest**

The personal anger and communal sorrow embodied in Zitkala-Ša’s 1900 memoir has had compelling counterparts in more recent literary responses
to the boarding schools’ Negative Archive. Native writers have made effective use of diverse literary forms to echo and reinforce her resistant rhetorical patterns. Plotlines, characterizations, and recurring imagery tied to the schools’ past have coalesced in a body of texts that, taken together, achieve a powerful corrective to flawed prior histories. Key themes include running away to escape, abuses of authority by teachers and administrators, conflicts over language use (including renamings of students and suppres-
sion of Native language and individual voices), and contests over cultural memory-making.58

Counter-narrative rhetoric by several Native women poets is illustrative. Louise Erdrich’s compelling 2003 poem “Indian Boarding School: The Runaways” invokes several recurring critiques while depicting a failed escape. The first-person speakers in this poem are students who tried desperately to reverse the direction of their earlier trip via train to school by stealing aboard a boxcar. Recaptured, they are brought back and punished for the attempt to go home, “the place we head for in our sleep” still, even after being assigned “shameful work” as punishment.59

Poet Esther G. Belin has poignantly addressed the oppressive learning legacy of boarding school culture even among today’s urban Indians. For Belin, whose 1999 From the Belly of My Beauty explores Native life through the lens of personal reflection, the assimilation curriculum experienced by her older family members has left its mark on her own sense of self. Though “[r]aised urban among Los Angeles skyscrapers, Mexican gangs, Vietnamese refugees,” she is self-consciously Indian, “eating frybread and beans.” But being Indian also means being shaped by those family members’ experiences in the United States’ “Federal Indian Relocation Policy,” which her prose poem says

placed them in boarding schools away from the rez. Five-Year Program at Sherman Institute, Riverside, California. Goal: annihilation of savage tendencies characteristic of indigenous peoples. New language. New clothes. New food. New identity. Learn to use a washing machine. Learn to silence your native tongue, voice, being. . . . Learn new ways to survive. (“In the Cycle of the Whirl,” From the Belly, 68)

Belin censures the cross-generational impact of the residential schools’ assimilation agenda. For instance, she confronts the paradoxical situation of being admitted to the elite University of California at Berkeley, yet still being an outsider, by contrasting her own educational access with her mother’s constrained economic situation, just one of many long-term results of industrial training as a curriculum: “I was awarded grant money to read literature and analyze theories of Manifest Destiny while my mother worked two jobs.60 The irony always silenced me” (78). Trying to overcome that silence, Belin’s narrative persona signals ways in which the University’s bureaucratic culture limits political pressure from the very minorities so
proudly recruited and admitted (9). On one side, she herself “questioned [her] presence in that institution of higher learning” and her status as a Na-
tive at a very different kind of school than her ancestors had been forced to
attend (77). On another, she tries to speak out, to advocate for curriculum
and student services responsive to the small but growing minority popu-
lation at Berkeley, even though she “didn’t know where to begin,” since
“[e]very time I shed tears, re-awakening old wounds, in an almost-prayer of
thanks for those sacrificed” (77).

Laura Tohe’s 1999 collection of poems, No Parole Today, begins with a
direct assault on the figure of Carlisle’s leader himself, in an “Introduction:
Letter to General Pratt.” Like Belin, Tohe also strives to honor those who
suffered through assimilation education programs. Dedicated “to all those
who survived Indian schools everywhere,” Tohe’s book devotes texts in Part
I to vivid portrayals of the abusive boarding school setting, with Part II’s
examination of social problems within the Native community today im-
plicitly presented as the result of that heritage.

In the opening letter to Pratt, Tohe uses his own words from an 1883
speech to convict the Carlisle founder of “colonialist efforts,” while stress-
ing that his influence spread well beyond the school he founded to others
and past his own time to the present moment: “The assimilation policies
you put in place to turn Indian people into civilized white American citi-
zens, who would . . . hold the values of the dominant culture, still affect
us today” (ix, emphasis in original). Describing herself as “a survivor, as
my parents’ and grandparents’ generations were, of the legacy you estab-
lished,” Tohe lays the groundwork for additional poems that reiterate her
theme. These include “Prologue: Once You Were Signed Up,” a reflection
on boarding school life by her grandmother presented “in Diné storytell-
ing fashion” (xiii); a narrative on her own first-grade experience of the “tak-
ing of our language” through “Dick and Jane books” that would “Subdue the
Dine” (2–3); “The Names” poem comparing Indian children’s hearing the
school-based imposition of Anglo names to immigrants “waiting for the
names that obliterate the past” (4); and a series of imaginary letters depict-
ing survival strategies developed by students in such settings.

Comparing boarding school life with “serving a sentence,” Tohe under-
scores the incarceration theme that will recur later in her text in portraits
of Indians who are today trapped within the literal confines of US pris-
ons. “While some of us survived these schools,” she declares, “others ran
away or died trying. . . . A cemetery adjoined almost every Indian school”
(ix). Reemphasizing how a brand of cultural genocide has been achieved in
part through linguistic erasure, Tohe asserts: “The most crippling legacy of boarding schools is the devastation of our native languages and culture” (x). Personally, she resists that legacy by using Native terms for herself and her tribe: “Although outsiders gave us the name Navajo, we call ourselves Diné, The People. I prefer to call myself the name my ancestor gave us because I am trying to de-colonize myself.”

Erdrich, Belin, and Tohe are certainly not alone in mourning, but also drawing paradoxical literary productivity, from the heritage of past loss linked to assimilation programs. Delving into even deeper realms of oppression, the 2009 novel Porcupines and China Dolls confronts the sexual abuse that has long been erased from boarding school histories. Set in a present-day moment when alumni of residential programs are grappling with suppressed personal histories of victimhood, this stark narrative connects social problems often associated with Indians’ lives today—such as alcohol abuse, low expectations for employment, and challenges with interpersonal relationships (including parenting)—to one of the most troubling, yet underacknowledged facts of boarding school life: white authority figures becoming sexual predators.

The novel’s central characters, James and Jake, have struggled in silence with memories of that abuse. When they finally open up to the larger community about their nightmare experiences, they seek retribution for individual but also for communal suffering. The plot line offers no false resolution, but it does end with some hope that confronting the darkest elements of this past history may bring at least a limited sense of peace to the Native community where the story is set, in Canada’s Northwest Territories. To underscore the historical backdrop for this account, author Robert Arthur Alexie, a former chief of the Teetl’it Gwich’in, begins his narrative with an extended flashback to the 1920s when the Canadian government began placing children of his community (including Alexie himself) in residential mission schools. In a chapter entitled “The First Generation,” Alexie presents powerful descriptions of the fear-filled arrival at school and subsequent immersion into a culture completely foreign to the young students. Details here—such as the pupils having their hair suddenly cut short and their clothing replaced, a delousing imposed without explanation, and a quick line-up that inaugurates the military-like routine—recall Zitkala-Ša’s 1900 narrative. Alexie introduces a strikingly discordant new comparison: in their new uniforms, the students “look like porcupines: well-dressed porcupines” (9–10).

To stress the stifling sense of isolation these First Nation children feel
even in their barracks-like sleeping chamber, Robert Alexie first describes a frightened young boy’s “low and muffled” cries, which sound “like a million porcupines crying in the dark.” Soon, however, for most of the boys, “the cries are silent. They’ll always be silent” (11). Silence becomes a strategy for managing pain, for suppressing abuse too dark to name: “they’ll try not to remember. They’ll block out everything bad that happens to them and others in those hallowed halls. They’ll remember only the good things, and those will be few” (12). The pressure of this silence is doubly debilitating, however, as “He’ll learn how to hide his emotions and will rarely smile. He’ll never laugh” (13).

By using vague “they” and “he” pronouns, Alexie suggests that the story, which in later chapters will focus on James, applies to many former students. Thus, memories this unnamed figure struggles to tamp down become communal more than individual:

He’ll remember the fear, the hunger, the hits, the slaps, the straps, the tweaks, the work and the loneliness. He’ll remember a lot of what went on in that place, but he’ll talk only about the good things. He’ll try to forget the not-so-good things, but he’ll never be able to do it. . . . He’s never going to forgive those who lied to him and those who abused him. He’ll never say it out loud. He can’t. They cut his tongue out, and he can’t talk about it.” (15)

Within the wounded world of Robert Alexie’s novel, this up-to-now concealed history of boarding school life finally breaks silence, finds voice, and seeks healing. If there is hope to be gleaned from this painful process, it lives within the story-based recapturing and deployment of a more honest memory, one facing and naming the abuses of a system from which so many still carry scars.

**Dramatizing a Communal Heritage**

N. Scott Momaday’s *The Indolent Boys* stages a passionate critique of the assimilationist agenda within a time frame comparable to Zitkala-Ša’s *Atlantic* accounts, even as the play also imagines how reclaimed historical memory can play a constructive role in community life for later generations. Momaday’s “About the Play” overview unabashedly classifies the events being portrayed as “a tragedy.”62 Grounded in the actual case of three Native boys caught in a winter storm when running away from the Kiowa Board-
For Momaday, this counter-narrative is, ironically, a shared tribal resource. “I have heard the story of the boys who froze to death from the time I was a child,” he explains. “It is deeply and ever more dimly embedded in Kiowa tradition” (5). Accordingly, Momaday declares, his text, crafted to “commemorate” the boys, actually represents a collaborative writing process: “I was greatly aided in the process by my Kiowa kinsmen, by others who knew of the story, and by the staff of the Oklahoma Historical Society and of the National Archives” (5–6). Signaling both the important place of this story in Kiowa culture and an assertive move to place official, white-oriented institutions like the historical society and the federal archives in service of this revised history, Momaday’s introduction simultaneously provides a cultural context for audiences beyond his own tribe. He reminds us that governmental institutions still bear responsibility for the past. Recovering the darkest elements in that troubled heritage is, therefore, an ethical duty. At the same time, Momaday positions himself as a story-bearer serving his community—a role he achieves by facilitating a reformative collaboration between Native and white memory-keepers. While insisting that authorship of this new narrative is communal, even if published under his sole name, he also imagines a healing process with aspirations extending outward to include others. By dedicating his play to “the numberless souls whose stories have fallen beyond reach,” Momaday shows that some awful debts can never be truly repaid, but that a communal counter-narrative record of such tragedies may bear lasting fruit. As such, his storytelling establishes the social justice potential in oral and performative dissemination of a communal Archive, which is moved to action both in his own playwriting and in the hoped-for audience response.

Within the play itself, Momaday uses a small cast to stand in for the “numberless” victims of assimilationist policy as well as the perpetrators. Recognizing that motivations driving individual whites’ involvement were often quite complex, he uses three figures to convey a shifting, nuanced range of perspectives among the staff at the Kiowa boarding school, whose history is framed both as one particular case and a representative site. Accordingly, whereas Barton Wherritt, one of the school’s teachers, spouts Pratt-like rhetoric justifying the school’s program in stereotyped terms, Carrie, a young white woman teacher, seems at first to embody a more sympathetic view. Dialogue between Wherritt and school superintendent G. P. Gregory gradually builds a picture of personal and official complicity
in the abuses of boarding school education, including its commitment to strict “discipline.” Thus, Wherritt first describes to Superintendent Gregory a vision of teaching as bound up with (white-led) national destiny:

I want to make them [the Indian students] fit in their heads and hands. I want to teach them to think, as far as they are able, to read and write, to know and respect the law of the land, to figure and keep accounts, to buy and sell. I want them to earn a decent living, earn it, I say. I want to teach them to paint and carpenter and husband and farm. I want them to be, by God, Americans. . . . It is our time, America’s time. . . . Why can’t they see it? Why do they resist that glorious destiny? (20)

Gregory and Wherritt commiserate about the difficulty of achieving these goals. After all, Wherritt exclaims, the Indians (and here they clearly mean all Indians, not merely the missing students) “are children” (21). Affirming both the aims originally driving Wherritt to the school and “the reality of the situation,” Gregory invokes the wisdom of “The United States Government” as the rightful guide for their enterprise (22–23). Wherritt thereafter slides into a less flowery (and notably more cynical) assessment:

Isn’t the object of teaching these children to convert them, therefore to save them? . . . Wasn’t that Mr. Pratt’s idea of Fort Marion? Shackle the cream of the warrior crop, the poor beaten bastards, stuff them in a train, scare the shit out of them, then, in mercy, let them live in a prison that was called a hotel, give them ledger books and colored pencils, give them sticks and string to make bows and arrows, and allow them to sell their charming, primitive arts and crafts to benevolent, curious sightseers for money, honest-to-God coin of the realm. Give them the English language, Christian names, and gainful employment. Inform them politely that their gods have forsaken them and that their way of life is unacceptable, uncivilized, and poof!—the transformation. (22)

Momaday’s counter-narrative here sarcastically invokes the theme of “transformation” (and associated public relations images) used by assimilationist advocates. To undercut the Carlisle-based dominant narrative, this speech distances Wherritt and Gregory from their own previous, more idealistic frame of “missionary zeal” for their work (21). Thus, even for au-
iences previously unfamiliar with the oppressive underpinnings of these institutions, the white men’s dialogue ironically justifies the missing students’ escape.

By characterizing these two school leaders in inconsistent language, while avoiding the tempting option of casting them as overly flattened villains, Momaday prepares his audience for a more complex portrait of Carrie, a white woman teacher whose tendency to honor her students’ cultural values draws criticism from Wherritt and Gregory. Wherritt notes how she has made a Kiowa “medicine wheel” the object of study in her class, after the “grandfather of one of her pupils brought it to her” (14). He complains that “[w]ith her it is sometimes difficult to tell who teaches and who is taught.” Wherritt also contrasts his own commitment to serving as a “disciplinarian” with Carrie’s tendency toward gentler, more sentimental (that is, feminized) teaching strategies (15). Wherritt further stresses the necessity of forcefully punishing any misbehavior, since “[i]t is our duty” to do so (17). And through this self-justification, another contrast emerges: one between “troublemaker” students whom Wherritt has disciplined and model pupils like John Pai, “the best student this school has ever had,” one “soon to be apostle to the Indians, the Kiowa messiah” (18–19).

With consummate skill, Momaday soon complicates our expectations concerning the characters of Carrie and John Pai, however. In a monologue at the beginning of scene 2, John Pai addresses a portrait of Lincoln, using an imagined conversation to undo the certainty with which Wherritt and Gregory presented this student as a future advocate of white values in his community. Declares John: “School here, Mr. Lincoln, is a camp where memory is killed. 66 We must forget our past. Our existence begins with the cutting of our hair and the taking of a Christian name. Here at the Kiowa Boarding School . . . I am taught not to remember but to dismember myself” (24). Referencing a sexual attraction to “Miss Carrie,” John Pai surfaces complicated elements in the relationships between white woman teacher and Native student—relationships whose intricate interactions around multiple power axes were certainly never addressed directly by the public relations machines supporting the boarding schools’ program.

When the audience hears Carrie herself speak, we are forced to confront the contradictory goals and needs behind white women’s teaching of young Natives. However seemingly open she is to cross-cultural exchange in the classroom, we see that a large part of Carrie’s motivation for her work is self-aggrandizing. She tells John Pai: “It’s just that I wanted for so long to find a student who, who could make use of me, total use,
whose mind and sensitivity I could shape and sharpen, who would justify and fulfill me, who would confirm me in my purpose . . . in my person and . . . vocation” (29, ellipses in original). Carrie’s effusive self-description here, along with its undertones of personal (including sexual?) needs, is in line with a recurring pattern of cross-racial relationships that emerged at institutions like Hampton and Carlisle and which, Katherine Ellinghaus has pointed out, were actually being encouraged by a number of assimilationist leaders on political grounds. With increasing numbers of white women drawing on the ideology of feminized purity, piety, and morality to claim positions as teachers and missionaries, these individuals also accrued strong female moral authority that could then supposedly be deployed to help civilize Native American men through marriage, thereby simultaneously positioning such women back in the domestic sphere (to the benefit of the nation). As Ellinghaus observes, positive responses to such pairings affirmed their potential value to the larger society, as in an 1891 speech by President Seelye of Smith College and in reports on the marriage of Elaine Goodale with Charles Eastman, one of which described their union as “a ‘Solution to the Indian problem.’”

In this case, Momaday limns the Indian half of any would-be union as ambivalent about, perhaps even resistant against, his own feelings of attraction toward Carrie and what she represents. We see this complicated identity politics at play in the character’s strong identification with the runaways, despite Momaday’s making other aspects of Pai’s portrayal reminiscent of “model” acculturated figures such as Eastman, Francis La Flesche, and Carlos Montezuma. John Pai, clearly troubled by the larger implications of the runaways’ attempted escape, verbally assails his mentor (and would-be mate?) with barbed critiques of the school, which he dubs a “conversion factory.” Repeatedly asking if he will be “whipped,” John Pai rejects Carrie’s attempts to describe a previous punishment of one of the runaways as merited discipline. Carrie expresses hope that the boys will be found, despite the brutal weather, but John Pai repeatedly shifts their conversation to the punitive features of the institution that led to their running away in the first place. He then shocks her by confessing that he once ran away himself—and that he “was disciplined” afterwards to be “made an example” (33). He stresses that the “pain of humiliation” was more brutal than the whipping, so that he forces Carrie (and through her, the audience) to face her own complicity in cultural genocide.

Like the opening of the play, this key scene has focused on those still at the school rather than depicting the runaways themselves. Rendered
memorably present by their very absence from the stage, these figures gradually take on a mythic quality, enabling them to stand in for all “the numberless souls whose stories have fallen beyond reach” that Momaday had honored in his preface. By the time we finally see the boys in scene 4 of act 1, their inability to speak for themselves (since, presumably, they have already died in the storm) does not actually render them voiceless. Momaday depicts Kiowa community members speaking to and about them in an imaginative conversation that includes the sleeping John Pai. Mother Goodeye and Emdotah (father of one of the boys and a Kiowa leader) pay tribute to the snow-sleeping runaways by saying their Native names over them, linking their personal stories with tribal lore, and imagining a better future for them, now that they “have gone away, into the darkness.” There, they can reconnect with tribal elders who have gone before. Explaining that he wishes “to place my words upon you now,” Emdotah uses Native language to reclaim the boys for the Kiowa community. Thus, he asserts their deaths represent a subtle victory (39). The quiet, dignified speech of these two figures, Emdotah and Goodeye, offers a marked contrast to the self-serving ranting earlier by Gregory and Wherritt.  

Act 2 examines the aftermath of the boys’ deaths, which have prompted much self-questioning for John Pai, as well as frantic efforts by Gregory and Wherritt to justify their harsh disciplinary practices. In a tense exchange, Carrie turns down a proposal from Wherritt, whose jealousy of John Pai seethes. Fearing both reprisals from the Kiowa people and, at least, a reprimand from the federal agent in charge of the area, Wherritt and Gregory are relieved to avoid repercussions on both counts. For the Kiowa, however, as a closing commentary by Mother Goodeye makes clear, more suffering lies ahead. An outbreak of measles will, ironically, lead school administrators to send children back to their tribal home—where the illness will spread rapidly throughout the community. At the same time, though, even in the face of this new tragedy, the Kiowa will call on the resources of storytelling to help safeguard who they are, as Emdotah says, “a tribe of dreamers” (29). Accordingly, together with John Pai and Mother Goodeye, Emdotah reconstructs the escape of Seta and his companions Mosatse and Koi-khan-hodle (no longer designated by white school names) in a narrative celebrating their bravery. This scene’s vision of the children’s final hours avows that they reacquired their true identities in the end, singing “a song at last, a death song, the song of a warrior,” for themselves and for their community. Momaday’s powerful counter-narrative play thereby closes with a touch of hope, implicitly imagining the cultural work his own
performative story song can do. Through the shared Archive of tribal cultural memory, and in collaboration with other community members who have helped recover and revise their history, the “boys” of Momaday’s play can now perform a restorative task.

Teaching about Survivance

Texts that present corrective histories are crucial to study in today’s cross-cultural classrooms. For one thing, these counter-narratives push members of the dominant culture to confront past abuses that we would generally prefer to forget. There’s a danger, however, to limiting our engagement with counter-narratives to stories revisiting oppression. Doing so may send an inadvertent message to students, leading them to stereotype as helpless victims the very people whose experiences and associated wisdom we need to honor. In such cases, pathways to productive, self-critical empathy can be sidetracked into pity that denies current and future agency to the very people whose histories have been marginalized and oversimplified in the past.

During the Keeping and Creating American Communities (KCAC) project I referenced in chapter 2, we sometimes encountered just such a response from students when studying the Cherokee Removal. Fortunately, though, we had support from a gifted Native scholar-writer, Diane Glancy (herself Cherokee), as we sought, over the multiple years of the KCAC program, to refine our cross-cultural teaching. Both her writing and her teaching about the Removal served as models we tried to adapt.

One narrative we used to reexamine Removal history was Glancy’s own compelling multivocal novel, *Pushing the Bear: A Novel of the Trail of Tears*. Glancy generously visited one of our summer institutes for K-12 teachers, and her ideas for teaching the book and its historical context soon carried over into area classrooms. In one productive exercise, she had us freewrite about the Removal, as it happened in the nineteenth century, in the first-person voice of someone who had not been fully represented in her novel. Some wrote as children on the journey; others as empathetic bystanders witnessing the travelers’ trek and struggling with how to respond; still others as someone who chose to stay behind, in hiding, rather than endure the round-up and long journey. Sharing these pieces allowed participants to debate the choices open (and those unavailable) to people living through the original events—including varying coping strategies used by Cherokee people upon arrival in the West, in what’s now Oklahoma.
In retrospect, in the context of this book’s framework, and though she didn’t use such terms herself directly when she worked with our summer seminar, I see connections between Glancy’s specific teaching strategy and the concept of learning legacy, as well as the aspiration of moving from archive-building to social action. Glancy’s *Pushing the Bear*, after all, drew on and reassembled a suppressed archive to produce a remapping and a retelling of the Cherokee Removal. To create that narrative, she had retraced the path of the Trail of Tears across the land and had studied the daily lives of people on that painful, enforced journey, as well as the historical documents that could be recovered. Her text blends voices of imagined characters with “real-life” ones. She takes this approach, I believe, to demonstrate the value of integrating the best evidence we can find from suppressed histories with indirect modes of recovery that incorporate what I would term *empathetic visioning and listening*. Thus, Glancy “imagined” the central character Maritole and her family into textual, story-making being. When teaching the book to us, she invited everyone in the institute to generate additional voices so as to expand that imaginative Archive. Adopting such a practice entails certain risks, of course; failing to do careful research first can lead to uninformed perspectives entering a cultural recovery process. But the possible benefits are nonetheless worthwhile, since the potential for promoting self-critical empathy is enhanced when we acknowledge the diversity of perspectives associated with any historical event where power differentials have come into play—as in the Removal or in the assimilationist schools that have been the primary focus of this chapter. In the multiple classrooms where KCAC participant teachers sought to apply Glancy’s approach, some admittedly had more success than others. Even when the results were less than ideal, though, our project teachers’ ongoing inquiry into their praxis gradually led to refined strategies for teaching about Native cultures in classrooms where students came, mainly, from dominant culture groups.

To enable collaborative evaluation of promising practices over time, we purchased class sets of Glancy’s book, rotating use across schools. Teachers supplemented that novel study with field trips to New Echota, both in person and online, and with other resources we exchanged across our team. For instance, some of our teacher participants organized dramatic readings based on scenes in the novel, with one high school group presenting a performance to elementary-age classes studying the topic in their state-mandated history curriculum. Excited as we were about these approaches, when assessing students’ responses to our newly developed “Removal units,” we discovered that our focus on the horrors of the Trail of
Tears sometimes failed to convey the resilience of the Cherokee people—both those who journeyed to what’s now Oklahoma and those who stayed behind, reorganizing as the Eastern Band.

Were we designing KCAC-sponsored Removal curricula today, we would be able to integrate in the additional resource of Glancy’s second volume of *Pushing the Bear*, subtitled *After the Trail of Tears*. There, she unflinchingly portrays the challenges characters from her first volume faced upon arrival in Oklahoma’s Fort Gibson, “a walled enclosure that reminded them of the stockades in the Southeast from which they had come.” But she also determinedly depicts their commitment “to rebuild in the new territory with what they could remember” (3). Addressing the bleak question Glancy identifies in her second novel’s “Afterword”—“what was it like to begin again from nothing?”—this sequel is hardly upbeat. But in its author-identified themes of politics, religion, and women’s leadership, and in its integration of “historical voices [like the Reverend Bushyhead] mixed with those of fictional characters” (189), this counter-narrative also commingles the “darkness” they faced with “once in a while, a brief spot of light,” such as portraits of resettled Cherokee gathering “to make a clearing in the trees for their field” (190). In those moments of hope for the fictional Maritole, her husband Knobowtee, and the children they adopt, readers can find a more forward-looking legacy.

Back during the NEH-funded years of the KCAC project, when Glancy had not yet written her follow-up account, astute teachers seemingly anticipated her eventual move to depict the Western resettlement by wondering how they could convey a resilience theme as part of the Cherokees’ living counter-narrative. Patsy Hamby tackled this concern by trying out a different core text, Robert J. Conley’s *Mountain Wind Song*, with a class of ninth graders. Conley (Keetoowah Band, Cherokee) addresses the Removal in three interwoven narrative strands, one depicting the nineteenth-century enforced migration and its impact on relationships, another excerpting treaties and other official documents associated with the Removal events, and a third set in the present day, when a Cherokee elder teaches his grandson cultural practices important to the community. Hamby’s students worked in three groups, with each team studying closely one of the three interwoven narrative lines in that novel, including digging deeper into related archives for each storyline. Each team then shared their research and interpretations with the whole class. Thus, one group focused on the historical romance of Waguli (“Whippoowill”) and Oconeechee, wherein Waguli heads west on the Trail of Tears, thereby becoming sepa-
rated from his lover. This team’s archive-building included landscape mapping, since the two characters embodied different geographic positions assumed by the two branches of the Cherokee tribe, post-Removal. Another group did intensive reading and supplementary research on the official documents in Conley’s novel. Initially worried that few students would select this strand, Patsy found this group emerged from their work with an empathetic critique of how the language in such documents was designed to disempower—and an appreciation for why many Native scholars today stress the importance of studying these legalistic archives. The third group worked through the narrative sequence of oral exchanges between the Cherokee elder and his grandchild learner, supplementing their reading with study of Natives’ use of material objects and oral texts to transmit culture. That third group, in particular, passed along an essential message of contemporary agency to the class as a whole.

Part of what enabled Patsy’s attentive cross-cultural teaching in this case was the shared work of K-university educators who had participated in a precursor to the KCAC initiative. Through a previous NEH grant, several of these same teachers had been involved in Making American Literatures (MAL), a national curriculum development program launched with a summer institute at the University of California, Berkeley, which incorporated inspiring workshops led by Native (Anishinaabe) scholar Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor’s teaching about core concepts from his scholarship had already informed the MAL team’s exploration of Native culture in that multiyear project; his ideas then carried over into the subsequent KCAC initiative, so that our collaborative curriculum-making in the second case actually linked up with a prior web of shared inquiry. In particular, our study of Native texts for KCAC’s “Recovering Displaced Heritages” theme drew from discussions about how best to facilitate study of Native survivance—a key concept several overlapping members on both project teams had first studied with Vizenor.72 By the time Patsy Hamby was teaching Mountain Wind Song and the larger story of the “Recovering Displaced Heritages” theme to students some might consider unprepared to grapple with Vizenor’s formulations, she had learned transportable ideas from the smaller team who had previously attended the Berkeley institute. So she was ready to invite her class to explore this productive cross-cultural learning legacy. Her supposedly “remedial” students responded with an energy ably described in her essay for Writing America, a collection of teacher narratives on the KCAC project.73 Through teachers-teaching-teachers networking in tune with National Writing Project principles, in other words, a learn-
ing legacy had passed from Vizenor’s scholarship to an educator across the country—and students who had themselves sometimes been constrained by stereotypes recalling those applied to pupils at assimilationist boarding schools. Crossing multiple cultural boundaries, counter-narrative resources reached new classroom audiences. In a sense, in other words, as we scholars surely hope happens with the work we do, Gerald Vizenor indirectly joined a collaboration with schoolteachers he has never met.74

Meanwhile, by sharing responses across their different reading groups, each of the students in Hamby’s class came to appreciate how all three strands of Conley’s novel are essential to his vision for a Removal counter-narrative—one that takes on the “official” history represented in this case by treaty and court case language, but also another conveying a legend that individualizes that formal history in a love story, as well as a third, showing Cherokee people living and making new history today. By pulling apart the three narrative strands of Conley’s novel and then weaving them back together, Hamby and her class became even more aware of how cultural resources gain social power when brought together through research and collaborative reflection. That is, these students came to read the novel as a story about survivance in action. Cultural memory, reformed, created a collaborative narrative of hope.

In the respectful, interactive teaching of Conley’s grandfather character, students found an affirmative counter-balance to the essential critiques associated with rereading broken treaty documents and confronting the suffering seen in the story of lovers separated by the Removal tragedy. Besides identifying empathetically with the cross-generational relationship depicted in the exchanges between the elder and his grandson, students recognized that narrative thread as emphasizing how Native Americans continue to safeguard their learning legacies, passing down valuable cultural resources to future leaders, and also how learners from other cultural backgrounds might tap into such knowledge from multiple American communities. In line with approaches like Conley’s narrative strand celebrating elder-to-child cultural transmission, the next chapter of this book will track another Archive of counter-narratives responding to the painful learning legacy of assimilationist boarding schools by presenting alternative models for cross-cultural teaching grounded in Natives’ own educational practices. Like the generous, community-building strategies I encountered in the Standing Peachtree teaching workshop described at the start of this chapter, these learning legacies offer a vibrant, positive foundation of cross-cultural teaching upon which we all can build.