THE FREEDOM AND PRIVACY OF AN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL’S SPORTS FIELD
AND STUDENT ATHLETES RESISTANCE TO ASSIMILATION

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ABSTRACT

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Starting in the late 1880s, the U.S. government decided that it was time to solve the on-going “Indian problem.” The government was concerned about how Indians were not adapting into mainstream society, were remaining on isolated reservations, and continued practicing their non-modern and uncivilized tribal cultures. Since Indians on reservations stood by the side of the road while modernity and capitalism passed them by, the U.S. government devised strategies to enforce complete assimilation by opening boarding schools, enforcing compulsory attendance laws, and taking young children away from their families. The key to changing the next generation of Indians was to target the domestic home and Pratt believed all Indian children needed to become white was an education. The early boarding school era from 1879 to 1930 banned Indian children from speaking their tribal languages, practicing their tribal cultures, and had strict militarized rules that taught them to value white modernity.

However, not all Indian children accepted assimilation and many students began to rebel against the school’s authority by finding private moments away from adult supervision. In To Show What an Indian Can Do, Bloom expresses how “Boarding school students clearly showed the capacity to take advantage of spaces wherever they could find them to play. When confined within the walls of an Indian boarding school, one must take advantage of any chance to escape” (xxi). Indian students took advantage of extracurricular activities and found avenues of escape where they could retain their pan-Indian identities. Students could resist assimilation by joining clubs, art classes, or athletic programs. This argument analyzes how sports were a strategy to resist assimilation by examining how student athletes devised ways to retain their pan-Indian identities and how they made private spaces on campus their own.
For the thousands of Indian children that did not survive their extended trip away from home at a federal boarding school.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II: PRIORITIES FOR BOARDING SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS AND THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How Eugenics Played a Role in the Assimilationist Agenda</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding School Superintendents’ Views on Forced Assimilation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports as an Advertising Strategy for Boarding Schools</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Capitalistic Benefits of Sports at Boarding Schools</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Boarding School Superintendents Failed to Realize</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How Sports Could Transform an Ethnic Group</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Boarding School Athletics Led to the Formation of Pan-Indian Identities</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimony from Student Athletes that Rebelled Against Assimilation</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding School Sports After the 1930s</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Rise and Decline of Boarding School Sports</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIBLIOGRAPHY</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“United States Indian School Pamphlet Cover” – 1895</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Map of Carlisle” -1911</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“United States Indian School Pamphlet – View of Campus” -1895</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Superintendent Henry Richard Pratt” -1902</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Superintendent Chalcraft” -1897</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Children at Stewart Indian School” -1930</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“View of Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School’s Campus” -1920</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Haskell Institute’s Sports Field” -1921</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Jim Thorpe in Carlisle Football Uniform” -1907</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“John Levi of Haskell” – 1922</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Early Boarding School Era and Efforts to Eradicate Indian Identities

At the turn of the twentieth century, the U.S. government decided it was time to solve the on-going “Indian problem.” The government coined the term “Indian problem” to illustrate how Indians were at a disadvantage because nothing could stop the onslaught of white civilization, capitalism, and modernity. Since Indians were labeled as “savages,” pre-modern, and “tainted,” the U.S. government devised strategies and tactics to maintain control over Indians by placing children in assimilationist institutions. An array of reformers, including bureaucrats, Christian missionaries, educators, and politicians attempted to solve the “Indian problem” by using boarding schools to achieve their aim. The founder of the boarding school system and Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Henry Richard Pratt, believed that education would assimilate Indians into white society. In his memoir, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, Pratt declares how “Education and industrial training for Indian youth, for all Indian youth, will, in a very short period, end Indian wars and, in a not very long period, end appropriation to feed and clothe them. I don’t believe anything else will” (252). Pratt believed that Indians could have the opportunity to join white society if they left the isolated and so called “backwards” reservation and attended a federal boarding school.

Before going further it is important to note that I will only use the term “Indian” while talking about children that attended federal boarding schools from 1879 to 1930. Instead of using terms such as Native Americans, Natives, American Indians, or aboriginal peoples, I decided to use “Indian” because the majority of boarding school narratives, memoirs, and primary sources refer to the young children as Indians. If a memoir or narrative includes the Indian child’s tribe then this will also be included. The “real” names for Indians should be their tribe, such as
Cherokee, Chippewa, Hopi, etc., but assimilation policies combined the variety of tribal cultures together and attempted to get rid of all types of Indian cultures.

The early boarding school era attempted to exterminate Indian cultures and identities in order to force Indians to partake in America’s modern and capitalistic society. Boarding school superintendents and the staff took pride in how their institutions could destroy Indian identities. The U.S government and boarding school staff members made earnest attempts to assimilate Indian children into American society; however, education was not bulletproof strategy. Complete assimilation required constant supervision of the children and total control of their relationships and interior lives. Thus, despite the efforts of so-called reformers and the government, federal boarding schools actually evolved into spaces where Indian children could resist forced assimilation and Americanization.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the U.S. government mandated assimilation and Americanization for all immigrant groups coming into the country. If immigrants desired to succeed and fit into American society then they had to abide by white society’s values and norms. Some minority groups adapted into American culture better than others and European immigrants often had an easier time fitting into white society than Indians. In order to assimilate Indians the government thought that it was necessary to break up the tribe through allotment and the loss of tribal identities. In *Formal Education in an American Indian Community*, Murray L. Wax, Murray Lionel, Rosalie H. Wax, and Robert V. Jr. Dumont note how “From the time of the Spanish and French missionaries until the present day, the whites have been concerned with educating the Indians. Usually, this has implied not simply the imparting of literacy, technical skills or culture and personality from an individualist, and in the case of the nomadic group, from a hunter into a settled and diligent farmer” (1). The U.S. government attempted to transform
Indian primitive hunters into efficient farmers to encourage capitalism, break up communal living, and force Indians to join modernity. Boarding schools aimed to transform Indian students into productive, efficient, and self-reliant members of American society, similar to European immigrants and white society. Boarding schools had the support of the U.S government due to federal laws that were created to end the on-going “Indian problem” and force Indians to join white society.

**How Federal Laws Encouraged Assimilation**

Starting in the late nineteenth century, Indians did not have a choice whether or not to send their young children to federal boarding schools because the government enforced laws to assimilate Indians through education. In *Domestic Subjects* Beth Piatote reports how in 1884 the U.S. government approved the removal of Indian children from their homes on the reservation to attend boarding schools and the allotment of reservation land (1). This law forced parents to send their children to federal boarding schools and threatened them with punishments if they did not comply. Indian parents would not get land from the government or could face imprisonment if they did not send their loved ones to a far away boarding school. With determined leaders such as Henry Pratt, Edwin Chalcraft, and Estelle Reel, reformers and missionaries began to take tens of thousands of Indian children away from their parents to learn how to become successful and “productive” members of American society.

The government did not only bribe Indian parents to send their children to federal boarding schools by threatening the removal of their allotment because they used allotment as an attempt to transform Indian pupils into self-reliant farmers. The Dawes Act in 1887 assisted the assimilation project by providing boarding school graduates with land ownership. The political ideology behind this law was to provide Indians with land to start their own farm or small
business so that they could join capitalistic society. If Indians had land and were taught how to make money from that land through vocational training then the government assumed that they would become more “white” and accepted by white culture. In *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School*, K. Tsianina Lomawaima reports how the Dawes Act “divested [Indians] of their tribal, communally held lands and introduced [them], forcefully if necessary, to individual land ownership” (3). The Dawes Act was a fundamental policy for the early boarding school era because schools were now responsible for teaching Indians how America valued independent land ownership. The vocational training at boarding schools taught Indians how to survive on their own settled land, just like other white rural homesteaders. With federal laws in place to encourage the extermination of Indian identities, federal boarding schools were ready to launch their assimilation project.

“Kill the Indian, Save the Man” – Efforts to Assimilate Indian Children

At the start of the early boarding school era in the 1880s, the goal was to assimilate Indians by getting rid of their tribal cultures. Assimilation would be fulfilled when Indian identities no longer existed, both in mind and being. Edwin L. Chalcraft’s memoir, *Assimilation’s Agent: My Life as a Superintendent in the Indian Boarding School Service*, defines assimilation as “usually termed ‘civilization’ – [which] would render Indians indistinguishable from whites, facilitate their absorption into the broader social fabric, and effect a fundamental change of identity in which the images Indians held of themselves as Indians would fade and eventually disappear” (xvii). Assimilation acquired different meanings throughout time and there was never a formal chart that measured assimilation. During the early boarding school era assimilation was a highly gendered process because it mainly targeted young
Indian men. Assimilation defined how Indian race was not a biological factor but a cultural phenomenon that could be changed.

Assimilation was achieved by superintendents believing that the only way to make Indians forget about their past identities was to take young Indian children from their homes so that they could learn about the white man’s way of life. The U.S. government was confident that Indian children would adapt into white society because they would spend at least five years at a federal boarding school, face punishments for practicing their Indian identities, and follow a strict schedule that acculturated them into white dominant society. Through this process of forced assimilation Indian children were expected to learn how to transform their lives into a modern, settled, and independent members of American society.

Federal boarding schools began to advertise how they could make Indians civilized and white by releasing promotional propaganda. Boarding schools, such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School, advertised their assimilation policies through photographs that portrayed how Indian students became white at their institutions. In the early 1900s, boarding schools released promotional pamphlets that would advertise the school’s campus and “before and after” photographs. In *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern*, Joel Pfister analyzes how “Carlisle’s popular before-and-after diptych photographs that typically exhibit a student in ‘Indian’ garb and in the adjoining photograph show the newly ‘civilized’ version propagated the *now you see it, now you don’t* disappearing act that the school hoped to accomplish in mind as well as body” (37). Complete assimilation used the motto “now you see it, now you don’t,” where Indian students would leave the institution no longer looking or acting like Indians. In these photographs, it is evident that boarding schools tried to “lose” the Indian in them to “save” their lives (Pfister 44). Pratt’s task of killing the Indian but saving the man
quickly became publicized through photographs to prove to white society that these institutions could rid young Indian children of their outdated and primitive past tribal cultures.

Boarding school superintendents wanted American society to believe that their institutions were saving Indian children from their primitive and “savage” cultures. In his memoir, Pratt expresses how publications from the boarding school targeted different audiences. Pratt mentions how some publications were for the public, administrative, or legislative authorities, while other publications for students and their families (297). In 1895, Carlisle Indian Industrial School released a pamphlet that includes pictures of the boarding school’s campus and classrooms. This pamphlet was intended for the public and Indian families because it includes numerous pictures of what life was like at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. On the front cover of the pamphlet, Carlisle released a traditional “before and after” photograph (see fig. 1) that reveals how Indians could forget about their Indian identities and outdated cultures after enrolling in a federal boarding school (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu). By putting this particular image on the front cover, Pratt wanted everybody to know how quickly boarding schools could introduce Indians to American society.
Fig. 1 – “United States Indian School Pamphlet Cover” -1895

This propaganda advertisement extends the well known before and after picture in the 1880s of Tom Torlino, where the “before” image is a traditional Indian with long hair and the “after” photograph is a clean-cut white man in a suit. This new “before and after” photograph portrays a more dramatic transformation by commenting on the unsettled lifestyle, not joining modernity, and presumably not contributing to American society. The “after” image shows Torlino as an ideal of American prosperity and national pride, with the appearance of a clean-cut American dressed in modern gentleman’s clothing, with a gracious and settled home, and draped in the American flag. Not only is Torlino’s clothing and appearance different, as he has been transformed from a “savage” Indian into a proper gentleman, but we see his evolution from living outdoors in a tipi to residing in a spacious modern home and his transformation from an Indian to a white American. The “before and after” photograph reveals how Indian students at boarding schools were objects moving on an assembly line, where the crude and primitive Indian would enter one side and an individualized American citizen was sent out the other side.

The “United States Indian School” image represents how white society assumed that Indians were living an uncivilized life because they were not settling down, finding steady work, or contributing to the U.S. economy. As Philip Deloria explains in *Indians in Unexpected Places*, white society believed that Indians “could and would leave behind their supposed lives as hunters and primitive farmers and evolve into modern people fully capable of using white technology – they just hadn’t done so yet” (143). Since Indian tribes did not join modernity and capitalism, boarding schools were responsible for introducing American norms, values, and traditions to young Indian children. The Carlisle pamphlet cover image represents the “primitive” lifestyle that does not adhere to white America’s modernity or capitalism. The two
sides of the image represent the change that white society, the U.S. government, and the boarding school staff expected Indian children to go through.

**Reasons Why the U.S. Government Forcefully Assimilated Indian Children**

In order to solve the “Indian problem,” the U.S. government and an array of reformers attempted to exterminate undesirable Indian characteristics and traits that did not align with dominant white culture. Pratt and Booker T. Washington, a graduate from Hampton Institute where African Americans received industrial and vocational training, believed that it was vital to train students to aspire for steady work. In *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1887-1923*, Donal Lindsey explains how Pratt and Washington believed that “no white American ever thinks that any other race is wholly civilized until he wears the white man’s clothes, eats the white man’s food, speaks the white man’s language, and professes the white man’s religion” (269). Boarding school superintendents wanted Indian children to forget everything about their past identities and abide by white culture’s values and norms. In order to “civilize” Indian children, the U.S. government and so-called reformers had to break up communal Indian tribes, teach Indian children the value of capitalism, and force Indians to join modernity.

First, the government decided to end communal living on reservations because this did not contribute to the economy. In the early nineteenth century, the government created Indian reservations so that homesteaders could take more land and Indians could be pushed aside and ignored. The reservations were not a part of American society and Indians were not assimilating like other immigrant groups due to the fact that were living in marginalized and isolated spaces. Indians were stuck on reservations and denied opportunities that African-Americans and European immigrant groups were given by white society. Later in the nineteenth century, the government decided it was time to get rid of reservations and force Indians to join mainstream
white society. Pratt recalls how he told an Indian agent for the Kiowa tribe that “Reforming a drunkard by keeping him in a saloon would be quite as sensible as our method of trying to civilize and Americanize our Indians by keeping them separated in tribes on prison reservations excluded from all contact with our civilization and the advantages of our American life” (153). Pratt urged political figures and so-called reformers to remove Indians from reservations because this was the first step to assimilate them into white society. The early boarding school era targeted young children because they could leave Indian reservations at a young age and quickly forget about their past lifestyles and tribal cultures.

Pratt convinced the U.S. government and white society that it was ethical and moral to take young Indian children away from their families and place them in an off-reservation federal boarding school. Taking young children away from their families was a strategy to break up Indian tribes because they were supposed to come back and show other Indians about the advantages of abiding by the white man’s ways. In his memoir, Pratt argues “the sooner all tribal relations are broken up, the sooner the Indian loses all his Indian ways, even his language, the better it will be for him and for the government and the greater will be the economy to both” (266). The boarding school system took Indian children from all over the country and found ways to separate tribes once they inside the assimilationist institution. For instance, when new dormitories were built at Carlisle Indian Industrial School, three pupils were assigned to a room but Pratt insisted that they would be from three different tribes (322). This policy enforced how Indians were not allowed to speak their tribal languages or forge alliances with fellow students. By taking young children away from their loved ones on reservations and enforcing rules for separating tribes inside the federal institution boarding schools attempted to exterminate all Indian identities.
Next, the U.S. government drilled capitalism into the minds and bodies of Indian students at federal boarding schools because white society did not value how Indians were not contributing to America’s economy. While at federal boarding schools, Indian students had the opportunity to see how American society was not the marginalized life on the reservation. Pfister proposes how “What students were schooled to see was that they were outnumbered, that American cities were towering and permanent (they saw the first American skyscrapers), and that ‘progress’ – meaning the extinction of the ‘Indian’ as anything but a usable American ‘individual’ – was futile to resist” (47). The government and boarding school staff expected Indians to realize that in order to be a successful and individualized American citizen that they would have to live in a capitalistic society. In order to join progressive capitalistic society, Indians were expected to support their own families by finding steady work and not having to rely on assistance from the U.S. government.

A fundamental step in assimilating Indians into American society was to ensure that they would find steady employment after leaving boarding schools. The boarding school system did not offer Indian students with the most promising careers but Indians were expected to support themselves and their families after graduation. Many Indian boarding school graduates became farmers, manual workers, carpenters, or teachers and were able to support themselves without help from the government. In Pratt’s memoir, he explains that “Constant employment is a necessity and of the greatest importance and benefit. Give them individually the proceeds of their own labor and they take hold of work with avidity” (169). Forcing Indians to participate in capitalism was a major step towards solving the “Indian problem” because Indians could settle down and support themselves once they found steady work. Federal boarding schools broke up
Indian tribes by forcefully taking Indian children away from reservations and training them how to become independent and successful members of white society.

Since Indian tribes lived modestly, communally, and without steady employment, the U.S. government devised strategies to force Indians to join modern American society. After Indian children attended a boarding school, they were expected to leave behind their Indian cultures and identities, join capitalistic society, and take part in modernity. David Wallace Adams in *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* mentions how, according to the U.S. government, Indians were “living a Stone Age existence, Indians could never withstand the never-ending onslaught on white settlement. Furthermore, the tide of progress could not be stopped. Hence, we must either butcher them or civilize them” (2). This explicitly racist statement proves how threatening assimilation policies were and how they were not concerned about what was best for Indians. The U.S. government used federal boarding schools to get rid of unwanted and “tainted” Indian characteristics, such as not keeping up with white modernity. Instead of leaving Indians on the so called “backwards” reservation, the government wanted to help Indians join modernity. Similar to Adams, Deloria stresses how Indians did not partake in modern society because they lacked the resources. Deloria argues how “It was easy to imagine impoverished and primitive Indians along the roadside or beside the tracks, watching as white modernity passed them by” (141). Boarding schools were designed to have Indians join the modernity bandwagon instead of waiting for it to pass them by. Hundreds of thousands of Indian children were forced to attend a boarding school and learn about what the government did not value and appreciate about their Indian cultures. While learning how to become American and white Indian children lived in deplorable conditions and were often ill, abused, or malnourished.
Reality of the Conditions Inside Boarding Schools

While the boarding school system did promise that Indian children could be assimilated into white society, it was a traumatic experience filled with homesickness, horrible living conditions, and contagious diseases. What the public, government, and superintendents expected the boarding schools to be like and the actual reality of the conditions dramatically varied. Once Indian parents found out about the crude conditions inside federal boarding schools they often wrote letters asking for their children to be sent back to the reservation. Brenda Child in *Boarding School Seasons* reveals how “Indian parents often reported in letters that they had to bring their children home from government boarding schools because they were sick and malnourished” (34). Indian parents did not realize how awful the conditions were inside the boarding school until after they sent their children away. In her narrative about Chilocco Indian School, Lomawaima further elaborates that an Indian parent wrote a letter after they heard about children dying from diphtheria. The mother pleads how “And I should like to know this if I send a dollar would you please have my babies picture taken if you will kindly do this let me know” (24). Indian parents were worried if their children were homesick, ill, or still alive. Parents that willingly or unwillingly sent their children to a boarding school had a right to worry because of the deplorable living conditions inside the school and the strict regimentation of the assimilationist agenda.

All Indian students, whether or not they enjoyed the boarding school experience, spoke about the horrible living conditions. Major concerns included poor sanitation, overcrowding, understaffing, the spread of diseases, and starvation. In his memoir, *Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School*, Adam Fortunate Eagle remembers the “Stink Dormitory,” where “the smell of stale pee is so bad it turns your nose sideways. Our beds are single-wide, steel frame
cots with a thin, horse-hair filled mattress under a rubber sheet” (6). Indian parents did not realize that their children would be sleeping in overcrowded spaces with foul smells and no heat. Many Indian children died from the horrible living conditions because it was a prime space for diseases to flourish. With the horrible sanitation and lack of space inside boarding schools, diseases such as measles, trachoma, and tuberculosis had the chance to quickly spread. In Jim Thorpe: Original All-American, Buford explains how Jim Thorpe’s brother, Charlie, passed away when he was eight years old when an epidemic hit Haskell (27). It was not until 1928 when the Meriam Report, also known as the “Problem with Indian Administration,” was released and the public found out about the horrible living conditions inside federal boarding schools. The Meriam Report, which will be discussed in the conclusion, marked the end of the early boarding school era.

Federal boarding schools also operated similar to prisons with strict rules, confinement, timed schedules, and militarized routines. Child mentions how Indian children would face “beatings, swats from rulers, having one’s mouth washed with soap or lye, or being locked in the school jail were not uncommon punishments” (28). Boarding schools forced Indian children to become ashamed of their Indian languages and cultures in order to drill Americanization into the minds and bodies of all Indian students. In her narrative, Lomawaima explains how the guardhouse was a common punishment for students who did not abide by the rules. A twelve year old girl named Noreen from the Potawatomi tribe explained how the matron was “always puttin’ people in the, we called it the guardhouse, it was actually just a room in the building but you were locked in and fed very meagerly for punishment” (48). Boarding schools operated just like a prison, with a strict schedule, matrons, and punishments for disobedience. Parents that sent
their children to federal boarding schools thought that it might offer their children a better life but they failed to realize the strict rules and awful living conditions inside the boarding school.

**Reasons Why Students Went to an Off-Reservation Boarding School**

Despite the militarized atmosphere and horrible living conditions, Indian parents sometimes agreed to send their children away to a federal boarding school. Indian parents sometimes cooperated because they believed that the boarding school system would offer their children better opportunities than the marginalized and isolated Indian reservation. Lomawaima retells the awful boarding school experience through a student named Albert from the Cherokee tribe. Albert explained how “My sister and my brother and I, I think I was about twelve years old, and the reason why we went up there, my mother was invalid that summer, and there was no one to care for us. So Chilocco was really a blessing them, they got rid of us pesky kids” (34). Albert, like thousands of other Indian children, would have been homeless without the federal boarding school system. There was simply nobody to provide adequate care for these children so they were sent off to an off-reservation boarding school. Furthermore, in the appendix to *Pipestone*, Eagle lists numerous reasons why students went to boarding schools, such as “Mother ill with cancer, father frequently deserts family, family held together by a grandfather who recently died, parents separated, father remarried, stepmother did not get along with him, mother dead and father trying to raise family, impossible home situation” (163). Some students believed that they were lucky to receive an education because they had an unstable home life. Many children went to federal boarding schools because their families did not have the resources to care for them. Other children went to boarding schools because of mandatory attendance laws or false promises made by missionaries and Indian agents.
Sometimes Indian children agreed to attend an Indian boarding school that was far away from reservations because recruiters made false promises. Indian agents and missionaries would not tell Indian families about the lack of food, lack of academic training, and mediocre job opportunities after leaving a federal boarding school. Recruiters would tell Indian children that they would travel and see the world and that they would be able to find simple pleasures in the white man’s world. Zitkala-Ša argues that the government convinced Indian children and their families to attend boarding schools by promising them that this new life would be better. However, this was the biggest hoax of the early boarding school era because the government gave Indians a false hope that their children could be successful like white Americans by attending boarding schools. Zitkala-Ša explains how missionaries came to reservations to promote boarding schools. In *Impressions of an Indian Childhood*, Zitkala-Ša insists that, “Mother, I am going East! I like big red apples, and I want to ride on the iron horse” (85). The mother tries to convince her daughter that the missionaries are not telling the truth. The mother explains that her daughter will mourn and cry for her, but the boarding schools will not soothe a homesick child. Quickly after boarding the train, the daughter realizes how she already misses her mother. The mother let her daughter go because she realized that she did not have the same resources that the recruiters and agents falsely promised to her daughter. The agents took advantage of children by bribing them with objects and telling them about how they could see modern society if they came with them. Indian children that agreed to attend an off-reservation boarding school would regret it when they realized the strict lessons they had to learn.

**Daily Lessons on Becoming White**

In order to transform Indian children into proper, well-mannered, and “civilized” members of society, boarding schools offered students academic and vocational training. In
Chalcraft’s memoir, *Assimilation’s Agent*, the daily schedule at the Chehalis Indian Reservation boarding school started with breakfast at 6:30 A.M. and ended with chapel services after dinner at 8 P.M. (23). The students were kept busy at all times so they had little time or privacy to resist the assimilationist agenda. Federal boarding schools provided students with both academic and vocational training with the goal of exterminating everything that was considered Indian.

In order to transform young Indian students into successful and productive members of society, boarding schools had to endlessly drill vocational lessons into the minds and bodies of every student. A newspaper at Carlisle Indian Industrial School from 1885 to 1892 included numerous daily lessons for students. In every issue of the *Indian Helper*, the following statement is included “The *Indian Helper* is printed by Indian boys, but edited by the-man-on-the-band-stand, who is NOT Indian” (carlisle.dickinson.edu). “The-man-on-the-band-stand” was Pratt and the newspapers noted that his race was non-Indian to show how these lessons were enforced by white society. The purpose of the student newspaper was to develop a community at the boarding school and for the public to see what was happening inside Carlisle. Mainly current students and their families read this newspaper because it was about the daily interactions taking place at the boarding school. Financial investors and white society read publications such as the Carlisle photograph brochure because they were curious to see how these institutions were transforming Indian students.

The vocational lessons and stories in Carlisle’s student newspaper reflect the values and expectations from Pratt and the boarding school’s staff. On Friday September 9, 1887, the *Indian Helper* published a story that a student wrote called “Some Things we are Learning at Carlisle besides Regular Study and Work.” The lesson trains students how to become white by telling them to:
How to earn money.
To be strictly truthful.
To economize in all our affairs.
To be polite in our manners.
To avoid tobacco and strong drinks.
Careful and correct business habits.
How to get most for our money.
How to do things well.
Habits of cleanliness and good order.
To avoid profane and indecent language.
To speak English fearlessly (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu).

According to the boarding school’s superintendent and the U.S. government, this list reveals the markers of a “good” Indian child that abides by the rules. All of the rules and lessons in The Indian Helper make the child ashamed of their outdated and primitive Indian culture because Indian tribes did not value capitalism, settlement, or the white man’s ways. This vocational training lesson from “the-man-on-the-band-stand” forces Indian children to feel embarrassed about speaking their tribal tongue or wearing tribal clothing. The key lesson is for Indian children to value time and money, which were two essential parts of becoming white. Phrases such as “economize,” “correct business habits,” and “money” reveal how white America valued and continues to value capitalism. Another vital lesson is look presentable and adopt American values, norms, and traditions. Indian students were expected to be polite, honest, try their best, and have good hygiene (as defined by whites) in order to be accepted into mainstream society. If Indian children followed these rules then they would be on their way towards becoming civilized and modern members of American society.

Another part of vocational training was to keep Indian students busy at all times. In order to be accepted by white society, Indian students had to value time, money, and productivity. To keep children from challenging or resisting assimilation policies, superintendents had to make sure that students were busy from morning to night. The Indian Helper included a poem from a
student on Friday November 11, 1891 that portrays the busy schedule and lifestyle at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The untitled poem tells Indian students to:

Work while you work,  
And play while you play;  
That is the way,  
To be cheerful and gay,  
All that you do,  
Do with your might;  
Things done by halves,  
Are never done right.  
One thing at once,  
And that done well,  
Is a very good rule,  
As many can tell.  
Moments are useless,  
Trifled away;  
Work while you work,  
And play while you play” (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu).

The poem illustrates how white society thought it was important to value time, hard work, and integrity. Pfister comments how “Many White reformers who assumed that ‘Indians’ did not know the value of time and work may not have understood that it was because Natives did value their time that they often considered repetitious and degrading forms of labor in the U.S. capitalist marketplace a preposterous misuse of time” (114). A fundamental lesson for all Indian students to learn was how to manage their time in order to become successful and independent members of society. The term “trifling” in the Carlisle poem refers back to how America did not value “insignificant” or “wasted time,” such as Indians not living a settled life. Time is money in a capitalistic society and Indian children had to learn how to avoid “useless moments.” The boarding schools offered meager vocational training and even less academic training.

All federal boarding schools had academic lessons in the morning and then vocational training in the afternoon. The academic training was not as extensive or rigorous as regular public schools because Indians were expected to work menial jobs after graduating from
boarding school. Child suggests that “Instead of engaging in normal classroom work found in public schools, Indian students spent long hours laboring in the school’s farms and gardens” (35). Federal boarding schools did not offer competitive academic training because educators did not believe that Indians were capable of more than a menial and low-class job. White society expected Indians to work manual or labor jobs after leaving the boarding school. Pfister explains how Pratt believed that “Indians, by his definition, can be expected to enter the general labor market as lumbermen, miners, railroad hands, or what not” (89). Pratt did not have to list more than three low-class jobs before saying “what not” because white society and the government believed that Indians were not capable of achieving anything else better. Indians at federal boarding schools only received meager academic training and some vocational training because they were expected to assimilate into America’s lower class as menial labor workers.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, dominant white society expected immigrants and minority groups to learn different vocational and academic lessons that would help them leave behind their past cultures and identities. In order to be a part of American society, immigrants, African-Americans, and Indians had to thoroughly abide by white society’s rules and values. At the same time as the early boarding school era, a new strategy emerged that helped minority groups learn how to become more American and white. In the late nineteenth century, amateur and professional sports became a way to collectively solidify national identities. Participating in sports or even watching sports quickly became a way to Americanize a diverse U.S. population.

The Emergence of Sports in American Society and at Federal Boarding Schools

Starting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, recreational and professional sports became a central part of America’s educational curriculum. Ironically, this was exactly
when the U.S. government was attempting to assimilate immigrants, African-Americans, and Indians into mainstream white society. During the early boarding school era from 1879 to 1930, baseball became America’s national past time, basketball was invented, boxing started with new rules, and football became a national obsession. Starting in the 1880s, the same time that Pratt founded Carlisle Indian Industrial School, there were organizational breakthroughs that encouraged the development of amateur and professional sports teams. In *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876 to 1930*, S.W. Pope reports how “Early collegiate athletics came to be more closely regulated in 1879, when the National Association of Amateur Athletes of America was formed… In 1888 the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) emerged as the principal organizational rival of the NCAA” (6). After amateur and professional sports became more regulated and popular they also quickly became a part of America’s identity. Pope further elaborates that the International Training School of the YMCA was founded in 1885 and this promoted the growth of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education (6). By the early twentieth century, all educational facilities encouraged recreational activity and athletics and prominent federal Indian boarding schools soon joined the sports frenzy.

As sports became more popular white society had the opportunity to learn more about ethnic groups and often became curious to see what they could accomplish on the sports field. In the early twentieth century, sports became part of America’s identity and it also became a critical rite of passage for ethnic groups to become assimilated into white society. Pope reports how “By 1920, most Americans thought that organized sports provided the social glue for a nation of diverse classes, regions, ethnic groups and competing political loyalties… Sport had indeed been transformed into one of the most influential activities involved in the production of a modern
national identity” (3-4). Boarding school superintendents quickly realized that sports had the ability to transform Indians into a spectacle where the public could notice how they were adapting into white society. Sports and assimilation at federal boarding schools was a highly gendered narrative because only men could attain the right type of white masculinity that mainstream society valued. Through athletics young Indian men could demonstrate a reconfirmed sense of themselves that valued sportsmanship, discipline, and teamwork.

Furthermore, the sports field became a space white society could see how different ethnic groups were assimilating into society. Similar to Pope, Deloria stresses the importance of Indian sports by claiming “The U.S. could readily assimilate Indian difference – where better than a baseball park or a football stadium? – and fans could understand viscerally how much assimilation would strengthen a multicultural, transnational America (123). Indians were not the only minority group that used sports as strategy to assimilate into white society and there will be an in-depth discussion about how different ethnic groups used sports as a space of resistance or acceptance into white society in Chapter 2, “The Freedom and Privacy of the Indian Boarding School Sports Field and the Reformulation of Pan-Indian Identities.”

The U.S. government, the BIA, and boarding school superintendents implemented athletics into their curriculum because sports were tied to Americanization. White society assumed that immigrants and Indians were not fit and healthy enough to become citizens, even when most of this was due in part to unhealthy conditions from poor sanitation in U.S. cities and reservations. In order to make “tainted” or diseased immigrants healthier, white society and eugenicists promoted physical education for minority groups. Pope describes how sports promoted the “muscular Christianity movement” because it was a healthy and socially beneficial activity (6). In the early twentieth century, white society had organizations that encouraged
muscular Christianity, such as the YMCA and Boy Scouts. Another part of muscular Christianity was teaching young athletes how to prove themselves through competition. In Pratt’s memoir, he argues that the reservation system was “denying them [Indians] the chances to see and thus to learn and to prove their qualities through competition” (214). The BIA and boarding school superintendents encouraged sports for Indian students because it would help them become more white. There will be more analysis about the muscular Christianity in movement in the next chapter about the priorities of boarding school superintendents.

After boarding school superintendents realized that sports were a tool to assimilate Indian children they also realized how sports were an opportunity for the public to witness the remarkable strides that Indian students were supposedly making at assimilating into white society. Indian athletes became a spectacle for white audiences because they were curious to learn about Indians and how students were learning to live by the white man’s ways. As newspapers started to include more stories about how Indian boarding schools could supposedly assimilate Indian children, more Americans became interested in witnessing how Indian students were becoming a part of mainstream society. In Pratt’s memoir, he explains how Indian education was a frequent topic in newspapers and large crowds started to gather when his students were in public (203). America quickly became fascinated with Indians and how education could transform students into civilized and white members of society. When Indians sports events starting becoming popular crowds would pack the stands at football or basketball games. In 1911, *The Washington Times* covered the Carlisle and Penn State game in an article called “Big Crowds Flock to See Carlisle Meet Quaker Team.” *The Washington Times* reports that “One of the largest crowds in years gathered today to see Carlisle battle with old Penn on the gridiron of Franklin Field” (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov). Athletics facilitated white society’s
curiosity to learn more about Indians and fans would pack the stands at boarding school football games to view the newly civilized Indian. The boarding school staff and U.S. government assumed that sports could Americanize Indian students through creating a spectacle for white society and by endorsing muscular Christianity.

However, this was often not the case. Indian athletes began to challenge and question forced assimilation by reformulating their Indian identities on the sports field. Athletics helped Indian students overcome the harsh reality of boarding schools because it offered them private moments in space with other Indian students. Boarding school superintendents thought that they could maintain constant supervision over Indian children but this was nearly impossible. Assimilation policies were not invincible because Indian children would find privacy through playtime or organized sports. Lomawaima reports how “Military discipline entailed a high level of surveillance of students but constant adult supervision and control was impossible… in the dormitories, four adults might be responsible for over two hundred children” (56). Outside of the dormitories, during playtime or sports games, students had more freedom to express themselves and resist assimilation because there was even less supervision. Federal boarding schools enrolled several hundred to even thousands of Indian students between the ages of five and nineteen with only a handful of adults to supervise them. Due to the lack of staff and direct supervision, athletic programs at boarding schools became an ideal space for students to start rebelling against forced assimilation into white society.

The Failure of Complete Assimilation

The boarding school staff could not realistically watch over hundreds of young Indians children around the clock. The assimilationist agenda did not account for how students could find private moments in public spaces to resist abandoning their Indian identities. In the early
twentieth century, the BIA recommended that boarding schools provide pupils more time for recreational play. In his memoir, Chalcraft remembers how “We noticed the pupils were using the Indian language almost exclusively while playing and at other times when they thought none of the employees could hear them, notwithstanding they were urged to use the language they were learning in the school rooms… From this, it appeared our weakness was in the playtime situation” (25). Boarding school superintendents attempted to solve the weakness of playtime by having student matrons supervise other Indian students. However, Indian students found a sense of privacy during playtime because Indian students would not snitch or tell on other students. Chapter 2 will have more discussion about resistance and how playtime or organized sports became a space of privacy.

Sports were not the only activity where students could discover privacy but it was an escape from the militarized routine at a boarding school. Students could escape by joining other extracurricular activities, such as art programs, the school’s band, or joining different clubs. However, this argument only analyzes how mainly young Indian men used the sports field to resist assimilation. Indian students could begin to challenge forced assimilation when they discovered private moments in space on the sports field. In his memoir, Chalcraft reminisces about how the “the library was on an upper floor, far from where any employees were working, which made supervision difficult, and the children used it more for playing than anything else” (96). Although this is playtime and not organized sports, white society and the boarding school staff wanted to turn playtime into further training for Americanization. Through discovering private moments in space on a boarding school’s campus, Indian students had the opportunity to show their creativity, adaptability, and resistance to forced assimilation.
Superintendents failed to realize how students could escape from constant supervision and rebel against the school’s authority. The *Indian Helper* portrays how sports fields at Carlisle Indian Industrial School were not close to the dormitories and campus buildings, which provided student athletes with a sense of privacy. On October 28, 1887, the *Indian Helper* notes how “The boys’ playground back of the school has been abandoned and hereafter will be farmed. In its place they have been given part of the field east of the stable, sufficient to lay off foot and baseball grounds” (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu). The location of the sports field is important for examining how student athletes redefined their pan-Indian identities. The National Park Service has an image of Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s campus (see fig. 2) where the sports fields are in one corner of the school’s grounds (nps.gov). The students had a sense of privacy when the sports field was not close to the buildings on campus. The sports field, athletic building, and athletic cage are in the northeast corner of the campus and are not close to administrative offices. The athletic field is placed in an isolated corner of the campus so students had less supervision than in the middle of campus. On a campus this large, students could easily locate private spaces to resist the assimilationist agenda.

Scholars have not fully acknowledged how the location of the sports field was vital for students to have private moments in space with other Indians. With students playing sports further away from the dormitories and classrooms, there was less surveillance from the boarding school staff and superintendents. Without the sports field, Indian children would have few other areas to interact without someone constantly watching over them. For instance, Carlisle Indian Industrial School was proud about the appearance and aesthetics of their campus. In the same pamphlet from the “before and after” image, there are photographs (see fig. 3) of designated recreational play areas on Carlisle’s campus (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu).
Fig. 2- “Map of Carlisle” -1911
During time away from the confining buildings on campus, Indian students could play tennis, croquet, football, read, or play outside. The photograph of the campus grounds illustrates how it was impossible to keep constant surveillance of every Indian child. By examining the location of the sports field there is evidence that students were not closely monitored at all times. There are only a few buildings off to the right of the sports field and it would be difficult for the staff to supervise every single Indian child while they were outdoors. Students valued outdoor playtime because it would offer them a chance to challenge forced assimilation. Outside of the boarding school’s buildings, students had the freedom to practice their Indian cultures and speak their tribal languages with other Indian students.

The first chapter will examines how boarding school superintendents, staff, and the U.S. government assumed that sports would completely assimilate Indian children into white society. However, chapter two reveals how students took advantage of private moments on the sports
field to practice their pan-Indian identities. Student athletes found a sense of purpose through playing sports and this dramatically changed their outlook on the boarding school experience. Indian students could interact with each other differently on the sports field, which became a site of resistance and a space of negotiation. In “How Boarding School Basketball Became Indian Basketball,” Wade Davis acknowledges how “During supervised play, Indian athletes normally pleased non-Indian coaches and observers with their orderly behavior, but away from non-Indian eyes, the students could interact with the game quite differently” (268). Sports fields were one of the only spaces that were out of sight from boarding school superintendents and the staff. Indian children could begin to redefine their pan-Indian identities when they were together on the sports field. For many student athletes, sports were their fondest memories of the boarding school experience that was otherwise traumatic, alienating, and designed to exterminate everything they knew about being an Indian.
CHAPTER II: PRIORITIES FOR BOARDING SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS AND THE
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

Superintendents at federal Indian boarding schools from 1879 to 1930 had to uphold their promise to white society and the Bureau of Indian Affairs that they could assimilate Indian children through strict discipline, education, and physical fitness. Superintendents had the responsibilities of developing curriculum and training programs (both academic and physical fitness), hiring staff, managing the school’s tight budget, and advertising. The U.S. government and superintendents intended that there would be no escape from total assimilation, with their strict polices to only speak English, maintaining a militarized routine, and offering academic and vocational training. Quite deliberately, there was little time devoted to recreational activities. Superintendents tried their best to ensure that there were no useless moments at federal boarding schools by offering students little privacy and playtime. This chapter analyzes how superintendents stayed committed to their assimilation policies even when the public and government began to realize that complete assimilation was impossible.

Several prominent superintendents believed in assimilation until the end of their tenure at a federal boarding school. Henry Richard Pratt, Edwin Chalcraft, and Estelle Reel believed they were truly helping American society and saving Indians by placing them in federal institutions that forcefully introduced them to white society’s values and norms. These superintendents thought that they had correct and ethical intentions because they were “rescuing” Indians from their outdated culture. Even when a movement began that was against the boarding school system, superintendents still believed they were doing Indians a favor by introducing them to the norms and values of dominant white society.
Although white society and the U.S. government realized that forced assimilation was perhaps not the best policy, superintendents still remained committed to their assimilation policies. The Meriam Report in 1928, which will be discussed more in the conclusion, exposed the horrible living conditions inside boarding schools and started the movement to have more Indian children attend public schools. In her introduction to Chalcraft’s memoir *Assimilation’s Agent*, Cary Collins informs us how “Offering no apology for Native cultural loss, Chalcraft never questioned the propriety of American Indian policies, and he remained unwavering in his commitment to assimilation” (xv). Superintendents continued to encourage forced assimilation through education because they thought were helping impoverished and helpless Indians. Once Indians were shown how to have a strong work ethic, speak English, and have Christian values, then they would be on their way towards assimilating into white society. In *Battlefield and Classroom*, Pratt insists he was “rescuing” Indians by “helping the Indians to overcome part of the false reputation given to them by their enemies” (135). Superintendents assumed that they could transform Indian students into white citizens if they only had the chance to show them how. For forty years, superintendents, the BIA, and the U.S. government set up a complex system to attempt to destroy Indian tribal cultures and identities.

**How the Indian Boarding School System Operated**

The early boarding school era constructed an intricate system to attempt to assimilate Indian children into white society. While the superintendent did have most of the control and power over the boarding school, there were other officials that reported information back to the BIA. The BIA had several different titles throughout the twentieth century such as the Indian Bureau, Indian Department, and Indian Service. The rest of this chapter will refer to the Bureau of Indian Affairs since this was the original name for the department that worked closely with the
U.S. government. Starting in the late nineteenth century, the BIA promised to maintain constant surveillance over Indians to ensure that their race was either butchered or civilized. The BIA also enforced rules and obligations that sent Indian children to far away off-reservation boarding schools, either by choice or involuntarily. Piatote reports how one of the major goals of the BIA was the “policy of compulsory school attendance [that] originated with the commissioner of Indian affairs in 1894 and was adopted by Congress by 1891” (1). The U.S. government and the BIA worked together to ensure that every Indian child could have the opportunity to receive an education that would teach them how to leave the reservation and become civilized and white.

In order to become civilized and white, the U.S. government, the BIA, and superintendents expected their students to leave behind everything that was considered Indian. According to the U.S. government, Indians had two options – to stay on the reservation and never have the resources to be able to join white society or to become educated about American capitalism and modernity. Numerous superintendents and prominent leaders in the early boarding school era argued that Indian children could become civilized and white if they only had the chance to be shown how. Deloria explains how “Indians they thought, could and would leave behind their supposed lives as hunters and primitive farmers and evolve into modern people fully capable of using white technology – they just hadn’t done so yet” (143). The U.S. government and the BIA defined civilized and “whiteness” as having a settled home, contributing to the U.S. economy, and learning how to support themselves by finding permanent employment. Once Indians took that first step off the reservation, the government would give them an opportunity to learn how to become more like white society. From the start of a student’s journey off to a federal boarding school, the BIA kept a record of how well the child was assimilating into white society.
The U.S. government and the BIA created a system where they could keep track of how well Indians were supposedly assimilating into white society. There were inspectors who worked in the field and traveled to different boarding schools and kept the U.S. government, BIA, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs informed about what was going on at the federal assimilationist institutions. In his memoir, Chalcraft explains how “The Indian department implemented the inspection system in 1873 as a means of centralizing Indian affairs and diminishing local agency control” (139). The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, which there were over a dozen in the early boarding school era, would oversee the progress being made at boarding schools and offer recommendations on how to further assimilate Indian pupils. The Commissioner and inspectors would also offer advice on how to become a model boarding school, such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School or Haskell Training School. The BIA set up an intricate system that reported how superintendents of federal boarding schools were priding themselves on the aesthetics of their campus, how well students were so-called progressing or evolving, and how they were producing modern citizens. Through developing this intricate system and sending out reports about the progress being made at boarding schools the government attempted to get rid of Indians’ cultures and identities.

However, these reports only focused on what the BIA and the U.S. government wanted to hear and not about what was actually happening inside federal boarding schools. These reports did not focus on the deplorable conditions inside the school and how children were beaten and underfed. Instead, the BIA and the U.S. government were only concerned about commenting on the superintendent’s abilities as head of the federal institution. In his memoir, Chalcraft mentions the different roles and responsibilities employees had at the BIA. Chalcraft discusses how “Indian Agents and superintendents are executive officers in the field work, while Special
Agents and Supervisors of Indian Schools are inspecting officials checking up the executive officers’ work and reporting their observations as to the conditions found, together with recommendations that seemed advisable, directly to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs” (140). The BIA and the government wanted to measure how well the assimilation project was coming along by observing how many students appeared white (though proper hygiene, clothing, and mannerisms), if they spoke English, and how well they adapted into white society after leaving the federal institution. However, these inspectors did not know much about Indian culture and failed to realize how complete assimilation could not be measured or kept track of.

Superintendents such as Pratt, Chalcraft, and Reed never realized that they didn’t have best intentions in mind for Indians because they remained committed to forcefully changing the next generation of Indians. In order to change the future population of America, superintendents at federal boarding schools had to become eugenicists and focus on how to exterminate Indians’ undesirable traits.

How Eugenics Played a Role in the Assimilationist Agenda

Right before the start of the early boarding school era, several movements began that focused on improving weak minds and bodies. These movements were concerned about promoting modernity and educating immigrants about how to become Christian, ethical, and competitive white citizens. One of these movements, Muscular Christianity, started in Europe in the 1850s and attempted to establish a new type of white masculinity that reflected the superiority of white males. In the early twentieth century, this movement quickly spread to the U.S. and President Roosevelt supported Muscular Christianity. In Pay to Play: Race and the Perils of the College Sports Industrial Complex, Lori Latrice Martin, Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner, and Nicholas D. Hartlep claim how “Like many Protestant leaders, Roosevelt also made
the argument that industrialization, urbanization, and immigration created a perfect storm that threatened the nation’s global stance and white male dominance on the home front” (19).

Immigrants and minority groups were perceived as a threat due to how America was on a mission to civilize so-called heathens and savages. The U.S. government attempted to eliminate all minority groups’ undesirable characteristics to ensure that white supremacy remained the status quo in America. Bodies that were foreign or “other” were considered a threat because they could take away white male dominance if the U.S. government did not come up with a plan to assimilate minority groups into dominant society.

Since foreign bodies became a threat to the nation’s cultural stability and white male dominance, America decided to adopt a scientific theory of manipulating population levels from Europe. In 1883, Sir Francis Galton coined the term eugenics in the United Kingdom and started the movement in Europe. The U.S. quickly became interested in Galton’s work because the government needed to find a way to keep America mostly white. In Essays in Eugenics, Galton defines eugenics as “the science [that] deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” (35). Eugenics viewed race as a cultural phenomenon instead of a biological science. Individual bodies became the U.S. government’s business because they needed to be improved both physically and mentally. With the influx of immigrants, urbanization, and industrialization, the government aimed to improve future generations by making minority groups and immigrants more like white society. The U.S. began to practice positive eugenics by attempting to change the appearance and behaviors of immigrants and Indians. In an essay titled “The Darwinian Context: Evolution and Inheritance” in the Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics, Paul Diane and James Moore explain how positive eugenics aimed to increase the proportion of individuals with desirable white traits and
to enrich society with outstanding individuals (31). Positive eugenics attempted to make minority
groups and immigrants more white so that future generations would not take away white male
superiority. The only way to stop fears about the decline of white supremacy was to force
immigrants and Indians to learn how to become more like white society.

Similar to fears about losing white superiority, Americans did not want society to be held
back by undesirable traits and people that did not conform to modernity and capitalism. In
“Race, Science, and Eugenics in the Twentieth Century,” Marius Turda asserts how,
“Eugenicists saw their efforts within the broad context of a battle against biological and social
degeneration, the ultimate aim being the creation of a healthy racial community” (72). Instead of
having Indian children grow accustomed to the lifestyle on the reservation, it was essential to
prevent social degeneration. Boarding schools promoted evolution through good breeding by
keeping boys and girls separate and making sure that only proper and civilized Indians married
to make sure that they were not more “savage” Indian children coming into the world. Once
boarding schools realized that they could transform students into civilized members of society,
superintendents started to become more interested in how sports could become an advertising
strategy for how their institutions were civilizing Indian children.

Since boarding schools were only concerned with exterminating undesirable Indian
characteristics, superintendents and staff members did not reflect on the students’ actual physical
and mental health. Alison Bashford and Phillipa Levine argue how “Eugenic advocates typically
had population-level aims firmly in sight, and were concerned less with making individuals
happier, healthier, or fitter for their own sake than with making a significant difference to the
physical constitution of future generations” (13). Eugenicists were concerned with exterminating
undesirable traits in non-whites, such as diseases, unhealthiness, unproductivity, and immoral
behaviors. The goal of eugenics was to change reproductive practices through preventing certain minority groups from adding more undesirable traits to the future population. Although sterilization and contraception were not involved in the early boarding school era, superintendents and staff members still made eugenics a part of their assimilation.

Eugenics was booming at the start of the early boarding school era and was declining by the 1930s. Since eugenics was flourishing during the early boarding school era, superintendents decided to implement eugenics into their institutions. Based on Galton’s definition of eugenics, superintendents firmly believed in this movement because their federal institutions attempted to exterminate all Indian characteristics in future generations. Superintendents wanted Indian pupils to leave their schools and contribute to America’s economy by becoming self-reliant and independent. When Indians left the boarding school and started a civilized and settled life, then they could reproduce and teach their children how to abide by white culture’s norms and values. Superintendents and the BIA were always afraid that Indians would revert back to their old culture and primitive ways after leaving a boarding school so they stressed to students that they should never forget about what they learned during on their extended trip away from home. The government assumed that Indians would reproduce and teach their children about how they learned to join white society. The only way to change future generations of Indians was to start teaching young Indian children how to acquire more desirable, modern, and civilized traits.

In order to promote positive eugenics, boarding school superintendents attempted to transform the minds and bodies of every Indian student. The mind could be evolved and civilized through meager education but superintendents needed to find a strategy to improve the bodies of Indian students. Several superintendents began to encourage physical training for Indian students when they noticed how sports encouraged fit minds and bodies. In *The Uniform Course of Study,*
superintendent Reel advocated how boarding schools needed to improve the heredity and physique of Indian children. In her book, Reel reports how “In order to get the best out of life, it is necessary to look into the physical condition of pupils and give them the training that will counteract the influences of unfortunate heredity and strengthen the physique” (196). A major concern in eugenics and the early boarding school era was to transform minds and bodies and Reed encouraged this connection to further ensure that Indian children were becoming assimilated. Superintendents started more athletic programs when they realized that physical training could lead to positive eugenics.

**Positive Eugenics and Indian Boarding School Sports**

Superintendents believed that sports could contribute to positive eugenics because it would teach Indian children to how to have desirable and civilized traits. Through sports Indians could learn about the white man’s ways because sports promoted muscular Christianity and eugenics. Indian boarding school athletic programs supported eugenics because sports portrayed how Indian students competed well with others, valued sportsmanship, and could compete with whites. Sports had the ability to increase America’s proportion of individuals with positive traits and many superintendents thought that sports could quickly Americanize Indian children. Pratt acknowledged the benefits of sports in the “Pratt Papers” by expressing how “If it was in my power to bring every Indian into the game of football, to contend as my boys have contended with different young men of the colleges, I would do it, and feel that I was doing them an act of the greatest kindness, and elevating them from the hell of their home life and reservation degradation into paradise” (67). Pratt supported eugenics because he believed that sports could elevate the Indian race to a higher status and degree of superiority by creating so-called proper outstanding members of society. Eugenics and Indian boarding school sports were intertwined in
the early boarding school era due to how America was attempting to get rid of individuals with undesirable traits.

Several superintendents argued how football could transform an uncivilized body into an outstanding and well-mannered member of society. Sports could benefit the assimilation project since it promoted the development of white characteristics and traits. Adams in *Education Through Extinction* mentions how “From football Indians would learn the values of precision, teamwork, order, discipline, obedience, efficiency, and how all of these interconnected in the business of ‘winning’” (185). From obtaining these qualities Indian athletes would supposedly learn how to leave behind their old cultures and join white society. Sports functioned in the eugenics discourse by promoting more positive and civilized behaviors for Indian pupils and superintendents believed that this would help get rid of Indian cultures and identities. Likewise, Sullivan in *Education through Sport* argues how sports could help Indians acquire more desirable traits that aligned with white society’s expectations of a proper and civilized individual. Sullivan compares how sports related to life after boarding school by claiming how “For many, virtues such as individualism, competition, and discipline were vital for success in business and society during this time” (105). Sports trained student athletes how to become more white and civilized, which lead to future generations of Indians with less visible Indian characteristics and traits. Superintendents urged Indian athletes to take these desirable traits that they learned on the sports field to America’s workforce. The early boarding school era used sports as a strategy to promote eugenics since it could change future generations of Indians by erasing all of their undesirable and foreign traits. All boarding school superintendents were eugenicists because their assimilation policies forced Indians to acquire more positive white traits and leave behind their undesirable Indian characteristics.
Boarding School Superintendents’ Views on Forced Assimilation

Numerous boarding school superintendents never gave up on their assimilationist agendas or attempting to “rescue” the Indian race. In 1879, Richard Henry Pratt (see fig. 4) became the first superintendent of an Indian Industrial School when he founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu). Pratt was the first boarding school superintendent and set the path for other political figures to follow in his footsteps. Before his leadership at Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Pratt attempted to Americanize Indian criminals into “civilized” members of white society at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. Fort Marion was an old prison that Pratt used to train Indians with speaking English, appearing white or civilized, and finding them menial work in the community. Throughout Pratt’s thirty-year tenure in the boarding school system, he thought that the rules and schedules inside boarding schools should be similar to a prison.
Pratt kept detailed records of Indians with a criminal record and kept a log of when they were arrested and what criminal charges or delinquencies they obtained. Some of his Indian criminals were arrested for theft, kidnapping, or domestic abuse. In his memoir, Pratt narrates how “I am authorized to forward the categorical list and offenses of the prisoners, compiled from the official reports of the officers having the matter of looking up offenders in charge at Indian agencies. I have added to that list the date and place of arrest of capture, and the date of the death of those that have died” (138). Before his career in the boarding school system, Pratt kept detailed and precise notes of his affairs and interactions with Indians. Later in his career and throughout BIA employees’ careers working with Indians, taking notes and records of Indian students became an important strategy to document the so-called progress of assimilation.

While at Fort Marion, Pratt wanted white society and the U.S. government to notice how the Indian criminals were transforming and progressing into white citizens with outstanding behavior and morals. The public began to take interest in the Indian criminals because they were starting menial jobs in the community and most white citizens were curious to see Indians. In a letter to the Smithsonian Institution, Pratt explains how “It is simply just to say that since being here these men have set an example to civilization in good behavior; twenty-two of them have learned to read and write, understandingly; while in the matter of labor, as such could be given, they have not failed or weakened in the slightest degree” (138). Pratt, like many other superintendents, believed that Indians only needed a chance to be shown how to live by the white man’s values and norms. A fundamental political aspect in the early boarding school era was to give Indians a chance to learn how to live by white society’s expectations and norms.
The Founding of the First Federal Boarding School

Pratt boasted about his success with the Indian “criminals” in St. Augustine but he thought that Indians could have better opportunities and a chance at success in a different environment. After the public and the government began to take notice of his work with Indians, Pratt argued, “Teaching them to work is one thing, but St. Augustine offers almost nothing in that line… They say they want to learn to build houses, to make boots and shoes, to do blacksmith work, and to farm, etc.” (167). At Fort Marion, Indian criminals worked in the St. Augustine community and would never have the opportunity to learn industrial trades. However, at Carlisle, Indian students had the opportunity to learn different trades and received a more formal but still inadequate compared to white public schools, education. Pratt believed that if Indians desired to become productive members of capitalistic white society, then they would have to leave the prison and be trained in a more structured environment.

Pratt knew that other institutions attempted to Americanize minority groups through a boarding school system where the children would be forced to live far away from home. In the 1880s, the Hampton Normal and Industrial Training School and Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute started to Americanize African-Americans by teaching them how to become individualized, independent, and successful members of white society. The Hampton Institute’s curriculum focused on how to make African-Americans self-reliant. Pratt wanted to do the same with Indians and give them a chance to join white society. In his memoir, Pratt explains how “My plan would be to create an educational department for the Indian service and to place at its head a great and earnest educational man like General S.C. Armstrong of Hampton Institute, for instance, and to provide him with all the means necessary for the work” (246). Pratt wanted to start a federal institution that would clothe, teach, and industrialize Indian children by forcing
them to leave their Indian cultures and identities behind. The boarding school system wanted to
supposedly offer Indian children a new way of life in four years and the U.S. government
supported this plan because it would rid of the country of “savagery.” Pratt proposed this plan to
the U.S. government and found an empty military barrack to start the first federal boarding
school. Since Pratt started his first two institutions at an old prison and a military barrack this
reveals how he thought that Indians should be confined and kept away from society until they
were ready to be fully immersed into white culture. The prison structure of the first boarding
schools portray how Pratt wanted the children to know that there were no other options than to
come to a federal institution and learn how to leave their Indian identities behind and become
independent and self-reliant members of white society.

**How Becoming White Meant Self-Reliance**

The U.S. government supported the boarding school system because a fundamental part
of becoming American or white was learning how to become self-reliant and independent. The
government did not want minority groups relying on public services for assistance and a major
goal of boarding schools was to make Indians self-reliant in a four year educational program. In
1881, President Garfield promised society that “I am going to make the Indians a distinct feature
of my administration” (Pratt 247). At the exact same time as the early boarding school era, the
U.S. government was searching for ways to assimilate minority groups by educating them how to
join America’s capitalistic and modern society. A central aspect of making Indians self-reliant
was breaking up the communal affairs on the reservation. Instead of communal living, Indians
needed to learn how to become independent and to take care of their own needs. From 1879 to
1904, Pratt was outspoken about his views with assimilating young Indian children. According to
the “Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners” in 1895, Pratt expressed how:
To me the Indian question does not center in lands in severalty. It does not center in any other phases that have been discussed here. It is a question of individualizing, of getting the Indian to stand with us shoulder to shoulder, and to take care of himself, and not be dependent upon a department whose particular quality is a perpetuation of itself. I feel that the Indian can be made just as capable of taking care of his individual affairs as the rest of us (digicoll.library.wisc.edu).

In the early twentieth century, there was a massive influx of immigrants coming into the U.S. and organizations and political affiliations targeted different minority groups to Americanize. The U.S. government targeted different minority groups based on fear from racial assumptions. For instance, Chinese immigrants were excluded from citizenship due to fear about diseases and promiscuity. Another example is how the U.S.-Mexico border became more patrolled from fears of Americans losing employment. The U.S. created a quota system to make sure that America would retain its “whiteness.” The U.S. government frowned upon immigrants that could not support themselves and had to rely on government assistance. This was referred to as “care drain” because white society was fearful that immigrants and minority groups would use too many public assistance programs and did not have the resources to become independent citizens.

In order to become self-reliant and independent members of American society, Pratt believed that it was important to introduce and immerse immigrant or minority groups into white society. The worst place for Indians was the marginalized reservation because this isolated space offered them no chance at becoming immersed into white society. In his memoir, Pratt argues how “If we had adopted the segregating Indian system for each language group of immigrants and held them in racial communities on reservations remote from the environment of our American life, it would have just as effectually prevented their Americanization” (271). Pratt
thought that he was being a progressive by giving Indians a chance to assimilate like other minority groups and immigrants. Pratt thought that reservations were holding Indians back from becoming independent, individualized, and successful members of white society. A major goal of Americanization in the early twentieth century was to have immigrants and minority groups work closely with whites to learn how to live by the white man’s ways.

Similar to Pratt, Chalcraft (see fig. 5) believed that boarding schools needed to educate Indian students about self-reliance and independence (Chalcraft). Chalcraft’s assimilation policies, like many other superintendents’ perspectives on educating Indians, assumed that Indians needed to be “rescued” from their isolated life on the reservation.

Figure 5 – “Superintendent Chalcraft” – 1897
In his memoir, Chalcraft claims how “Indian policies were to radiate with the humanitarianism needed to lift the nation’s peoples from the miserable condition in which they had become mired” (xvi). Similar to how Pratt frequently described Indians as depressed or morose, Chalcraft assumed that somebody needed to save Indians by taking them away from the marginalized reservation and teaching them how to abide by the norms and values of white society. Furthermore, at graduation Chalcraft would urge Indian students not to forget about what they learned and to not go back to the so-called “backwards” lifestyle on reservations. In his memoir, Chalcraft reminisces about how he told students to strive for faithfulness in their future studies and encouraged students to become self-reliant (92). According to the U.S. government, in order to be self-reliant and independent one must not rely on the government for assistance, be able to support their family, and have steady employment. This was different from what was valued on Indian reservations because it was a collective community without steady income or settled homes.

Another superintendent that believed in self-reliance was Estelle Reel at Central Indian School in Cheyenne, Wyoming from 1898 to 1910. Reel encouraged vocational education to ensure that boarding schools were producing “willing workers” that would contribute to America’s workforce and economy. In the first published narrative about how to enforce effective assimilation policies, Reel commented about how industrial education would awaken Indians’ capacities and interests. In *The Uniform Course of Study*, Reel comments how her goal was to “make Indian boys into industrious, practical farmers and self-supporting citizens” (40). Many superintendents believed that the best way to transform Indian families into white citizens was to have men become self-reliant and independent farmers and train women how to become homemakers. The gendered and sexist narrative of boarding school curriculums was to have men
become independent workers and to have women take care of the domestic home. After superintendents created an industrial curriculum that would supposedly produce independent and self-reliant members of society, it was time to show white society how Indians were becoming just like them.

Sports as an Advertising Strategy for Boarding Schools

At the start of the twentieth century, white society quickly became fascinated with sports teams at Indian boarding schools. Newspapers around the country covered Carlisle’s and Haskell’s football teams and superintendents used sports as a way to advertise the so-called progress of complete assimilation. Superintendents began to encourage athletic programs when they realized that this was an effective strategy to show the public what these recently “savage” Indians could accomplish on sports fields. Deloria observes how Indian boarding schools, such as Carlisle, “took pains” to illustrate its success with transforming young Indian children into assimilated and Americanized members of society (36). First, superintendents took advantage of how Indian students were spectacles on the sports field by charging an admission. Superintendents also advertised their athletic programs to portray how the institutionalized life at a federal boarding school could exterminate Indians’ undesirable characteristics and traits.

White society became interested in Indian tribal cultures and they were curious to view how boarding schools were transforming Indian students. While Pratt was working with Indians at Fort Marion the public started to take interest in Indians because they wanted to know more about their cultures and witness for themselves how Indians were becoming a part of white society. In his memoir, Pratt narrates how “During the winters there were many visitors to the old fort and among them considerable numbers of people of importance in the country. There was always a desire to see and know about race peculiarities” (120). Politicians and the public
became intrigued by the federal boarding school system because they knew little about Indians’ lifestyle and tribal cultures. America created a spectacle out of Indian students at boarding schools because they wanted to witness the dramatic and traumatic transformation of savagery into white civilization. Superintendents encouraged politicians and the public to visit their institutions so that they could see for themselves how Indians were forcefully becoming assimilated into white society. Chalcraft advertised how close Chehalis boarding school was to town so that the public would visit and end up supporting his assimilationist institution. In his memoir, Chalcraft explains how “A trip to the reservation is worth while of any townsman… Many had never been on an Indian reservation nor seen Indians. Puyallup Agency was in plain view and only a short distance from the principal hotel in town” (83). After advertising to the public how they could tour the federal boarding school, Chalcraft had several political visits, such as members from the Senate Indian Committee. Not long after Chalcraft’s visits from politicians and missionaires, boarding schools began inviting the public to athletic events.

“Look at What Indians Can Do!”

Since white society did not know much about Indians, sports events were an opportunity for the public to change their views about Indians. Spectators at boarding school athletic events reconsidered the typical stereotypes about the “savage,” “barbaric,” and violent Indian through personally witnessing Indians’ sportsmanship and physical achievements on the sports field. Bloom analyzes how “Unlike physical education or recreation, these athletic programs were created to provide schools with a valuable source of public relations, providing proof that Native American children could be assimilated” (xvii). Superintendents argued that sports could introduce students to modern society and teach them how to become white. Likewise, Sullivan reveals how “Athletic events challenged and sometimes changed such [negative] views as
spectators encountered Indians in a familiar and recreational environment” (114). This new positive gaze embraced how sports could create traits that were essential to forming an American and white identity. The white spectator’s positive gaze of Indian athletes focused on how sports proved that Indians could assimilate into American society through sportsmanship and competition.

Athletics assisted Indian students with becoming civilized and Americanized because they were able to metaphorically and figuratively compete with whites on the sports field. Indians finally had the opportunity to compete with whites and beat them at their own games. Deloria observes how “Becoming manly meant, in many ways, becoming white. Indian players could beat white men. Pratt told his teams, not because they were Indian, but because they were becoming more like white people” (124). Pratt told his student athletes that they were beating whites by becoming Americanized to further drill into their minds that they could not succeed if they held onto their Indian identities. Pratt wanted his student athletes to know that they were successful on the sports field because they were no longer practicing their primitive and outdated tribal cultures. Soon after boarding schools introduced athletic programs local and national newspapers also began to take interest in talented Indian athletes.

In the early 1900s, white spectators packed the stands at local boarding school sports events for entertainment purposes and to see what Indians could accomplish on the sports field. From smaller boarding schools to more famous institutions, such as Haskell or Carlisle, America became obsessed with following Indian boarding school football teams. Football players from Carlisle and Haskell quickly became known around the country as major newspapers followed their success and achievements on the sports field. In 1911, The Washington Times covered the Carlisle and University of Pennsylvania game in an article titled, “Big Crowds Flock to see
Carlisle Meet Quaker Team.” The newspaper reported that “One of the largest crowds in years gathered today to see Carlisle battle with old Penn on the gridiron on Franklin field” (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov). Carlisle became so well known between 1905 and 1912 that tens of thousands spectators attended every game. Carlisle was one of the most famous football teams in the country and they played against other prestigious college teams, such as Harvard, Syracuse, and the University of Pennsylvania. As the country began to notice how well Indians were doing at sports, superintendents kept up their advertising in order to increase the school’s tight budget.

The Capitalistic Benefits of Sports at Boarding Schools

Arguably, the most important benefit of starting athletic programs at boarding schools were how sports could bring in extra revenue for the school’s tight budget. There were already donations being made to boarding schools, especially to Carlisle Indian Industrial School, by elite whites and citizens that were genuinely interested in helping the assimilation project. In the introduction to Pratt’s memoir, Collins explains how “Because Pratt’s efforts were much publicized, the institution was the beneficiary of numerous donations that lifted the material life of the school to a higher level than at most other schools” (xv). Carlisle could have survived without sports but for schools without donations, sports were vital to keep the institution open and functioning. Without sports, a boarding school’s campus would be even more unlivable because athletic funds provided improvements to the campus and curriculum. As mentioned earlier, the budget per pupil was only two hundred and twenty-five dollars a year (Archuleta, Child, Lomawaima 55). Most boarding schools that were not elite like Haskell or Carlisle had to find ways to make more money in order to keep the institution from closing.
Not long after the emergence of sports at federal boarding schools, superintendents realized that athletic programs could produce extra revenue through ticket sales and donations. Most boarding schools did not have to fund their athletic programs because sports teams generated their own funding for equipment and traveling. In *The Indian Craftsman*, “Pop” Warner wrote an article about how Carlisle’s football team was successful and financially self-reliant. From 1899 to 1903 and 1907 to 1911, Warner was Carlisle’s football coach and he convinced other prestigious white colleges to play against his Indian team. Carlisle’s football team was successful and well known and the football team only lost two games in the 1903 season. In the article, Pratt reported how “Athletics at the school are financed by the receipts from the football games, the surplus being sufficient to equip and maintain other branches of sports, thus making athletics at Carlisle self-supporting without charging students or employees admission to the games” (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu). Carlisle’s football team was financially independent and brought in extra revenue for the school. Sports became the second largest revenue for many boarding schools, right behind donations by citizens interested in “saving” the Indian race. Since sports were self-supporting and profitable superintendents found ways to make quick cash off games by charging white citizens admission.

Many federal boarding schools did not have their own stadiums to play home games at so they had to convince other institutions to give them part of the gate receipts. Warner convinced other prestigious college sports teams to give Carlisle money for attending games because they were one of the nation’s most well known football teams. In *Native American Son*, Buford notes how the 1906 football game between Princeton and Carlisle drew in more than nine thousand dollars and throughout the 1907 season Carlisle made sixty thousand dollars (60). According to the CPI Inflation Calculator, sixty thousand dollars in 1907 is equivalent to one million four
hundred and ninety-eight thousand in 2017 (https://data.bls.gov). This was an incredible amount of money for a boarding school that only had a two hundred dollar budget per pupil annually. While Carlisle was the most successful Indian football team in the country this amount of money is not equivalent to what all boarding schools made but smaller schools could also have the opportunity to generate some extra income.

Since Carlisle was making a fortune off their football team, Pratt updated the campus for the students. While Pratt did build a dormitory for himself and collect expensive Indian art, he still contributed a lot of money to Carlisle’s campus. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Carlisle built new dormitories and an art studio from the football team’s revenue from competing against other prestigious white football teams. Similar to Carlisle, Haskell had a successful football team and searched for ways to make athletic programs more profitable. Haskell Institute decided to build their own football stadium so that they did not have to rely on ticket sales from other colleges. McDonald, the head football coach for Haskell, reminisces in his memoir about how “Early in 1924, Mr. Peairs called me into his office and said, ‘McDonald, we need a better football field. If these other schools can raise money for a stadium so can Haskell” (31). McDonald started a campaign for Mr. Peairs and in 1926 Haskell opened the third largest and only lit stadium for nighttime football in Kansas. Several schools attempted to mimic Carlisle’s success with sports because it could improve the school’s campus.

Smaller boarding schools that were not as prestigious or famous as Carlisle also realized that sports could create extra revenue. Another example of an Indian sports team that was self-reliant financially was the Fort Shaw Indian Girls’ Basketball team. In “World Champions: the 1904 Girls’ Basketball Team,” Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith reveal how the team “would finance their meals and lodging in the towns in which they played by changing from their
basketball uniforms... into ceremonial buckskin dresses and beaded breastplates and charging fifty cents admission to a postgame program of music, dance, and recitation” (3). The girls’ basketball team couldn’t make money through ticket sales but they could charge the audience after by performing their exotic culture for white audiences. Pratt charged audiences for viewing the female Indian body because white audiences were curious to see Indians perform their tribal cultures. In his memoir, Pratt explains “I fixed the price of admission at one dollar without consulting the ladies, and circulated the program” (189). Pratt did not tell the female students that he was making a profit off their performance so that he did not have to share any of the revenue with them. Although superintendents did take advantage of student athletes it was better than not having sports and moments of privacy to forge Indian alliances and retain their pan-tribal identities.

Without athletic programs the boarding school experience would be more difficult for students because they would have never had the chance to express themselves and find private spaces. Even if superintendents were making a profit from student’s talents and not sharing it with them it still benefitted the students. Boarding school campuses, such as Carlisle, create more private spaces for students from athletic funding. Without the capitalistic benefits of sports more students would have dreaded the boarding school experience. Bloom expresses how “All of these narrators remember sports in a positive light, even if they had negative memories of boarding school in general... Nevertheless, almost all published recollections of boarding school by Native Americans contain some mention of athletics” (98). Superintendents thought that sports were benefiting the assimilation project because of eugenics, advertising, and the revenue from sports games. However, boarding school superintendents did not realize how sports gave
students opportunities to find private moments in space and the ability to reject assimilation and Americanization.

What Boarding School Superintendents Failed to Realize

A critical flaw in the boarding school system was how inspectors and BIA employees did not know much about Indians. Since superintendents and agents knew little about Indians’ lifestyle, they took improper measures to attempt to assimilate them into white society. Numerous politicians and scholars that were against the boarding school system argued that superintendents and agents only thought about their own interests instead of trying to truly help Indian children. In Pratt’s memoir, Senator H.L. Dawes sent Pratt a letter where he overheard another Senator proclaim how “Capt. Pratt was the worst enemy the Indians could have; his posturing before the country was ridiculous, and only done to make for himself notoriety, and gain credit for doing great things, that the articles in the papers commendatory of this work were silly twaddle and made him sick” (287). Most BIA employees were only concerned with how well they were doing in public relations instead of considering how to best take care of the Indian children. Likewise, Chalcraft agreed that most Indian agents did not truly know how to help or “save” Indians because of their lack of knowledge about Indians’ culture and traditions. Chalcraft comments how “The Inspectors were generally broken down politicians with a pompous air and a high opinion of their abilities, while in fact, they knew little or nothing about Indian matters” (76). Not many employees in the early boarding school era met the qualifications to truly assist Indian children and help them assimilate into American society. Boarding school superintendents and BIA employees were only concerned about assimilation, money, and their reputation.
Boarding school superintendents and Indian agents often did not stay with the boarding school system for long because there were high turn over rates. For instance, Chalcraft worked at numerous different places during his thirty-year career in the boarding school system. Chalcraft was the superintendent at four different boarding schools before he worked for the BIA. Chalcraft was the superintendent at Chehalis Indian Reservation, Puyallup Agency and School, Salem Training School, and Jones Male Academy. Similar to Chalcraft, many other boarding school superintendents did not stay at one institution for long. Lomawaima declares how 

“Superintendent turnover was high in Chilocco’s formative years: five superintendents in the first five years. Eight more superintendents served between 1889 and 1926” (17). A lot of boarding school superintendents did not stay at their appointed position for long because they thought that the work was exhausting or they were let go from the BIA. Boarding school superintendents and BIA employees were required to travel across the country to keep reporting back to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs about the conditions inside federal assimilationist institutions. This reveals how the assimilation project was not invincible because many influential leaders were not at their positions long enough to truly enforce a program to assimilate and integrate Indian children into white society.

Another flaw with the assimilation project was how athletic programs at boarding schools did not encourage assimilation because it gave students a chance to redefine their pan-Indian identities. Many student athletes realized that they began to spend less time at boarding schools because they were practicing for games, traveling, or bonding with their teammates. In Davis’ “American Indian Sports: A Historical Overview,” he argues how “The underfunded and poorly managed boarding schools were inconsistent in how they directed their physical education and interscholastic athletic programs, and thus inadvertently allowed student athletes a degree of
agency in how they approached these newly introduced sports” (252). The BIA and superintendents failed to realize how sports offered student athletes a sense of freedom and agency because it gave them an opportunity to briefly escape from the controlling and closely monitored boarding school. The next chapter analyzes how students used this agency to their advantage by rejecting assimilation and used the sports field to retain their pan-Indian identities.
CHAPTER III: THE FREEDOM AND PRIVACY OF AN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL’S SPORTS FIELD AND THE REFORMULATION OF PAN-INDIAN IDENTITIES

At the start of the early boarding school era, superintendents were confident that complete assimilation was an attainable goal due to how children had little time for recreation and play. In the first decade of the twentieth century, assimilation policies started to fail when boarding schools gave Indian children more time for outdoor play, started athletic programs, and introduced art programs into the curriculum. Through the freedom found in private spaces Indian students, mainly athletes, began to reject assimilation and develop a pan-Indian identities that combined the values and traditions from different tribes. In To Show What an Indian Can Do, Bloom expresses how “Boarding school students clearly showed the capacity to take advantage of spaces wherever they could find them to play. When confined within the walls of an Indian boarding school, one must take advantage of any chance to escape” (xxi). With the chance to escape from the strict and militarized routine at a boarding school Indian children had agency for the first time. Without athletic programs and time for recreational play, many Indian children would have endured a more traumatic experience at boarding schools and would have never had the opportunity to forge alliances and retain their pan-Indian identities.

Many young Indian children could not handle the strict discipline and militarized routine at federal boarding schools so they started to rebel against the school’s authority by finding private spaces on or near campus. Indian children were kept busy around the clock and were closely monitored so it was often difficult to find private moments in space. In Education Through Sport, Sullivan argues how “These stressors caused many students to look for avenues of escape… many involved themselves in extracurricular activities to alleviate the stressors in boarding school life” (5). Before boarding schools started athletic programs and a variety of
clubs, Indian children would have no time for play or to develop friendships with fellow students. By participating in extracurricular activities and sports Indian students had an opportunity to escape from the confining boarding school and form their own subcultures that resisted leaving behind everything that was considered Indian. After students realized that they could find private spaces, they started to resist Americanization and assimilation. Since Indian students began to take advantage of freedom and privacy, Sullivan notes how “Students learned to test, stretch and manipulate the boundaries of authority and its surveillance, establishing pockets of privacy in dorm rooms and catalpa grove, communicating in slang, enforcing an honor code of responsible behavior, and participating in a hierarchy of ranked resistance” (101).

When students were on a sports field, in the dorms without supervision, or in a secluded space on campus they noticed that they could practice their tribal cultures. Students began displaying various forms of resistance, from minor actions (stealing, speaking English) to significant actions (drinking, fighting, or the ultimate protest, running away). Students began to outwit the system when they found their own private spaces to rebel against assimilation policies.

When Indian students realized that they could find moments away from adult supervision, sports and extracurricular activities became a primary site for resistance. If Indian students had the chance to escape and be on the outskirts of campus then they would have less supervision and could attempt to resist assimilation. In “How Boarding School Basketball Became Indian Basketball,” Wade Davis explains how “Indian boarding school students were often resilient and occasionally rebellious, and the schools lacked sufficient staff to monitor their play time and athletic activities” (267). It was impossible for boarding school staff members to supervise every Indian child around the clock. During unsupervised moments on a boarding school’s campus Indian students could begin to reformulate their pan-Indian identities. An ideal
space for privacy and freedom was the boarding school’s sports field because the staff did not supervise every practice. Indians were not the only ethnic group to use sports as a strategy for Americanization or resistance but they did find their own unique way to redefine their identities by spending time on the sports field.

How Sports Could Transform an Ethnic Group

Indians were not the only minority group to construct or redefine their identities by participating in sports. Ethnic groups could either use sports as way to assimilate and adapt into white society or keep their past culture and traditions. However, some ethnic groups believed that sports could further the assimilation process while they also retained parts of their ethnic identities. Sullivan argued that some minority groups did not have to make an either/or decision by arguing how “Like many other ethnic groups of the same period, Indian students found in athletics an Indian identity while also furthering an American identity” (143). However, this is not entirely true for Indian boarding school athletes. Since complete assimilation was a failure, Indian athletes were allowed to retain and practice their Indian cultures and identities on the sports field. Sports became a way for ethnic groups to embrace their past culture and traditions through brotherhood, pride, and community. While Indians were not the only group to use sports as a strategy of accommodation or resistance, boarding school athletes had their own unique agenda to keep their tribal identities.

At the same time as the early boarding school era, Jewish Americans were either accepting or resisting Americanization by participating in athletics. Jewish basketball became an Americanization project that attempted to normalize Jewish masculinity through sport. Since a common stereotype with Jewish Americans and other ethnic bodies was that they were physically weak, the emergence of Jewish basketball attempted to reverse the negative stereotype
about having an unfit body. In “A Sport Which Jews Excel’: Jewish Basketball in American Society, 1900 – 1951,’ Arieh Schalr reports how “Although no single conception of physicality existed with Judaism or Jewish culture… sport had a negative impact on religious or cultural Jewish values that were constructed to distance Jews from Gentile society” (9). American Jewish athletes did not have a both/and option due to how they could either further their integration into mainstream white society or become distanced from their Jewish communities. Some minority groups had to decide between their past culture or Americanization with sports because their culture did not value certain athletic competitions. For example, in “Jews and Baseball: A Cultural Love Story,” Eric Solomon claims how baseball players Hank Greenburg and Sandy Koufax respected their Jewish heritage by not playing baseball on Yom Kippur (75). Although they were successful and famous athletes, some white Americans did not accept that they valued their past culture more than America’s favorite pastime. Jewish athletes faced the difficult and complex decision whether to give up their Jewish identities or become white when they participated in organized sports.

Likewise, athletics did not always benefit African-Americans due to how racism and bigotry was prevalent in the world of collegiate and professional sports. Sports did not offer an entrance into white society for African-Americans due to Jim Crow laws. In “Sport in Philadelphia’s African-American Community, 1865-1900,” J. Thomas Jable portrays African-Americans’ experience with sports as “To cope with the torment of racial discrimination, some African-Americans turned to sport. Entertaining and diversionary, it temporarily took their minds off the harsh realities of surviving in a segregated society. Sports sometimes served as a rallying point which brought blacks together” (157). African-Americans used sports as an escape from discrimination and racism because they did not have the opportunity to become white through
athletics. Similar to other minority groups, African-Americans used sports as an escape from reality and it often brought their identities closer together. Although minority groups developed a community through athletics they would still rarely be allowed to become white by participating in sports.

Minority groups and immigrants did not have the same experience with sports as whites because they had a more difficult experience being accepted into prestigious white colleges or athletic clubs. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, people of color were denied entry into major universities, social athletic clubs, and faced tough circumstances when trying to become a professional athlete. Joseph B. Oxendine in *American Indian Sports Heritage* discusses the formation of athletic clubs and reports how “A major social development in the middle and late 19th century was the formation and expansion of athletic clubs. Though originally developed to promote athletic participation, especially in golf and cricket, these clubs quickly evolved into centers for social activity, catering to persons from a particular national background or social class” (163). Most athletic clubs catered to elite white society and did not offer much room for social advancement for minority groups. There were few athletic clubs for African-Americans and Jewish Americans and there was not a single athletic club for Indians. Minority group had to find their own purpose with sports and decide whether it would promote their ethnic identities or further immerse them into white culture. Indians, unlike other minority groups, used sports as a way to create a new identity that brought an array of tribal cultures together.

**How Sports Fostered Pan-Indian Identities**

Instead of either practicing their Indian cultures or becoming assimilated into white society, Indian athletes at federal boarding schools used sports as a strategy to form a new
collective identity. Bloom argues how Indians took advantage of sports because they created their own hybrid identities that derived from religion, tribe, and the culture on the boarding school campus (53). Indian student athletes constructed pan-Indian alliances on the sports field that allowed them to resist assimilation. Likewise, Buford reports how the most famous boarding school sports team resisted assimilation when “The Carlisle athletes, who came from tribes all across the country, their new feats of valor and victory won against the best and the brightest of their white peers, were creating a new Pan-Indian story” (106). During sports games Indian athletes could combine their past tribal cultures and values into a collective identity. Student athletes at boarding schools around the country used sports as a way to assert that they were not going to leave their Indian culture and identities behind. In this chapter, pan-Indian identities refer to a movement that brought tribes together and promoted unity between them. Although the pan-Indian movement did not fully emerge until the 1950s, I will argue that Indian athletes forged this new Indian identity by spending time away from the closely monitored areas on a boarding school’s campus. Students constructed pan-Indian identities in any space that was not directly supervised by the boarding school staff, either in the dormitories, during clubs, off-campus, or on the sports field.

During private moments on the sports field, Indian students could continue to remember how their tribal cultures valued sports. Oxendine argues throughout this book that Indian tribes played many athletic games before coming to federal boarding schools. Oxendine reminds us how “they [sports] were evident in ceremonies and festivals relating to war, hunting, harvest, birth, death, and other important community events” (xix). At a young age, Indian children would learn how to swim, run, and participate in events and tribal ceremonies that involved athletic competition. Since athletic activities were a vital part of Indian identities before coming
to assimilationist institutions, the sports field became an ideal space to resist becoming white and remember what it was like to be an Indian again.

Indian student athletes could not play games that they played on the reservation due to how the boarding school’s staff did not want them practicing their past Indian cultures. However, students still could resist assimilation and Americanization while playing non-Indian sports. Oxendine explains how tribes had popular games such as lacrosse, shinny, double ball, and various forms of football (36). Although these sports were banned at federal boarding schools, other games still promoted tribal unity and brought Indian students together. In *The Best of the Athletic Boys: The White Man’s Impact on Jim Thorpe*, Jack Newcombe quotes a young boy from Carlisle that asked about the children playing unfamiliar games during a playtime. The young boy asked the supervisor “if he had tried Indian games; with a blank look he said the government rules specified what games were to be played. Perhaps it never occurred to him that Indians had games of their own” (42). Athletics had the ability to unify tribal identities because most whites did not realize that Indian culture valued sports. It was also difficult for the boarding school staff and white spectators to observe Indian games and reflect how this promoted their Indian identities. It was simple for Indian games to reflect past tribal traditions without white society and the boarding school staff noticing because they knew little about Indian culture. Student athletes realized that sports fields were ideal spaces to form a collective Indian identity that resisted becoming white.

How Boarding School Athletics led to the Formation of Pan-Indian Identities

At federal boarding schools, it was impossible to hold on individual tribal cultures and traditions because there were so many different tribes. However, once Indian athletes were on the sports field then they could develop a new broader Indian identity that combined values from
different tribes. Boarding schools enrolled students from tribes all across the country to make it harder for students to resist assimilation and forge Indian alliances. Lomawaima explains how in 1907 Chilocco Indian School enrolled seven hundred Indian students from over forty different tribes (11). Boarding school superintendents often put students that spoke different tribal languages in the same living quarters to ensure that they could not resist assimilation. However, when Indian athletes starting playing whites’ games on the sports field they had the first opportunity to unify as a collective Indian identity. Boarding school superintendents did not expect that Indian students would find a new sense of community and form pan-Indian identities due to assimilation policies constrictions and strict rules. When sports emerged at boarding schools superintendents did not consider how Indian athletes could use the sports field as a site of resistance.

The Indian boarding school sports field became a location where students could rebel against the assimilationist agenda because they had control over this space. Student athletes did not have to follow strict rules, only speak English, or forget about everything that was considered Indian when they were away from the boarding school staff and with their fellow Indian peers. Lomawaima argues that students were clever enough to know where to resist due to how “they remembered that they controlled certain times and certain spaces of student life. Private moments were the arena where gangs and cliques rules, where tribe and/or “Indian-ness” most often mattered” (130). The sports field evolved into a space where students could construct their pan-Indian identities and rebel against assimilation. The sports field became a site of resistance against Americanization and assimilation due to the privacy and location of sports facilities, how the rules were more relaxed on the sports field, and how students developed pride and a sense of community.
Privacy and Location of the Boarding School Sports Field

A major flaw in the assimilation project was the staff to student ratio because it was impossible to oversee every Indian student at all times. Indian students took advantage of how they could find spaces that were not supervised where they could begin to practice their pan-Indian identities. Lomawaima explains the failure of complete assimilation by stating how “Military discipline entailed a high level of surveillance of students but constant adult supervision and control was impossible… In the dormitories, four adults might be responsible for over two hundred children” (56). Due to the lack of staff in the dormitories one could assume that there was even less supervision on the sports field because Indian athletes were farther away from campus. Since the boarding school staff could not keep up with monitoring Indian students inside campus buildings then it would be even more difficult to supervise them on the sports field. If students could escape to marginalized spaces on the outskirts of campus then they could have a chance to rebel against the school’s authority. While away from the confining walls of campus buildings Indian children could have freedom and agency to continue practicing their Indian tribal cultures.

Indian children at federal boarding schools had private moments to themselves because the campus was not a small and isolated space. Campuses in the early boarding school era were often several acres or more and once children got the chance to roam the school grounds then they could find private spaces to forge alliances. For instance, young students presumably from the ages of five to ten at Stewart Indian School in Carson, Nevada (see fig. 6) spent time outdoors on the outskirts of campus (dmla.clan.lib.nv.us).
While there were strict rules that forbid students to practice their tribal cultures, young Indian students discovered certain spaces on campus where they could rebel against the school’s strict authority. The assimilation project was not a success for the BIA and superintendents because Indian students made the school into their own space by forming rebellious subcultures and communities. In the photograph from Stewart Indian School there are only a few buildings around the children because they are on the outskirts of campus. In this isolated and marginalized space Indian students took advantage of how they were out of sight from most of the boarding school’s staff. While under direct supervision Indian children would abide by the school’s rules but the second they were away from the staff they could rebel against giving up everything that was considered Indian. The children are also in pairs of two to four and this reflects how Indian pupils could form friendships that alleviated homesickness, grief, and loneliness. Inside federal boarding school’s confining buildings children did not have a chance to retain their pan-Indian identities but on the large campus grounds students had the ability to make the space their own.
Boarding school superintendents did not take into account how children could make a section of campus their own. Boarding school campuses did not place Indian children relatively close to where the staff resided and this began to shatter the goal of complete assimilation. The distance between the children and the supervisors allowed Indian children to make certain spaces their own. The students made private spaces their own by defying the school’s authority and not giving up their Indian identities. As mentioned in the introduction, Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s campus had student dorms and recreation areas in only one area of the campus. In the northeast corner of campus there are not many administration buildings and this permitted Indian students to have a space that they called their own. Students could escape from the school’s strict policies to not practice their Indian cultures by going to the secluded athletic field or to the campus grounds by Letort Creek. In their private nooks of campus Carlisle students could rebel against the school’s authority and escape to spaces where they could retain their pan-Indian identities.

Similar to Stewart Indian School and Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Mount Pleasant Indian School in Michigan had an open space for students to play that was isolated from the rest of campus. Although this campus (see fig. 7) is smaller than more prestigious boarding schools, like Carlisle or Haskell, it still had a space in one corner that allowed students to have privacy and freedom (cmich.edu). Indian students could interact with each other in the designated play area in the northwest corner of campus and find ways to resist giving up their Indian culture. Mount Pleasant Indian School’s recreational area is close to a wooded area where students could escape for a few moments from the boarding school staff.
There are also barns close to the recreational area where Indian students could have private moments in space where they formed their own subcultures and communities. Even on smaller campuses Indian students could locate spaces where they could begin to resist assimilation and make the school their own. Indian students quickly realized that if they went to the campus grounds to play recreational sports then they could find private moments to form their own rebellious subcultures.

The sports field became an ideal place for students to rebel against the school’s authority because it was always in an isolated space on campus. A major reason why Indian students had privacy on the sports field was because the athletic facilities were not located directly next to administrative buildings on campus. Indian athletes could resist and rebel against the boarding school’s authority if they were far away enough from the boarding school’s staff and superintendent. At Haskell Institute, the sports field (see fig. 8) appears like it is in the middle of nowhere (lindquist.cul.columbia.edu).
Superintendents and staff members would never be able to oversee everything that was happening in this marginalized space that is far away from other campus buildings. During sports games Indian athletes would not get punished for speaking their tribal languages, practicing Indian dances, or forming rebellious alliances. As sports became increasingly popular, coaches and the staff began to give student athletes more freedom and time away from the assimilationist curriculum.

A Private Space with Less Discipline

Indian athletes at federal boarding schools had more chances to escape from the rigid and strict assimilation policies than students that were stuck inside campus buildings for most of the day. Athletics permitted students to have a sense of privacy and more possibilities to rebel against the school’s authority because they traveled for sports games and how coaches had more relaxed rules than superintendents. Student athletes that played for a boarding school sports team often got the chance to travel around the country and spent a lot of their time away from the federal institution that attempted to exterminate their tribal identities. Many boarding schools did
not have a sports field of their own so they had to travel across the country to compete against other sports teams. Oxendine reports how “Carlisle was a much-traveled team, a circumstance consistent with the philosophy of school officials who believed that traveling was a valuable educational experience” (188). The school’s administration believed that sports would benefit the assimilation process because traveling would help further immerse Indian children into white culture. Superintendents believed that traveling was a vital educational experience that would prepare students for life after leaving boarding schools. In John Levi of Haskell, McDonald expresses how “Mr. Peairs, Superintendent of Haskell, was a firm believer that travel was a form of education. That certainly was correct and especially for our Indian youth who had never been off the reservation before coming to our Indian boarding school” (55). Prestigious boarding school football teams were invited to stay at hotels in major cities and travel across the country to compete against other well-known white sports teams. Likewise, student athletes enjoyed traveling because it gave them a break from the institutionalized lifestyle at a federal boarding school. Student athletes had more freedom to retain their pan-Indian identities when they traveled with their teammates. Due to the high amount of traveling to other sports team’s stadiums Indian athletes missed quite a few days of school and had less strict rules when they were around the sports team’s coach.

Student athletes could get away with practicing their pan-Indian identities on sports fields because coaches had more relaxed rules than the school’s staff. While most Indian students pleased non-Indian supervisors they did not have to act completely white and American in front of the boarding school’s coach. Coaches were not as strict as superintendents so students took advantage of this by practicing their Indian identities and refusing to give up everything that was considered Indian. Bloom mentions how Carlisle’s football coach “Pop” Warner expressed how
“When I went to Carlisle School in 1899 as football coach, I had all of the prejudices of the average white, but after fourteen years of intimate association, I came to hold a deep admiration for the Indian and a very high regard for his character and capacities” (24). Football coaches got the chance to know their student athletes outside of the strict and militarized boarding school atmosphere and this created a bond between the students and coach. This bond made coaches appreciate Indian tribal cultures and made them accept how the students practiced their pan-Indian identities on the sports field. “Pop” was Warner’s nickname because he was commonly described as a father figure to student athletes. While Warner did not have the most ethical or moral behaviors and frequently used foul language, Indian students still appreciated his relaxed attitude and rules. Several newspapers and coaches commented on how Indian athletes could sustain their tribal cultures when they were away from campus and only with the sports team’s coach.

There are numerous narratives and newspaper reports of how Indian athletes continued to hold on to their Indian traits and characteristics on the sports field. Several newspaper stories commented on the loud yells from Indian players that rebelled against the boarding school’s strict rules. Newspapers from around the country reported about how Carlisle’s football players let out Indian screams on the field and took pride in their tribal cultures. Buford reveals how Thorpe yelled out “Indian-like-war-whoops” and “the shirll of an enraged redskin” (91, 147). Warner never snitched about how his players retained their Indian identities and tongue because he appreciated their tribal cultures. As mentioned earlier, Warner felt sympathetic towards Indian students so he let them take pride in their achievements and celebrate in any manner or language that they wished. In The Indians Craftsman, Warner in 1909 commented how “the Indians know that people regard them as an inferior race, unable to compete successfully in any line of
endeavor with the white men, and as result they are imbued with a fighting spirit, when pitted against their white brethen, that carries them a long way toward victory” (carlisleindian.dickinson.edu). Warner appreciated the “fighting spirit” that his student athletes had because they never felt like an inferior race when they were together on the sports field. When athletes worked hard enough to prove that they could beat white colleges and universities, Warner believed that they earned to celebrate in any way that they wished. The difference in how Warner and superintendents viewed student athletes led to Indians having a chance to reformulate their pan-Indian identities. Similar to how boarding school coaches were proud of their Indian sports teams, students also discovered that sports finally allowed them to have something to be proud about.

**How Sports Created a Sense of Pride and Accomplishment**

Inside a federal boarding school students did not have anything to be proud about because they were in an institution that was forcing them to leave behind their tribal cultures. Boarding school students constantly heard bells all day that directed them to their next task and they often did not feel any sense of accomplishment. Sullivan comments how “Students quickly realized that success in athletics provided a sense of pride and accomplishment that few other parts of the curriculum could” (90). In order to maintain complete assimilation, superintendents introduced sports to further immerse students into white culture. However, students found something in sports that could maintain their pan-Indian identities. In *Away From Home*, Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima explain how “Mainstream sports, such as football, were first introduced at boarding schools as a part of a larger effort to erase Native American culture and history from memory. Ironically, sports became a source of pride for students” (110). In the following paragraphs, there
are quotes from students or coaches that illustrate how student athletes formed a collective Indian identity through the pride of their athletic accomplishments.

When prominent and famous boarding school sports teams, such as Carlisle’s and Haskell’s football teams, started to travel across the country and beat elite white teams, student athletes and fellow Indian peers could not hide how proud they were. The student body at boarding schools would have parades or celebrations for their sports teams when they returned home from a big win. With Carlisle’s football teams feats and victories, the students displayed a collective pride for their talented athletes. Buford reports how the student body had celebrations when Carlisle’s football team returned home from beating a “Big Four” university. After the win at the University of Pennsylvania, a student at Carlisle describes a parade where:

Every male student at Carlisle and the fifty-piece school band celebrated on Saturday with a now-traditional parade through town in their nightshirts and carrying flaming torches. Doing a snake dance – also a victory tradition at Harvard – they accompanied a ‘corpse,’ a dummy on a stretcher dressed in a red sweater with a big ‘H,’ to the delight of hundreds of spectators. Though interactions between the students and townspeople were tightly controlled by the school’s administration, the local residents were proud of Carlisle and the renown its football victories had brought. (60)

Although the school’s administration had control over student celebrations, students created new ceremonies and traditions that reflected their past Indian tribal cultures. The parades allowed students to forge alliances and create a community where they could rebel against the school’s authority. The Hopi snake dance was performed by Harvard football players after victories where the students would line up touching each other’s shoulders in a line and would “slither” around like a snake. However, this was a tribal dance long before the emergence of professional sports.
In “Representing the Hopi Snake Dance,” Leah Dilworth describes the Hopi Snake and Antelope ceremony as “the most widely depicted Southwest Native American ritual. Usually performed in August ensure abundant rainfall for the corn crops, it was only one ritual in the round of ceremonies enacted throughout the year, but because it involved the handling of snakes, it was the ceremony most often described by non-Indian observers” (413). The Hopi Snake Dance by Harvard football players represented how they were mocking Carlisle’s athletes because they were not allowed to perform tribal Indian dances.

Although Carlisle students could not perform this snake dance, they could still respond to Harvard with their own parade that unified their pan-Indian identities. In their own parade, Indian students made a fake body with a Harvard sweater on a stretcher and this reflected how Harvard was no longer the best and most prestigious football team in the country. Indian students created their own subculture that celebrated boarding school’s sports teams victories and the time spent planning these parades and ceremonies further reinforced their pan-Indian identities. The students were also carrying torches and were in their nightshirts, which defied appearing white and civilized at all times. The boarding school staff would rarely let white society see Indian pupils without looking like white society (proper clothing, short hair, proper hygiene – as defined by white society) so this was a new opportunity for students to rebel against assimilation.

Similar to Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Haskell Institute’s football team strove to become as famous and successful as Carlisle. Between 1910 and 1930, Haskell played many football teams that Carlisle faced like the University of Pennsylvania, Syracuse, Brown, and Harvard. After football games, students at Haskell planned events that retained their pan-Indian identities. In his memoir, Frank McDonald, the head football coach for Haskell, reports how:
Saturday night, following the receipt of the news of Haskell’s victory over Brown University, the student-body descended on the city of Lawrence and just naturally showed the natives how a victory parade should be staged. It was what is usually called a ‘shirt tail’ parade but on this night the ‘shirt tails’ were eliminated altogether and instead we had the dear old Government red blanket. Every loyal Haskelite had one on his back and the line of howling, yelping, singing, shouting Indians – forming a red line a mile or so long – made a very picturesque appearance (35).

Students celebrated with the meager materials that they had to show their pride for their fellow talented Indian athletes. Haskell’s students transformed an old Indian tradition and ceremony into something new that promoted the development of their pan-Indian identities. Students at Haskell put the red blanket on their backs and lined up to illustrate how they were forced to carry the burden of forced assimilation. With the loud shouting and Indian yelps, students at Haskell disobeyed the school’s authority by continuing to act like Indians. The students symbolically put the government red blankets that they got when they first came to Haskell on their backs to show how they were moving forward with their pan-Indian identities. Indian students were not giving up their past cultures when they mimicked an old Indian dance and formed a mile long line and went shouting down the streets of Lawrence, Kansas.

Indian student athletes were proud of their athletic accomplishments and maintained their Indian identities by participating in competitive sports. Since students found a private space with more relaxed rules and a sense a pride, they could create a subculture that embraced their past Indian cultures, traditions, and values. Deloria’s grandfather played football at a federal boarding school and argues how “Rather than simply assimilating, my grandfather helped create a new, cross-cultural world for himself and companions” (114). The freedom on a sports fields allowed
students to create new Indian identities and without the emergence of athletic programs many students would have never discovered a way to rebel against the assimilationist agenda. Several successful and well-known Indian athletes, as well as amateur athletes, retained their Indian identities by joining sports teams at federal boarding schools. Vine Deloria Sr. of Kearny Military Academy, John Levi of Haskell, and the legendary Jim Thorpe of Carlisle are prime examples of how sports provided Indian students with a chance to sustain their pan-Indian identities and resist becoming white.

Testimony from Student Athletes that Rebelled Against Assimilation

Narratives from Indian student athletes reveal how federal boarding schools did not successfully accomplish their goal to exterminate the Indian race because students resisted assimilation policies and rebelled against the school’s authority. The assimilation project was not invincible due to how students could find private moments in space to hold on to their Indian identities. Indian students would continue to search for avenues of escape until they discovered how to resist becoming white. In Lomawaima’s recollection of the boarding school experience at Chilocco Indian School, she reports how a student named Curtis, from the Creek tribe, in 1927 explained how:

Well, most of the things that I did, I wasn’t really a mean kid. I got into a lot mischief and most kids did there, there’s no way you could survive… Any time you take a bunch of kids and you put ‘em together in that kind of environment and you try to control their thought and what they do and everything, it’s impossible! Those kids are going to find some way to rebel and do what they want to do, and we did. (128)

Curtis, like many other students at boarding schools, realized that there were ways to escape from the militarized and strict rules that attempted to get rid of their undesirable Indian
characteristics. Students found activities that could distance themselves from the assimilationist institution and allowed them to reformulate their pan-Indian identities. Students could join the school’s band, art programs, or sports teams to escape from direct supervision.

Indian student athletes that played informal sports at boarding schools also had the chance to keep their Indian identities through spending time together playing competitive sports. Students that created their own sports teams could get away from the boarding school’s staff, spend time forging alliances, and continue to practice their Indian culture. In Lomawaima’s narrative about Chilocco she explains how “behind closed dorm room doors, in the catalpa grove, or behind the barns, in the evening along Chilocco Creek, where adult was not, students defined their peers according to values and criteria of their own” (126). Informal sports permitted students to be away from adult supervision where they could create their own subcultures. Indian students discovered a pan-Indian sentiment when they were alone and cleverly created their own subcultures that did not give up everything that was considered Indian. Lomawaima introduces Frank, from the Cherokee tribe in 1929, who expressed how “On weekends, if we were too little to make the football team, we had our own team, we went down to the picnic grounds and played football against each another little organized football team” (138). At a young age Indian students at boarding schools learned how to find activities where they were alone with fellow Indian students. Once students got the chance to escape from the confining boarding school they started to realize that forced assimilation was not the only option for them. The sports field, whether for a group of young students or the school’s official team, allowed students to retain their Indian identities.

**Student Athletes’ Resistance to Assimilation**
Several famous boarding school football players rebelled against the school’s authority and broke rules that were designed to promote assimilation. While Indian athletes were on the sports field they received special privileges that permitted them to continue practicing their Indian culture. Vine Deloria Sr., Philip Deloria’s grandfather from the Lakota tribe, attended Kearny Military Academy and used sports to retain his Indian identity. In “I Am of the Body: Thoughts on My Grandfather, Culture, and Sports,” Deloria narrates his grandfather’s experience with playing sports as “he wore a uniform, studied hard and rose to the top rank of Cadet Colonel. While he learned English and went by the name of Pete, however, the boys with whom he lived learned to speak Lakota as well” (325). In private moments away from the school’s staff student athletes had a chance to form their own subcultures that still practiced their tribal tongues. The group of Indian athletes kept speaking their tribal languages in order to maintain their pan-Indian identities.

Likewise, student athletes at Carlisle had special privileges that other students did not have. The amount of freedom that they had from traveling, spending time away from campus, and forming close friendships allowed them to resist assimilation. As mentioned earlier, many students at Carlisle rebelled against the school’s authority by coming together and celebrating team victories and feats. The well-known and legendary Jim Thorpe, from the Fox and Sac tribes, played football at Carlisle Indian Industrial School from 1907 to 1909 and 1911 to 1912. Thorpe successfully competed in baseball, track, and football at both Haskell and Carlisle. Thorpe (see fig. 9) competed in the 1912 Olympics and was one of the most talented athletes in the first half of the twentieth century (carlisle.dickinson.edu).
Thorpe was the best football player to ever play for a boarding school but he did not always follow the school’s strict rules. Thorpe did not become completely “white” and American at Carlisle because football players had more freedom and privacy away from the boarding school’s staff. Buford illustrates how “Warner’s ‘football boys’ were allowed much freer access to the town than the weekly outings of the other students” (64). Student athletes at Carlisle could roam the nearby town whenever they pleased and were not constantly supervised since they were allowed to leave the school not in their uniform. Buford explains how Carlisle students would be out all night, either at a bar or cinema, and had the privilege of not being closely supervised around the clock. Warner and other football players would frequently catch Thorpe drinking but nobody would snitch on him because he was invincible to the school’s authority and rules. Throughout his life, Thorpe battled with alcoholism and his weakness for “firewater” broke
down his determination and goals. Robert Whitman in *Jim Thorpe and the Oorang Indians: The N.F.L.’s Most Colorful Franchise* reminisces how “Nobody wanted to squeal on Jim, but quarterback Gus Welch finally admitted that Jim was in a bar down the street. Warner went to the bar and escorted Jim back to the hotel after some spirited verbal exchange” (17). Thorpe would only get a slap on the wrist when rebelling against the school’s authority because sports gave him a special status at Carlisle. From covert to extreme resistance Indian student athletes had the power to deny assimilation and maintain their Indian cultures and traditions. All student athletes had to do was find a space that was not supervised by adults

**How Sports Allowed Indian Students to Keep their pan-Indian Identities**

Many boarding school athletes realized that they could not separate sports and their tribal cultures because athletic competition was an essential part of life on the Indian reservation. Deloria Sr. rediscovered his Indian identity on the sports field and this cross-cultural identity allowed him to resist becoming white. In “I Am of the Body,” Deloria argues how “Yet even as Indians shared a playing field and a set of sporting rules and cultural understandings with non-Indians, they drew very different meanings from athletic competition. For my grandfather, race, religion, culture, and family were inextricably tangled with his feats on the playing field” (323). When the BIA and boarding school superintendents decided to start athletic programs they never took into consideration how sports fostered an Indian identity since sports were inseparable from their past tribal cultures. Boarding school sports elicited different meanings for whites and Indians and this caused student athletes to have a chance to reformulate their pan-Indian identities. Since white society failed to notice how sports reflected Indians’ past cultures they did not realize how athletics promoted pan-Indian identities.
Boarding school sports allowed students to retain their Indian identities because it was impossible to separate athletic competitions from their past lifestyle on the reservation. Indian students symbolically and physically kept their pan-tribal identities by keeping Indian nicknames. John Levi (see fig. 10), an Arapaho Indian, attended Haskell Institute from 1921 to 1924 and was one of the most talented football players on the team (blogs.lib.ku.edu). Since Levi was unstoppable on the football field, newspapers came up with the nickname “Charging Buffalo” or “Big Buffalo.” Indian football players that had nicknames reveal how student athletes were not completely assimilating into white society. The media reinforced how Indian football players would not let go of their Indian cultures because the coverage reflected how student athletes retained their pan-Indian identities.

Figure 10 – “John Levi of Haskell” -1922
In McDonald’s memoir at Haskell there is a newspaper report from the Providence Rhode Island Journal that describes Levi and his football teammates as:

A fast running hard hitting tribe of copper-skinned warriors led by ‘Big Buffalo,’ John Levi, the modern Jim Thorpe, from the Haskell Indian School at Lawrence, Kansas, trapped the Brown Bear in his den at Andrews Field yesterday afternoon and administered a 17-13 defeat in one of the most exciting football contests played here in many years. John Levi is definitely the best football performer seen at Andrews Field in a long time. (35)

This newspaper article reflects how Indian student athletes did not give up their Indian identities because sports allowed football players to keep their tribal culture. First, this article mentions how the football players were copper-skinned warriors that were not completely white and assimilated into American society. It is not necessary to include copper-skinned warriors after saying the “tribe” but the newspaper wants to reinforce how these student athletes were not giving up their tribal identities. Next, the newspaper uses the nickname of “Big Buffalo” for John Levi and describes how he could sprint like an animal on the sports field. White football players were never described as animalistic on the sports field and this was only used for Indian students, which reveals racism and discrimination. The article also invokes the image of Indians hunting with “trapping” their opponents during the game. Although the newspaper does elicit racist connotations with primitive and foreign labels, this is exactly what student athletes tried to accomplish. Instead of having white spectators and the media describes their games using white terms and characteristics, Indian students wanted newspapers to portray how they were not giving up their pan-Indian identities. Newspaper articles also frequently commented about how
Indian sports teams would put on a show during halftime that presented their Indian cultures and values to white audiences.

Student athletes retained their pan-Indian identities by participating in halftime performances that gave them opportunities to practice their tribal customs, ceremonies, and dances. For instance, Levi maintained his Indian identity by celebrating victories after football games where he got the chance to wear tribal clothing and perform Indian customs.

Superintendents did not have strict rules about what students did during parades and prep rallies before or after sports games. Under the coach’s supervision, Indian students were proud to come together as a student body to celebrate victories beating white sports teams. McDonald remembered how he once joined his athletes’ celebratory parade and explains how “For the first time I dressed in full Indian attire – feathers, war paint, etc. and became ‘Chief Sun Down’ of the Nodac tribe. The boys got a big kick out of my predicament but with the head erect – folded arms – I stepped front and center on the stage” (59). McDonald was not the only one to wear Indian clothing because he mentions how athletes had an extra turnk with Indian customes and a drum for traveling during the football season. These Indian performances for white audiences created more publicity and funding for Haskell but it also allowed students to have a place to express their pan-Indian identities.

Other Indian football teams continued to put on performances for white audiences that reflected their past culture’s traditions and customs. Several years after Carlisle’s football program ended many players continued to keep their pan-Indian idenities to show society how Indians were proud of their athletic accomplishments. Although this was not a federal boarding school sports team the players still rejected assimilation and becoming white. In 1919, Thorpe played for the Oorang Indians football team right here in Ohio and helped create the National
Football League. This was the smallest and most distinctly Indian type of football in the history of the N.F.L. and the Oorang Indians always performed their tribal traditions and customs for white spectators. In his memoir, Whitman describes the football team as “It is a story of promotion defined to art, reunion of friends, and great players, a cast of all Indians, and Airedale dogs. Whereas the Canton Bulldogs will be remembered through the years as the the powerhouse world champions, the Oorang Indians will be remembered for not winning” (32). The Oorang Indian football team sustained their pan-Indian identities by being an all Indian team, having pride in their team even though they lost most games, and by giving spectators a preview of their exotic culture during halftime. The Oorang Indians were the most “colorful” franchise in the N.F.L. because of the performances during halftime that embraced their “Indianness”. In Whitman’s memoir, he describes the Oorang Indian football team as:

> Where most teams would go to the locker room to regroup for the second half, most of the Indian team members (aided by non-playing Indians) were involved in very colorful half-time exhibitions promoting the dogs. The fans loved it. An Indian makes picturesque publicity. Bring him out in feathers and war paint, and give him a pack of dogs and he is sure to attract some attention. (67)

The Oorang Indian football players were not proud of how many games they won but they were proud to show society how they maintained their pan-Indian identities after spending four or more years at institution that was designed to exterminate their Indian culture. The football team that started from the Airedale dog kennel in La Rue, Ohio was the most colorful team in the N.F.L. because of the halftime performances that reflected how Indians were not giving up their tribal cultures. McDonald mentions how Indians made a public statement during halftime performances because white society was curious to know more about Indians. Many students,
including athletes, continued to retain their pan-Indian identities after they left a federal boarding school.

**Athletes’ Resistance to Assimilation After Leaving Boarding School**

As mentioned earlier with superintendents Pratt and Chalcraft, many leaders of boarding schools encouraged their students at graduation to never forget about what they learned while spending time away from the Indian reservations. However, not all Indian students joined white society after leaving a boarding school and many went to back to the reservation or continued to practice their Indian cultures in mainstream society. In *Away from Home*, the editors argue how narratives about boarding schools “remind us that, in the end, the goal of cultural genocide failed. Ultimately, the story of Indian boarding schools is one of personal survival and cultural triumph” (10). Part of why the assimilation project failed was due to how Indian students could locate private moments where they could form their own subcultures that reinforced their pan-Indian identities. Since there were not enough staff members to oversee all Indian children, students could retain their pan-Indian identities by joining clubs, art programs, or playing amateur or organized sports for the boarding school.

After his succesful career in professional sports, Deloria Sr. became a minister and activist for Indian rights. Deloria Sr. criticized the few boarding schools that were still around in the 1950s and believed that Indians were not a vanishing race. Throughout his activism he spoke out against the government’s plan of forced assimilation and terminating tribal governments. Deloria Sr. was able to retain his Indian identity through sports by mimetic performance, revenge against whites, and pan-tribal unity. Deloria Sr. wrote a get well letter to the former Indian Commissioner John Collier (the Commissioner that was in charge when he attended Haskell) that poetically says:
I am of the body. I have a good, strong body. Nevertheless, may the spirit of my grandfather, Sasway, guided into by the wisdom of my father, Tipi Sapa, impart to you on this paper, by my physical strength, the unseen healing resources of the earth, which rise up from the ground when we need them, by the power of the Great Spirit, and restore you to good health (336).

Deloria Sr. sent this letter to Commissioner Collier to prove how sports were a spiritual activity that embraced Indian identities. Indian athletes were proud of the strength, wisdom, and guidance that they received from their ancestors and the spiritual world. This “get well” card illustrates how Indians did not assimilate into white society by participating in sports at federal boarding schools. Deloria Sr. italicizes spirit, wisdom, and physical strength to illustrate how these created his cross-cultural Indian identity.

Similar to Deloria Sr., Jim Thorpe and other student athletes at the federal boarding schools found successful careers after graduation. Many students were teachers, public speakers, or worked for the BIA. By working directly for the boarding school system, graduates that were employed to work for the BIA could rebel against the rules and help students retain their pan-Indian identities. Sports offered Indian students opportunities to practice their tribal cultures and an alternative to only finding menial jobs after leaving the federal boarding school. Unfortunately, sports were only an avenue of escape for Indian students during the early boarding school era because in the 1930s boarding schools started to eliminate athletic programs.

Boarding School Sports After the 1930s

Starting in the late 1920s, the BIA and the government began to realize that sports did not promote assimilation and they started to deemphasize the role of sports at federal boarding schools. Although some Indian sports teams were famous and successful, superintendents and
the BIA believed that students should be doing better things with their time. Oxendine expresses how Indian boarding school sports declined due to “The idea was often expressed that Indians should reduce their sport involvement and devote themselves to so-called more important endeavors” (259). Indian students should be kept busy from morning to night with academic and vocational training instead of being away from the school where they could have chances to escape from assimilation policies. Perhaps even the boarding school superintendents and the BIA realized that athletic programs were part of the reason why complete assimilation was impossible. The conclusion will analyze reasons why Indians disappeared from professional sports after the early boarding school era due to the Meriam Report in 1928, administrative decisions to de-emphasize the role of sports, and how white society did not give Indians the chance to join prominent and organized sports teams.
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

After forty years of forcing Indian children to attend federal boarding schools, ripping Native families apart, and forcing Indian adults to live a marginalized and isolated existence on reservations, a new government policy emerged that called for Indians to help themselves and to find their own resources to be able to join white society. Similar to how Pratt argued that Indians could not learn to become white on reservations, the U.S. government decided that it was finally time to close most boarding schools and have Indian children attend public schools. In 1924, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act that aimed to provide Indians with more resources to be able to join white society. In the 1930s, political figures began to speak out about how to change assimilation policies. White society started to appreciate the sense of community that they found among Indians and reconsidered how Indians were suppose to leave their tribal cultures behind if they wanted to succeed in white society. At the end of the early boarding school era in the 1930s, John Collier, the Indian Affairs Commissioner, worked with President Roosevelt to offer Indians a “New Deal.”

In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act called for cultural pluralism and Collier argued that the Indian way of life had much to teach white society and that their tribal cultures should be preserved. In A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America Ronald Takaki reports how Collier’s new government policy called for the maintenance of Indian cultures on their communally owned lands. Collier’s policy called for Indians to remain Indians and argued how “Assimilation, not into our culture but into modern life, and preservation and intensification of heritage are not hostile choices, excluding one another, but are interdependent” (224). Assimilation was no longer the only way for Indians to succeed in mainstream society and they did not have to decide between either becoming white or giving up their tribal cultures. Collier
argued how Indian tribes should be allowed to retain their tribal cultures and join white modernity. Collier declared how “Modernity and white Americanism are not identical. If the Indian life is a good life, then we should be proud and glad to have this different and native culture going on by the side of ours… America is coming to understand this, and to know that in helping the Indian to save himself, we are helping to save something that is precious to us as well as to him” (225). As mentioned earlier, the U.S. government frowned up minority groups that could not take care and provide for themselves. Instead of having Indians relying on government assistance and the boarding school system, the goal was now for Indians to help themselves and find their own ways to become successful in mainstream society.

The Indian Reorganization Act called for Indians to help themselves without relying on the government by closing most federal boarding schools, eliminating compulsory attendance rules, and by sending more Indian children to public schools. However, without as many federal boarding schools athletic programs quickly disappeared and Indians no longer had opportunities to compete in organized professional sports. Oxendine asserts how “friends of the Indian at the time did not view sports as a helpful means of promoting Indian-well being” (xxi). The Indian Reorganization Act inadvertently caused Indian boarding school sports to decline because the U.S. government thought that Indians should be doing better things with their time. Boarding school sports abruptly ended in the 1930s when the Meriam Report was released and reports emerged about corrupt and unprofessional boarding school athletic programs.

**The Meriam Report**

Starting in the 1920s, there was a lot of controversy about Indian boarding schools and politicians began to speak out about the horrible living conditions that Indian children endured and survived through. Indian families and boarding school inspectors began to submit formal
complaints that demanded changes to improve the wellbeing of their children. Child reports how Indian parents had issues with the school and many would write letters to the BIA or superintendents. Child explains how “In 1917 a father from the Omaha Agency at Macy, Nebraska, did lodge a complain with ‘the Indian Office in Washington’ because of the way Flandreau School treats the pupils and starve them” (31). When Indian parents came to visit their children or when they had a short trip home they noticed that their children were skinner, malnourished, and unhealthier. Parents began to complain directly to the BIA about how the boarding school was not taking adequate care of their loved ones.

As more complaints arose about the conditions inside federal boarding schools, Hubert Work, a secretary from the Department of the Interior in Washington published a report that exposed how boarding schools treated their students. The Meriam Report, also known as “The Problem of Indian Administration,” examined how boarding schools were not taking adequate care of Indian children. Buford describes how “The findings were grim: inadequate schooling, housing, and employment, and abysmal health care… The boarding schools in particular disrupted family life and alienated the students from their own culture and kin. The American Indians, stated the report, ‘wish to remain Indians, to preserve what they inherited from their fathers’ – just like anybody else” (257). The Meriam Report exposed how boarding schools were inflicting traumatic experiences upon Indian students and how many children were both physically and mentally unhealthy. The report also reinforces how Indian students found ways to rebel against assimilation policies because they discovered spaces where they could retain their pan-Indian identities. The Meriam Report exposed the conditions that Indian children survived through to white society hoping that this would cause more boarding schools to close and have Indian children attend public schools.
The Meriam Report revealed how Indian children were underfed, malnourished, overworked, overcrowded, and had little supervision. The report criticizes how the school’s staff could not handle taking care of Indian students or offer them a wholesome education. In the report, Work expresses how “The outstanding evidence of the lack of an adequate, well-trained personnel is the absence of any well considered broad educational program for the Service as a whole” (narf.org). The report criticized how the staff was not well trained and could not possibly supervise every Indian child. This reflects how boarding schools’ assimilation policies failed due to how the staff was not prepared to take care of several hundred Indian children. Indian students developed their own subcultures and pan-Indian identities due to how the staff did not have the resources to enforce complete assimilation. The Meriam Report also mentions how athletic programs were corrupt at boarding schools because the administration devoted too much time and attention to sports teams and athletes received special privileges.

Criticism About Boarding School Athletic Programs

Right before the 1920s, several investigations began at Carlisle and Haskell about problems with overemphasizing boarding school sports. According to the U.S. government and politicians, a major flaw with boarding schools’ athletic programs was how students were spending too much time on sports and should be doing better things with their time. Oxendine expresses how “In 1914, a senatorial investigation was launched in activities at the Carlisle School. Criticism had been forthcoming about laxity in the academic program, overemphasis on athletics, abuse of students, handling of athletic funds, inflated school attendance records, and the general lack of discipline” (192). This investigation searched for reasons why boarding schools’ assimilation policies were failing. The assimilation project was not invincible because Indian athletes had special privileges that alienated them from the boarding school lifestyle and
how other students were living in horrible conditions inside the school with little food, diseases ravishing through the campus, and a poor academic curriculum.

Right after the Meriam Report, the BIA began to investigate athletic programs due to accusations of unprofessionalism and corruption. Superintendents and coaches were giving student athletes special privileges and the administration was relying too much on sports for public relations. Oxendine asserts how many Indian athletes at boarding schools were “students in name only” (xxi). Some student athletes were only at a boarding school just to play football and received little academic and vocational training. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs began discouraging boarding school sports teams and suggested that boarding schools only have recreational activities. In the 1941 *Manual for the Indian School Service*, the BIA expressed how “intramural athletics and games in which everybody has a chance to play shall be encouraged, rather than formal gymnastics or calisthenics or interscholastic athletic competition” (26). Instead of having professional sports teams where athletes spent most of their time away from the boarding school, the BIA recommending only having athletic activities that all Indian children could participate in. This mandate from the BIA eliminated students athletes’ privileges that allowed them to rebel against the school’s authority. In the 1930s, Indian sports vanished and student athletes no longer had the opportunity to show white society what they could accomplish on a sports field.

The Rise and Decline of Indian Boarding School Sports

Boarding school superintendents did not intend to have sports become a prominent part of the curriculum at their assimilationist institutions that severed Indians’ ties with their tribal cultures and communities. And yet, by the early 1900s, sports were flourishing at boarding schools and superintendents invested a lot of their time and energy into developing athletic
programs. Students joined sports teams to distance themselves from the school’s campus and to reformulate their pan-Indian identities. Numerous student athletes had remarkable talents and physical endurance on the sports field and played professional sports after leaving boarding school. In McDonald’s memoir, he explains how there were at least thirty boarding school football players that played professional sports for a college or university (59). A common assumption about boarding school students was that they were trained only for low-class manual labor jobs. However, sports allowed Indian students to retain their pan-Indian identities and it offered some students a chance at a successful career.

In the early 1970s, the Haskell Indian Junior College honored Indian athletes that excelled in athletic competitions and brought pride to their Indian communities. In 1972, Turner Cochran founded The American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame that celebrated Indians’ achievements in sports if they there were at least one-fourth American Indian, made an national impact in a sport, and have merited recognition and distinction (282). A board of directors from across the country induct Indian athletes approximately every two years. Jim Thorpe and John Levi made it into the American Indian Hall of Fame for their successful and remarkable football careers. Oxendine includes a list of fifty-seven Indian athletes that made it into the American Indian Hall of Fame and thirty-seven are from boarding schools between 1880 and 1930 (284-295). Successful and prestigious boarding school sports teams recruited Indian athletes from around the nation to show how their teams could beat whites at their own games. At a time when Indians had little to be proud about, thirty-seven athletes from the early boarding school era brought fame and honor to themselves and their tribal communities.

Not long after the rise of successful boarding school sports teams that beat white elite teams at their own games, Indian sports vanished. Instead of having athletic programs where
Indian athletes brought recognition, prestige, and pride back to the student community at a boarding school, the U.S. government and BIA encouraged Indians to find distinction and pride for themselves. A possible reason for the abrupt ending to Indian boarding school sports teams is how the government and white society did not want Indians to have anything to be proud about. The new Indian policies in the 1930s argued that Indians should have to find their own way to success, just like everybody else in America. Boarding school sports quickly disappeared because white society did not want Indians to have something that distinguished them as a better than white society. While sports did not last long at boarding schools it at least gave Indian students a chance to resist complete assimilation and develop their own rebellious subcultures that refused to give up their proud pan-Indian identities.

During the early boarding school era, Indian students took what little they had and found a way to retain their pan-tribal identities. If Indian children could distance themselves from the school’s staff then they would be allowed to retain their tribal cultures. For forty years, sports were many Indian students’ favorite memories at federal boarding schools and it brought the student body together when they had nothing else to keep them going. However, in the 1930s Indians no longer had a sense of community and pride with sports. Oxendine explains how “The Indian’s entrance into college sport after the early 1930s was an individual, lonely effort – without the accompaniment of other Indian athletes and often without even the presence of other Indians at the institution” (272). Informal barriers existed that denied or discouraged Indians from playing sports for major colleges and universities. The early boarding school era’s athletic programs brought Indian students together where they could escape from the staff and retain their pan-Indian identities. It is remarkable that thirty-seven Indian athletes made it into the American Indian Hall of Fame in the forty-year span of the early boarding school era.
Fortunately, Indian athletes could use sports as an avenue of escape when complete assimilation was the only option for Indian students. Without sports, many Indian children would have endured a more traumatic, alienated, and lonely experience while away from home for at least five years at a federal boarding school.
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