

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Opera and Land: Settler Colonialism and the Geopolitics of Music at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School

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Abstract

This article examines the politics of music at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the flagship federal off-reservation boarding school for the compulsory education of Indigenous children, established in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1879. By examining the music education and performance culture at the Carlisle School, this article considers the role of music both within boarding school discourses of “civilization” and in terms of the larger federal goal of dispossession of Native land. Based on original archival research and engagements with contemporary discourses in Indigenous music and sound studies, the article then considers a nationalistic comic opera titled *The Captain of Plymouth* performed by Native students at the Carlisle commencement exercises in 1909. It argues ultimately that, although music, dance, and expressive culture were a central concern for federal assimilationist policy, music making at Carlisle provided a groundwork for the emergence of an intertribal social formation that guided musical practices and self-determination movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

“The Indian [...] is raw material in the mountain and plain to be brought and put through the proper refining influences of our civilization mills of today, wrought into shape and then sent to work on the great oceans of our industry and thrift.”

— Richard Henry Pratt¹

“The majority of men and women are hopelessly treading Drudgery mills and that is civilization?—To be compelled to work when you do not wish it—is drudgery—not civilization! That is about what Carlisle would gain in the end—success in making drudges. I prefer to be stone-dead than living-dead!”

— Zitkala-Ša²

In 1882, when he was around 12 years old, Luther Standing Bear (Oglala Lakota) was brought by his schoolmaster to a “big hall” to serve as entertainment for an audience of white visitors to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. In one of his several memoirs written decades later, Standing Bear describes singing a “love-dance song” at the request of Carlisle founder “Captain” Richard Henry Pratt, to the great pleasure of the audience. A man who “looked like Santa Claus” then requested to hear an oration “in the Sioux tongue.” Standing Bear describes,

Now in school we were not allowed to converse in the Indian tongue, but here was an old man making a formal request which Captain Pratt did not wish to refuse. [...] I arose and said, “*Lakota*

¹Richard Henry Pratt, “The Indian No Problem,” *Red Man & Helper* 5, no. 43–44 (June 24 and July 1, 1904): 7–8. *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 23, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/red-man-and-helper-vol-5-no-43-44>.

²Zitkala-Ša to Carlos Montezuma, ca. June 1901, in *Letters, Speeches, and Unpublished Writings, 1898–1929*, ed. Tadeusz Lewandowski (Boston: Brill, 2018), 55.

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iya woci ci yakapi queyasi oyaka rnirapi kte sni tka le ha han pe lo,” which, interpreted into English, means, “If I talk in Sioux, you will not understand me anyhow.” But I did not understand exactly how to interpret this properly at the time, so I was pleased when there was a clapping of hands, so I could sit down again. Just then the old man stood up again, and while I was shivering in my shoes for fear of what he might again ask me, he said “Can that boy interpret what he said into English?” I knew I had to say something, so I replied that it meant, “We are glad to see you all here to-night.”³

This episode, one of many rich first-hand stories Standing Bear recorded of his life navigating the Federal Indian Boarding School system from its watershed moment in 1879, points to the complexities of signification, performance, and contestation that subtended the assimilationist education program writ large.⁴ On the surface, Standing Bear’s story reveals what Stó:lō musicologist Dylan Robinson has theorized as the insatiable settler “hunger” for Indigenous aural and performance cultures and knowledges—one always attended by a hunger for land.⁵ On a deeper level, it shows Standing Bear playing with white aural expectations and navigating complex and dissonant domains of signification, making meaning for himself and his peers to which the white audience is oblivious. If Standing Bear’s narrative bears witness to the degradation to which young Native people were subjected at Carlisle, it also shows how those same people brought their own complex strategic engagements to their circumstances, playfully inverting performance expectations to make their own way within hostile circumstances.

The complex mediations and conflictual meanings embedded in this passage provide a model for this article’s investigation of the broader significance of music at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the institution at the center of the boarding school system that Red Lake Ojibwe historian Brenda Child has suggested is representative of settler colonialism “at its most genocidal.”⁶ Scholars of Indigenous North American history have long understood the boarding school system not simply as a humanistic “civilizing” mission (itself a thinly veiled cultural assault on Native children), but just as crucially as a way of structurally undermining Native tribal and political blocs in order to facilitate the state dispossession of Native land.⁷ Land and territory, as Lenape theorist Joanne Barker and many others have argued, is “not anecdotal but formative” to the colonial processes on which settler nations like the United States are founded, and the question of land subtends the *longue durée* of colonial and early-U.S. policy toward Native peoples, including the boarding school era.⁸ Thus, this article builds off of Indigenous studies scholars’ insistence on the centrality of land to the history of settler-colonial governance, as well as musicological scholarship on the role of music in the experiences and policies of the assimilation era, to ask how music in carceral and assimilationist institutions played into larger processes of land dispossession. I argue ultimately that, although federal policies that suppressed Native music and dance in reservation life and imposed Euro-American music at boarding schools were part of the broader field of governance that tried to break up Native communities and undermine relationships to their land bases, the actual practices of music and performance at Carlisle and other

³Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 166–67. Citations refer to the University of Nebraska Press edition.

⁴Group endonyms and exonyms are complex and historically contingent, especially so in the context of U.S. settler colonialism. In this article, I follow contemporary scholarly convention by using “Indian” only when citing primary sources and referring to specific institutions by their official names, while referring to the actual peoples to whom those constructions were meant to be applied as Native or Indigenous (when discussing formations larger than a particular tribal designation).

⁵Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 1–3, 37–73.

⁶Brenda Child, “Boarding School as Metaphor,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 38.

⁷I call on radical geographer Clyde Woods’ use of the “bloc” as opposed to simply the “community” to point to the irreducibly spatial and geopolitical nature of the relationships between individual Native peoples and between Native peoples more broadly and the state. See Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (1998, repr; New York: Verso Books, 2017). Citations refer to the 2017 Verso Books edition.

⁸Joanne Barker, “Territory as Analytic: The Dispossession of Lenapehoking and the Subprime Crisis,” *Social Text* 36, no. 2 (June 2018): 34. See also Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 60.

institutions of carceral assimilation provided the sparks of mutual recognition, solidarity, and sociality among students of a wide range of backgrounds. Assimilationist cultural policy thus paradoxically contributed to the development of nascent forms of intertribal political and social formations that would guide Native music practices and self-determination movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

I aim to contribute to the historiographic understanding of U.S. American settler colonialism and the role of music and expressive culture within that broader structure, while also modeling deep intellectual engagement with the Indigenous scholarship that continues to lead the scholarly discourses around music, colonialism, and Indigeneity. Of course, my positionality as a white settler scholar bears on how I approach this question.⁹ My method is therefore not to pretend to speak from an embodied or privileged knowledge of the complex meanings of musicking for Indigenous communities; rather, I assemble critical readings of settler discourses and policies using the conceptual tools developed in Indigenous critiques of colonialism. By reading the settler archive against the grain, I hope to make the dispossessive machinations of colonial culture more apparent, offering discussions that could be seen as complementary to those Indigeneity-centered music historiography and analysis that orient the anticolonial critique of contemporary music studies. In short, I take seriously the provocations of musicologists Jessica Bissett Perea (Dena'ina) and Gabriel Solis, who ask the question, “what happens to American music studies if you put Indigeneity at its center?”¹⁰ Furthermore, this article’s central theoretical concern—a consideration of the politics of music under settler colonialism as inextricable from the material geopolitics of land—is meant to contribute to the increasing urgency of debates around “decolonizing” music studies by taking seriously Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s now-standard insistence that “decolonization is not a metaphor.”¹¹ Hidden behind debates about decolonizing music studies is a seldom-investigated set of questions about what music and land (i.e., the material basis of decolonization) have to do with each other. May the following discussion help sharpen some of those questions.¹²

The boarding school system in context

Established in the Susquehanna Valley in central Pennsylvania by Brigadier General Richard Henry Pratt in 1879, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School was the flagship federal off-reservation boarding school for the compulsory education for Native children.¹³ Over the school’s 39 years of existence,

⁹I live, write, and teach on Lenni Lenape lands. Research for this article was conducted on lands belonging to the Susquehannock, Mohegan, Schaghticoke, Pequot, Paugussett, and other Algonquian-speaking peoples, and the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Miami, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi peoples.

¹⁰Jessica Bissett Perea and Gabriel Solis, “Asking the Indigeneity Question of American Music Studies,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 4 (November 2019): 410.

¹¹Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

¹²The question of the relationship between music (studies) and land is also being posed by Indigenous music scholars currently. Consider, e.g., the 2022 joint annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the Society for Music Theory, which hosted a session brilliantly titled, “What Does This Have to Do with Land Back?: Indigenous Perspectives on Decolonization Frameworks in North American Music Scholarship.” This panel session, with Indigenous music scholars Imani Mosley, Breana McCullough, Melody McKiver, Rena Roussin, and Renata Yazzie, asked a fundamentally decolonial question of music studies. Although not leaping to any simple answers, the present article takes seriously the question of what “this” (music, music history, music studies) has to do with “land back.”

¹³The Susquehanna Valley was and is an important crossroad between various regions and as such was a complex site of diplomatic, military, and trade relations between various Native nations. The Iroquoian-speaking Susquehannocks, whose name derives from the river running through the valley, broke off from the Mohawks starting in the fourteenth century. In the following centuries the Susquehannocks faced increasing pressure from European settlers as well as the powerful Haudenosaunee Confederacy, with whom they competed for dominance in the fur trade industry initiated by European’s insatiable desires for economic gain and material goods like beaver furs. Central Pennsylvania also became a paradigmatic case of the multiple political forces on the western “frontier” in the aftermath of the Seven Years’ War and the British crown’s ill-fated Proclamation of 1763. Native resistance was consolidated in Pontiac’s Rebellion, also in 1763, which in turn stoked the racist eliminationism of white settlers in the region. By the end of the eighteenth century, most Native peoples in and around the Lower Susquehanna Valley had been driven out, to be absorbed into neighboring Native nations. See Christopher Bilodeau, “Before Carlisle: The Lower

thousands of young Native people were brought from their communities across the continent and beyond, ostensibly in order to be assimilated into U.S. American society. Carlisle transformed federal policy on Native education, setting the course for hundreds of other federally operated boarding schools across the United States and Canada.¹⁴ Notwithstanding the school's official messaging, which touted a humanistic, sentimentalist, and philanthropic mission of "civilizing" Native children, the racial discourses and suppressive practices of the school show the more fundamentally violent and geopolitical function of the boarding school system. The explicit goal of the Carlisle School was to "Kill the Indian and Save the Man": A motto that encapsulates the way the supposed civilizational mission of the schooling system hardly masked the actual corporeal and cultural violence it enacted.¹⁵

The off-reservation boarding school system was introduced as an improvement on existing federal policy in two ways: First, Carlisle founder Richard Henry Pratt sought to improve upon the existing institutions of colonial education, including the day schools, mission schools, and on-reservation boarding schools. Against the bilingualism of many of the mission schools and the proximity to home communities offered by the day and on-reservation boarding schools, Pratt argued that these institutions would fail to fully assimilate Native children because they allowed some measure of inclusion of the students' cultures, languages, and lifeways.¹⁶ Second, the emergence of the humanistic discourse of Carlisle was meant as a transformation of the federal government's stance toward Native peoples away from the outright military violence that characterized settler-colonial expansion earlier

Susquehanna Valley as Contested Native Space," in *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, eds. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 54–80; David J. Minderhout, ed., *Native Americans in the Susquehanna River Valley* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013); Judith Ridner, *A Town In-Between: Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the Early Mid-Atlantic Interior* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010).

¹⁴For a thorough recent statistical account of the scope of the boarding school system, see United States Department of the Interior, "Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report," by Bryan Newland, May 2022.

¹⁵There is a wide body of scholarly literature about the boarding school system as a whole and about individual institutions within it. See, e.g., Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, "To Remain an Indian": *Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Democracy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006); David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2020); Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose, eds., *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Denise K. Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries: The History, the Unforgivable, and the Healing of Northern Plains American Indian Boarding School Survivors* (Fargo: North Dakota State University Press, 2019); K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas: Hopi Students at Sherman Institute, 1902–1929* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Ruth Spack, *America's Second Tongue: American Indian Education and the Ownership of English, 1860–1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Margaret Connell Szasz, *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607–1783* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc, eds., *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Education Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education, 1871–1982* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 1997); Preston McBride, "A Lethal Education: Institutionalized Negligence, Epidemiology, and Death in Native American Boarding Schools, 1879–1934" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2020). In addition to secondary historical and ethnographic literature, there is also a vital body of first-hand memoirs of boarding school experiences that inform the historical narratives. Although my focus is on Carlisle here, I occasionally draw on scholars of other schools, including the prominent Chilocco School in Oklahoma and the Sherman Institute in California. Without wishing to dilute the experiential and historical specificity of each of these institutions, I argue that Carlisle's position as the model for the entire off-reservation boarding school system brings the continental breadth of student experiences into close relation with the practices of students and school officials at Carlisle.

¹⁶Thomas J. Morgan (the Commissioner of Indian Affairs starting in 1889) is usually understood as the initiator of that shift, but the philosophy of removal was being established in Pratt's writings as early as the 1870s. See Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club*, 74–75, 159–83; Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 51–59. Pratt wrote and rewrote his polemical views on education throughout his long career, delivering these writings as orations to policymakers, at educational conventions, and for elite philanthropists. One representative publication is a speech titled "The Indian No Problem," delivered before a convention of New York City ministers in 1904 and printed in *Red Man and Helper* 5, no. 37 (May 1904). *Red Man and Helper* was one of many Carlisle school newspapers that Pratt supervised and often wrote for pseudoanonymously.

in that century.¹⁷ This supposedly gentler, sentimental approach to Indigenous peoples was encapsulated by Ulysses S. Grant in his 1869 inaugural address, which called for the “proper treatment of the original occupants of this land,” favoring “any course toward them which tends to their civilization and ultimate citizenship.”¹⁸ To understand Carlisle and the program it launched as a part of the broader policy reforms at the time means understanding it as a continuation of the violent processes of dispossession and domination by other, only superficially more “enlightened,” means. In this way, the boarding school system went hand-in-hand with the parallel legislative process known as allotment, which imposed Euro-American property and landholding patterns onto Native peoples by turning communally held tribal lands into individual parcels of private property—in the process, making much of that newly private land available for property tax foreclosure and dispossession by predatory settler venture. Consolidated in the 1887 General Allotment (or Dawes) Act, the allotment process was draped in the same ideological cloth as the boarding school system, enforcing the belief, in the words of Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) and Jean M. O’Brien (White Earth Ojibwe), that “the privatization of land is a necessary precondition for individual success and cultural modernity.”¹⁹ The centrality of the schooling system in this new ideology of assimilationist progressivism in settler-colonial society is encapsulated by the well-known allegorical painting *American Progress*, in which Columbia, the mythical personification of the United States, glides frictionlessly to the West, spreading civilization in the form of railroads and telegraph wire, trampling Native peoples underfoot. Nested in Columbia’s right arm is a “School Book”²⁰ (Figure 1).

This article proceeds in five sections: First, I discuss the important precursors to Carlisle in Pratt’s educational experiments with Native prisoners at Fort Marion, a military fortress in St. Augustine, Florida. The prominent role of arts, crafts, and performance for the broader ideological mission of the Fort Marion experiment laid the groundwork for the aesthetic discourse of Carlisle and the assimilation era more broadly. The second section provides an overview of the role of music in the daily life

¹⁷In recent decades, scholars have developed an understanding of “colonialism” and “settler colonialism” as distinct political configurations, with the latter marked especially by the intention of the alien colonizing force to remain on the colonized land, thereby necessitating the elimination—by extermination or by assimilation—of the peoples indigenous to that land. Crucial to the contemporary understanding of this relation’s persistence into the present day is Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe’s oft-cited description of settler colonialism as a “structure and not an event.” See Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 388. However, Michael Witgen (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe) argues that U.S. colonial policy did not always fit neatly into Wolfe’s paradigm, at times resembling other kinds of franchise colonialism. See Michael Witgen, *Seeing Red: Indigenous Land, American Expansion, and the Political Economy of Plunder in North America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022). Despite his place as a (somewhat unwilling) foundational citation for settler colonial studies, Wolfe himself recognized that the theorization and practical navigation of settler colonialism was the domain of Indigenous peoples. See the conversation between Kanaka Maoli scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism Then and Now,” *Politica & Societa* 1, no. 2 (2012): 235–58. On the emergence of a Critical Indigenous Studies that purposefully activates Indigenous genealogies of knowledge and diverges from non-Indigenous disciplinary formations, see Brendan Hokowhitu, “Introduction,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies*, eds. Brendan Hokowhitu, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Chris Andersen and Steve Larkin (New York: Routledge, 2021), 26–31.

¹⁸Ulysses S. Grant, “Inaugural Address March 04, 1869 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed September 22, 2022, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-36>. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 5–27.

¹⁹Daniel Heath Justice and Jean M. O’Brien, “Introduction: What’s Done to the People is Done to the Land,” in *Allotment Stories: Indigenous Relations under Settler Siege*, eds. Daniel Heath Justice and Jean M. O’Brien (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), xi. On allotment and property tax foreclosure, see Joanne Barker, “The Corporation and the Tribe,” in *Colonial Racial Capitalism*, eds. Susan Koshy, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd and Brian Jordan Jefferson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 33–59. On the policy history of allotment, see C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

²⁰On Gast’s allegorical painting, see Frank José Arellano, “Una Expresión Del ‘Destino Manifiesto’ En Los Estados Unidos: Análisis Semiótico de La Pintura ‘American Progress’ de John Gast (1872).” *Razon y Palabra* no. 90 (August 2015); Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38–39. On the role of railroads in U.S. settler colonialism, see Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2019), 110–11; and Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).



Figure 1. John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872.

of the students at Carlisle, from the sonic regimentation of time by bells and prayers to the extracurricular ensembles that students formed. In the third section, I elaborate the aforementioned argument on the role of music at the schools as inextricable from the changing dynamics of land by examining assimilation-era state discourse on music and dance in light of contemporary Indigenous sound and music studies scholarship. I then turn to a discussion of *The Captain of Plymouth*, a Savoy-esque comic opera performed by students during commencement weekend in 1909, showing how the opera's supposed "civilizing" function failed on its own terms. I conclude by meditating on the operatic text's striking inclusion of a "Ghost Dance," interpreting this resolutely anti-assimilationist reference within the assimilationist text as a kind of flashpoint for new sparks of intertribal solidarity among the young people who performed it.

Spectacle and the origins of the boarding school system: Fort Marion Prison

In 1875, Richard Henry Pratt was charged with overseeing the transportation of seventy-two prisoners of war from the Central Plains—mostly Kiowa, Comanche, and Cheyenne—over 1,000 miles from Fort Sill in the Oklahoma Territory to Fort Marion, a military prison in St. Augustine, Florida.²¹ At Fort

²¹The designation of these men as "prisoners of war" highlights the complexity of the legal and military context of the 1870s. The Indian Appropriation Act of 1871 had liquidated officially recognized "nationhood" for Native tribes, which were to be considered "wards" of the federal government, in language that drew on Chief Justice John Marshall's invention of the legal fiction of tribes as "domestic, dependent nations" in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1 (1831). When these Plains warriors were captured, some state officials wanted them tried in a military tribunal as enemy combatants, but the Attorney General refused, arguing that a state of war could not exist between a government and its "wards." In fact, the captives were transported to Ft. Marion for indefinite detention precisely because of the confusion caused by their uncertain legal status after 1871. Pratt himself produced monthly reports to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in which he tabulated the prisoners' "offenses" as civil crimes like murder

Marion, Pratt subjected his prisoners to forced labor (including in the exhumation of Indigenous burial sites in Florida) and experimented with “educating” them in English and the ways of U.S. American civilization.²² He would go on to model his institution in Carlisle, Pennsylvania on his experiments at Fort Marion, including the central importance of public performances by prisoners as part of their “civilization.” Art and cultural performance played an important part in constructing the highly mediated relationship between the prisoners and the townspeople of St. Augustine. The prison was well-known as a “hive of artistic creativity,” and the visual works produced by Bear’s Heart (Cheyenne) and other ledger artists there have long been appreciated as a kind of counter-archive visualizing the experience of forced transportation and imprisonment.²³ In addition to the visual artworks, Pratt curated performances of dances and songs from Central Plains Native communities in strictly controlled environments, supposedly in an effort to help ameliorate white “religious and race hatred” against Native people.²⁴ In the 1870s, settler fascination with (usually highly decontextualized and constructed versions of) Native expressive culture was on the rise, and Pratt capitalized on this desire, with the nominal purpose of smoothing over the tensions that his social experiment had created in the town, but also to win support for his endeavors and advance his career as an educator and/as jailer.

Figure 2 shows the Kiowa prisoner Etahdleuh Doanmoe’s depiction of an Omaha dance for the townspeople of St. Augustine. The performance, out of context and under conditions of extreme coercion, of this and other Native dances must be regarded in light of the ongoing assault from the Office of Indian Affairs on the autonomy of Native communities on reservations to participate in their dance cultures. Although dances like the Sun Dance and the Omaha Dance complex were not officially outlawed until the 1880s, Pratt’s sanctioned curation of otherwise discouraged performances by prisoners of war as entertainment for white audiences strikingly reveals the contradictory power of spectacle.²⁵ Upon close inspection, one is struck by the layers of reality and artifice in Doanmoe’s representation: Notice how the ground on which the dance occurs extends, proscenium-like, from the wall of the prison, as if it is a mere simulation of the land to which the dance is indigenous. The alignment between the smoke from the central fire and the prison watchtower, as well as the visual continuity between townspeople and the fortress windows, adds to the dissonance between the dance itself and its surroundings. Unsurprisingly, it is the dancers that animate the image, in bright colors and fluid motion against the backdrop of stationary spectators. It is also notable that, though it apparently depicts the culturally specific Omaha Dance, this scene shows a cultural practice being shared by members of related but distinct Plains peoples. Despite Pratt’s dismissive description of the dance as given for the prisoners’ “new friends”—and only secondarily “to amuse themselves”—perhaps we can see in Doanmoe’s drawing a spark of creative, intertribal sociality under captivity, a theme to which I will return below.

It was the musical performances outside the prison walls that shaped the course of the captives’ lives and the future of colonial education programs. In March of 1878, Pratt programmed a night of entertainment intended to secure funds for the continuing education of several of the prisoners. The evening was so popular that Pratt offered a repeat performance the next night (see Figure 3). By providing a pageant of variety entertainment, Pratt hoped to garner philanthropic support from the elite

and robbery. I follow the scholarly convention here by describing these men as “prisoners of war.” This designation highlights the federal government’s larger “war” on Indigenous people, and validates the warriors’ understanding of themselves as fighting on behalf of their people, rather than as aberrant isolated “criminals.” See Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 5–7; Charles Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929).

²²Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867–1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 130. See also the correspondences between Pratt and geologist (and later director of the Bureau of American Ethnology) John Wesley Powell, in which Pratt describes burial mound exhumation using the forced labor of the prisoners. John Wesley Powell to Richard Henry Pratt, November 7, 1877, WA MSS S-1174, box 8, folder 251, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

²³Karen Daniels Peterson, *Plains Indian Art from Fort Marion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 8–14.

²⁴Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 117.

²⁵On the federal government’s attack on various dance forms, see John Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879–1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 26–37.

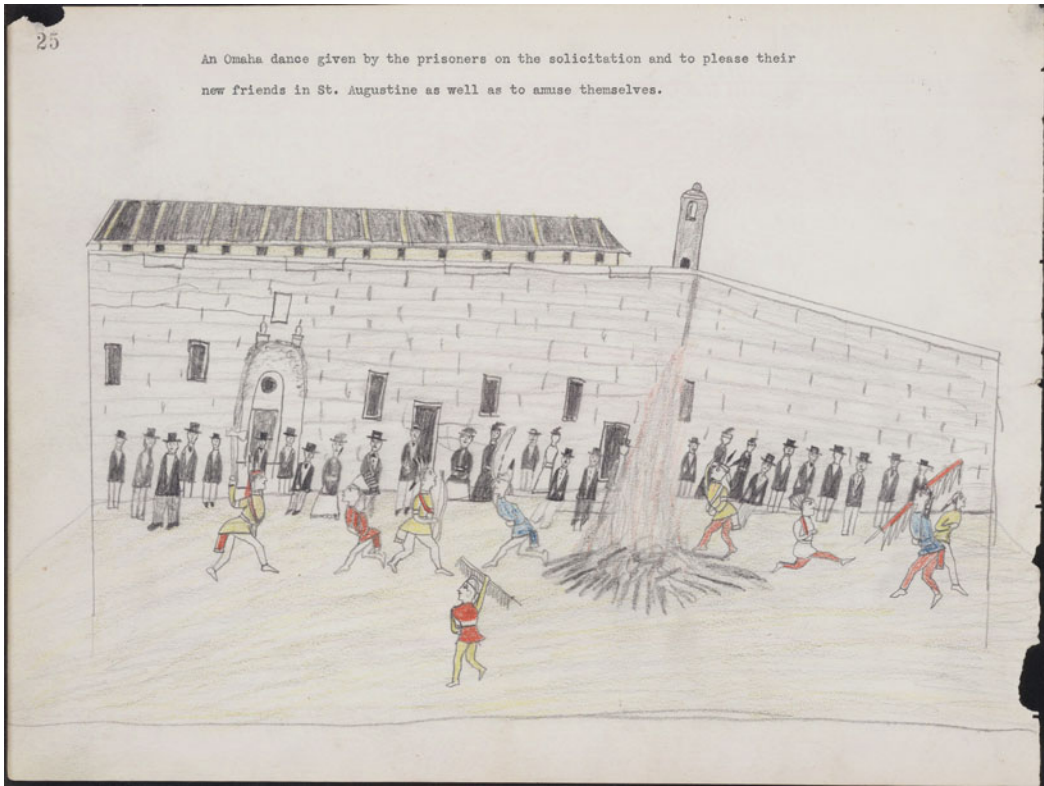


Figure 2. Etahdleuh Doanmoe, “Omaha Dance at St. Augustine,” c. 1877. Box 32, Richard Henry Pratt Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT.

Euro-Americans visiting St. Augustine for the winter. The performance of “war whoops” and “love songs” for the audience of mostly well-to-do white women made such an impression that Pratt received multiple offers for the philanthropic sponsorship of the prisoners’ educations. At the same concert, women from St. Augustine put on a “Mother Goose” number with both their own white children as well as “decorated Indians.” This gesture of maternalistic incorporation resonated with sentimentalist racialism of the era by performatively casting Native peoples in general as the “children” of the white race, to be “lifted...into their rightful place as real potential Americans.”²⁶ This episode shows one form of racism replacing another: By displaying the prisoners as emotive, child-like, and ultimately improvable objects of white sympathy, these performances were designed to counteract the perceptions of Native peoples as barbaric and warlike, thereby securing philanthropic support for their assimilation.

The pageant, which also contained “a talk in the Indian sign language” translated by Tsait-Kope-Ta but not listed on the program, was celebrated by Pratt as a great success. As a direct result of this performance, the captives at Fort Marion were sent away to be educated after their official release from prison.²⁷ It won favor among the white elites in St. Augustine, earning sponsorship and placement in northern schools for several of the performers, including Etahdleuh Doanmoe and Tsait-Kope-Ta.²⁸ It also set an important course for how spectacle and performance could be used

²⁶Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 189. On maternalism, child removal, and settler colonialism, see Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Laura Briggs, *Taking Children: A History of American Terror* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

²⁷Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 191.

²⁸Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 188–90.

REPEATED TO NIGHT,
BY GENERAL REQUEST.

A-Take-e-ah-ome Imyiyomo.

(Pleasing Entertainment.)

AN EVENING WITH MOTHER GOOSE AND THE CHILDREN.
IN THE NEW SPACIOUS DINING ROOM OF THE

Magnolia Hotel, St. Augustine.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 1878.

To aid a Fund for the Education of Indian Youth.

(The desire for education and the progress made by some of the younger Indians at the Fort induced one of the teachers to ask of the Indian Department permission to send two to a suitable labor school, with a view to usefulness to their tribes as instructors thereafter. The Department consents providing no expense accrues to the Government. It has been arranged that by working odd hours most of the expense will be borne by themselves, so that the whole sum required to carry them through a three years' course is not large, and over two thirds of the amount is already secured among friends at the North. To complete this fund is the object of this entertainment.)

To Gratify Her Many Friends, Old and Young

MOTHER GOOSE.

APPEARS IN PERSON AND WILL CONDUCT THE

EXERCISES.

1. Mother Goose introduces herself.
2. Mistress Mary. - - - - - Miss Maud Noble
Flowers. - - - - - Miss Mabel Ballard,
Kitty Stanbery,
Fanny Sherwood,
Gertie Palmer,
Edith Palmer,
Nana Pratt.
3. Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep. - - - - - Miss Gertie Palmer.
4. Little Miss Muffet. - - - - - Miss Kitty Stanbery.
5. Little Bo Peep. - - - - - Miss Fanny Sherwood.
6. Indians in full war dress, dancing and singing their War song to music of Tomtozas.
Tsat-kope-ta and Tsh-dle-tah, Musicians. Zo-tom and Howling Wolf, Dancers
7. Lullaby. - - - - - Miss Gertie and Miss Edith Palmer.
8. Cock Robin.
Sparrow—Master Sumner Saville. Fish—Miss Edith Palmer. Linnet—Miss Maud Noble.
Owl—Master Porter Tracy. Thrush—Miss Mabel Ballard. Bull—Master Fred Vaill.
Fly—Miss Gertie Palmer. Beetle—Miss Marion Pratt. Lark—Master Paul Tracy.
Hook—Master Henry Saville. Dove—Miss Nana Pratt. Kite—Master Willie Allen.
9. Eavesdropping. - - - - - Master Huntington Saville, Misses Gertie and Edith Palmer.
10. Nomadic Lovers. Indians in Native costume, singing love song. Bear Mountain and Biter, Kiowas.
11. Old King Cole.—Master Fred Vaill. Page—Master Huntington Saville. Three Fiddlers—Masters Porter and Paul Tracy and Willie Allen.
12. My Pretty Maid. - - - - - Miss Maud Noble and Master Fred Vaill.
13. Hark, Hark, the Dogs do Bark. - - - - - Troupe.
14. Ten Little Indians.—Masters Fred Vaill, Porter Tracy, Paul Tracy, Sumner Saville, Henry Saville, Huntington Saville, Willie Banskett, Kingsley Gibbs, Josy Enslow, Willie Allen.
15. Song by the Indians, written by a lady. - Zo-tom, Tsat-kope-ta, Etah-dle-ah, Roman Nose.

Lo we had Men to your home,
Come in silent address.
From the far-off Plains where roam
all our tribes in gladness.

Chorus.
In this genial happy land
Chiefs of us say a nation,
We find the welcome friendly hand,
We find the true salvation.

Here we've learned a nobler life,
To do unto each other,
The good we can to conquer strife,
And call the white man brother.

Chorus.

TICKETS OF ADMISSION, 50 Cents. CHILDREN, 25 Cents.

To be had at the Hotels, News Stand, Whitney Bro's.

Reserved Seats, \$1.00, at Ballard's only.

ENTERTAINMENT TO COMMENCE AT 8 P. M.

Figure 3. Box 30, Folder 828, Richard Henry Pratt Papers WA MSS S-1174, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

as a frame for what Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd has called “paradigmatic Indianness”: The wordless “war song” and the “love song” in the unfamiliar Kiowa language, for example, surely titillated the spectators with the alluring display of a sanitized otherness.²⁹ However, it also demonstrates how even the fetishizing construction of spectacular “Indianness” could never fully annul the agency and experience of the performers: The love-song’s raucous popularity, the ambiguous lyrics in the final song, and the opportunity to perform a war song in such a restrictive context must, at minimum,

²⁹Jodi Byrd, *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxxv.

have stirred a wider range of reactions among the performers than mere acquiescence to U.S. American civilization. Indeed, even the stated desire of certain prisoners to get an education in settler-operated schools was itself a strategic negotiation with the terms of their incarceration. Some of the prisoners actively sought education simply because they saw it as a more dynamic and capacious opportunity than their brute confinement in a military fortress.³⁰ Thus, even though Pratt would describe this evening of “pleasing entertainment” as evidence of the success of the white civilization program, the captives’ performance itself, at least insofar as it led to their emancipation and opportunities for further negotiation of settler society, must have been seen as a success for something quite different.

Music in daily life at Carlisle

As a result of what was hailed as the great success of the Fort Marion experiment, several prisoners were released in 1878 into the official care of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Rather than send the men back to their home communities, Pratt arranged to have some of them sent to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute to receive “white education” alongside formerly enslaved people and their children. Due in part to his ideological differences with Hampton founder Samuel Chapman Armstrong, Pratt immediately began soliciting the federal government and east coast elites for financial and political support for a school specifically for the education of Native children.³¹ He was soon given access to a decommissioned barracks and transported the first group of students from Pine Ridge and Rosebud Agencies to Carlisle in October of 1879.³²

Like at Fort Marion, the musical activities at Carlisle were central to its processes of subjection. These activities took a number of different forms, most prominently the music and arts classes that all students would attend at some point in their time at the school. The extracurricular school bands were also a source of pride for many students and for the school officials themselves. There were also occasional concerts at the school, both by live bands and on gramophone, that played a large part in the school’s official leisure activities.³³ Music and sound were operationalized in the highly regulated social life of the Carlisle School both in terms of content and form. The lyrical content of the musical materials themselves expressly communicated messages of national pride, racializing stereotypes, and the middle-class liberal values into which the students were supposed to be indoctrinated. Whether mealtime hymns celebrating Christian meekness, jingoistic songs narrating the bravery of the founding fathers, or school songs designed to simulate the consent of the children to give up their identity, the music at Carlisle was more often than not chosen for its explicitly assimilation-friendly message. The form of musical training provided an equally important, albeit more implicit, arena for racializing aesthetic education.³⁴ By “form” I mean not only the semiotic codes of “Western” (Euro-American) music, including harmonic, orthographic, structural, and performance norms (which themselves can carry a kind of “colonizing force,” as Kofi Agawu has argued³⁵), but

³⁰The strategic use of white education for the broader purposes of supporting, serving, and defending their Native communities was the most prevalent stated aim of those who would go on to Carlisle and other boarding schools. Despite the stated intentions of the school system to take the children away from their communities forever, students and their families had understood white education as a strategic engagement from the beginning. See, e.g., Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux*, 123ff; Child, *Boarding School Seasons*; Mann, *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education*, 44ff.

³¹See Robert Francis Engs, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited: Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Hampton Institute, 1839–1893* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999); Lee Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 103–35; Adams, *Education for Extinction*; Donal Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877–1923* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

³²Luther Standing Bear, who was in this first party of Carlisle students, describes his experience of transportation and arrival in *My People the Sioux*, 133–50.

³³See Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 120–27. Melissa Parkhurst describes related events at the Chemawa School in Salem, OR, in *To Win the Indian Heart: Music at Chemawa Indian School* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2014), 135.

³⁴On arts education as a weapon of assimilationist policy, see Marinella Lentis, *Colonized Through Art: American Indian Schools and Arts Education, 1889–1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

³⁵Kofi Agawu, “Tonality as a Colonizing Force in Africa,” in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, eds. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 334–55.

also the form of wider curricular design through which the school imposed a version of settler musical culture as a leisure activity separable from and secondary to the labor-oriented core of U.S. American life.

Therefore, it is important to consider not just the semiotic content but the institutional and bodily “relations of production” that governed the musical program at Carlisle.³⁶ This division also highlights the problem of the epistemic clash at the heart of the education program. Although K. Tsianina Lomawaima (Mvskoke/Creek) and Teresa L. McCarty have emphasized the early stages of the assimilationist curriculum as essentially an “erase and replace” model of re-education, we should be attentive to the hidden epistemic violence of making commensurable what was erased and what it was replaced with.³⁷ It is not just that Native cultural repertory was simply suppressed and replaced with a Euro-American one: It is also that the assimilationist education program imposed a universalist conception of what music *is* and *does* in such a way that papers over the deep ontological and epistemological incommensurabilities that structure listening and sounding across colonial divides. As Robinson has argued, the (re)cognitive structures of settler listening all too often misapprehend Indigenous sounding as *merely* musical, aesthetic, or cultural, at the expense of reckoning with the active force of such sounding as “more-than-aesthetic,” for example as its own subjectivity in an inter-subjective listening field, as territorially specific law, or as historical documentation.³⁸ In this way, we must recognize that the policy bind that suppressed Native expressive complexes and imposed Western aesthetic education was not just a kind of cultural chauvinism that preferred Western music to Native music; rather, it sought to break down Native expressive practices that were intimately imbricated with territoriality and sovereignty.

Discussing the development of boarding school policy after its strictest version in the early “erase and replace” model, Lomawaima and McCarty identify what they call an expanding “safety zone” in which expressions of Native identity—especially arts, handicrafts, and performance—were gradually deemed “safe” enough to be included in boarding school curricula. An attention to the hidden epistemic violence of assimilation helps us understand that for a cultural practice to be deemed “safe” by school officials meant judging that practice as effectively dematerialized—that is, isolated within a reified domain of culture that, in the policymakers’ minds, had nothing to do with the politics of sovereignty. At the same time, however, it was of course not the government officials that decided how a Native cultural practice related to group life. The policy directive that allowed gradual inclusion of certain expressions of Native identity would also serve as a source of creative subterfuge on the part of the students.

In 1901, the federal Office of the Superintendent of Indian Schools published a comprehensive *Course of Study*, outlining the standard curriculum for boarding schools and detailing the moral and practical values of teaching each subject. Although this document was published two decades after the opening of Carlisle, most of its materials were clearly modeled closely on Pratt’s approach to pedagogy, as was most boarding school education policy until the 1910s. The 1901 *Course of Study* cited Carlisle’s curricular materials directly and was illustrated with well-known photographs of the various workshops, classrooms, and extracurricular activities at Carlisle. One of the shortest sections in the text, especially in comparison to those on various forms of agricultural and domestic labor, is the chapter on music. Reel writes that “music is an uplifting element in life and its power is felt. [...] Music as a moral factor makes the pupil feel the charms of harmony and beauty, thus softening and enriching his nature.” Whereas labor cultivated the body and schoolroom instruction cultivated the mind, schoolmasters were urged not to neglect the cultivation of the “hearts” and “souls” of the children, for such spiritual uplift would “help the children to erect for themselves high ideals, and this will aid them to choose the good in life.”³⁹

³⁶For a sociological discussion of the relations of musical production and its structuring but often implicit role in “everyday life,” see Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19ff.

³⁷Lomawaima and McCarty, “To Remain an Indian,” xxii.

³⁸Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 41–46, 86–92.

³⁹Estelle Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States: Industrial and Literary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 160–61. Reel was the Superintendent of Indian Schools from 1898 to 1910.

The text goes on to discuss instruction in vocal and bodily technique. Because “tones are the expressions of our moods,” the brochure insisted, singing must be taught in a “pure tone,” with the mouth and the throat open and unobstructed to allow for the “correct enunciation” and “free use of the voice.” Nasal vowels—common in the phonology of many Native languages—were “never permitted.” The *Course of Study* also stressed that the children must know the meaning of the words they were singing, so as to double the meliorative spiritual effects of the music as sonic entrainment and as meaningful moral lessons.⁴⁰ Following this ideal of total comprehension of the music, the Office urged that “patriotic songs must be taught and the children told something of the life of the author and the reasons for writing the songs given. This leads up to the celebration of national holidays, when patriotic songs should have a prominent place on the program.”⁴¹ As will be discussed more below, patriotic and holiday rituals played a major role in the ideological discipline of the school, and music was a convenient vehicle to accustom children to the values of patriotism, preparing them for participation in holiday pageants and for their allotted place in U.S. American life.

This emphasis on patriotic songs provided the counterpoint to the other major theme of the children’s songs, namely good behavior and an appreciation of schooling. As the following example from a calisthenic musical text shows, students often sang songs that affirmed their gladness to be at school, combining these messages with the physical entrainment not just of their voices, but of their entire bodies. The illustration that accompanies “Away to School” (see [Figure 4](#)) shows a group of children coordinated in singing and with their hands upon their head, which the song’s lyrics describe as a quality indicative of active and eager learners.⁴² In this way, music education, especially for the youngest students, could combine several of the most important factors of Carlisle’s soft coercion: It modeled physical disciplinary coordination and saturated the students with patriotic and moral ideals, which in turn would guarantee that they would “succeed” in assimilating and not go “back to the blanket.”

Beyond the classrooms themselves, music was ubiquitous for marking the strictly regimented daily schedule. Bugle calls marked clock time in military fashion. In *My People the Sioux*, Luther Standing Bear describes waking up early in the morning to blow the wake-up call for the other students, then having an hour to practice cornet before laboring in the tin shop for most of the morning. In the afternoon, he would go to class, rehearse with the brass band until dinnertime, and finally blow the evening calls at nine o’clock.⁴³ Time was also ordered through bells, especially to mark the beginning of meal-times. Students would sing from the “Grace Before Meals” book, printed onsite, with short choral tunes “written especially” for Carlisle by William Gustavos Fischer with words commonly taken from well-known American poets like Edna Dean Proctor (see [Figure 5](#)).⁴⁴

Although vocal instruction and group singing was the extent of most younger children’s exposure to music at Carlisle, more advanced students had the opportunity to pursue music in greater depth, forming various chamber ensembles and choirs. Students could receive piano instruction, join brass or wind

⁴⁰These ideals notwithstanding, meanings of English poems, songs, and recitations were often bracketed in favor of rote memorization due to the fact that teachers at Carlisle rarely had any training in the language instruction. See Spack, *America’s Second Tongue*.

⁴¹Reel, *Course of Study*, 160–61.

⁴²Flora T. Parsons, *Calisthenic Songs Illustrated: A New and Attractive Collection of Calisthenic Songs Beautifully Illustrated, for the Use of Both Public and Private Schools, Containing Songs for Diversion, Devotion, and Recreation* (New York: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor & Co., 1869), 1; purchased for the Carlisle School October 16, 1879. “Statements of Receipts and Disbursements (1879–1886),” *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/lists/statements-receipts-and-disbursements-1879-1886>. That this purchase was made so soon after the school opened (the first children arrived close to midnight on October 5 of that year) shows that music was at the forefront of Pratt’s imaginary for the school. In communications with Washington even before mid-October, Pratt insistently requested that the Bureau of Indian Affairs send a piano and other musical instruments to Carlisle along with such necessities as linens for clothing and flatware. See Pratt’s letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 9th, 1879, “Request for Supplies and Repairs at Carlisle Barracks,” *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documents/request-supplies-and-repairs-carlisle-barracks>.

⁴³Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux*, 148–49.

⁴⁴“Grace Before Meals” hymn pamphlet, PI-09, Box 15, Carlisle Indian School Collection, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA.



AWAY TO SCHOOL.

Words by SAMUEL NEWTON. Music by S. D. BARR.

Away to school we'll run, we'll run, we'll run, Away to school we'll run, we'll run.
 Or we will lose the fun, we will, we will, Or we will lose the fun, we will;

For only early ones, 'tis said, Sing with their hands upon their heads.

Figure 4. From Flora T. Parsons, *Calisthenic Songs Illustrated*, 1.



Grace Before Meals
 for the
Carlisle Indian School
 Dining Room,
 Carlisle, Penn.

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord,
 And sing with all your might"

Words and Music Written Especially for this Purpose

Printed by Indian Apprentices of the Carlisle Indian Press, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

(EVENING.)

Words by EDNA DEAN PROCTOR. Music by WM. G. FISCHER.

Fa-ther! eve-ning shades are fall-ing; Bus-y, joy-ous
 day is done; Thanks and love we bring, re-call-ing
 All thy care from sun to sun, And when days no
 more are giv-en, Pray 'we may be thine in heaven.

Figure 5. "Grace Before Meals," cover page and 1, PI-09, Box 15, Carlisle Indian School Collection, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA.

ensembles, and even start their own choirs. Military bands played a prominent role in reinforcing the larger disciplinary environment of the school.⁴⁵ These activities made space for select students to develop their musical skills and interests to a considerable degree, leading eventually to relatively successful careers for a few students. Among the most prominent of these was the Oneida cornetist and composer-conductor Dennison Wheelock, who enrolled in Carlisle in 1885 and went on to direct the Carlisle Indian Band, and later, the U.S. Indian Band. Luther Standing Bear also played cornet in the Carlisle band, as did the Lakota musician Robert Coon, who would go on to play in John Philip Sousa's prestigious band.⁴⁶

Music, labor, and land

School officials, however, were careful to distinguish music as extraneous to the real essence of the kind of U.S. American lifestyle to which the students might aspire, which was resolutely centered around agricultural, industrial, and domestic labor. A poem titled "Girls, Take Notice" in an 1886 school newspaper makes this point more explicit:

We may live without poetry,
 Music and art;
 We may live without conscience,
 And live without heart.
 We may live without friends,
 And may live without books;
 But civilized man
 Can't live without cooks.⁴⁷

This poem insists on the superfluity of creativity and social life while also inculcating a sense of noble domesticity for the female students. The feminized domestic labor of social reproduction is presented as Native women's aspirational lot in life; music, literature, art, and even friendship were to be enjoyed sparingly, if at all, and only after the housework is complete. This strict hierarchization of the place of music in life was strongly determined by class-inflected ideologies of enjoyment and pleasure. As the aforementioned 1901 *Course of Study* put it, "It is not the desire of the Department to give advanced instruction in music, but it is intended to be taught more as a recreation, whose uplifting influence will be felt in the home."⁴⁸ These statements reveal the way that education at Carlisle was put to particular ideological goals, including the construction of a certain kind of lower-class identity awaiting the students upon assimilation.

However the narratives of industrial education were themselves largely overdrawn. Despite official school rhetoric on the importance of useful job training, the type of vocational training the students at boarding schools received was largely rural in orientation at a time when the white workforce was shifting to industrial manufacturing labor in and around urban settings. As Lomawaima has argued, the "industry" touted by these "Industrial Schools" meant not training for manufacturing work but rather "instruction in the rudiments of civilized living, especially the hard labor necessary to serve

⁴⁵See Vincent Veerbeek, "A Dissonant Education: Marching Bands and Indigenous Musical Traditions at Sherman Institute, 1901–1940," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 44, no. 4, 41–57 (2020).

⁴⁶Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 206–10; Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 186–88.

⁴⁷"Girls, Take Notice," *Indian Helper*, January 22, 1886, 1, quoted in Cristina Stanciu, "That Is Why I Sent You to Carlisle': Carlisle Poetry and the Demands of Americanization Poetics and Politics," *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 1–2 (2013): 55. The poem also appeared in *The Red Man and Helper* 1, no. 17 (November 2, 1900): 3, *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 23, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/red-man-and-helper-vol-1-no-17>.

⁴⁸Reel, *Course of Study*, 161.

the most civilized elite.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, as political theorist Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) has argued, the explanatory framework of “proletarianization” (forced subsumption into the labor economy) must be considered alongside the prior but related process of dispossession that, with proletarianization, is constitutive of capitalist originary accumulation.⁵⁰ In other words, it is not enough to say that the schools were designed to transform Native peoples into workers; it is also important to understand how these institutions fit into the broader processes of land theft and privatization. Thus, the political-economic *raison d’être* of the schools lies not primarily in training a new industrial workforce but rather in structurally dismantling Native communities through child removal and subsequently facilitating the capture of Indigenous lands through legislative processes like allotment.

Close attention to the politics of music at Carlisle can help bring this crucial point into relief. Despite the ubiquity of music in daily life at Carlisle, unauthorized musicking (much like the speaking of Native languages) was still officially forbidden, subject to regular surveillance, and suppressed at all costs. This also highlights the important broader context, discussed above, in which Native dance forms were explicitly outlawed on reservations. Expressive practices like the Omaha Dance and the Sun Dance were considered a threat by the federal government in that they represented Native refusals to be engulfed by U.S. American society.⁵¹ In fact, the state’s fixation on breaking up Native peoples meant that any gathering that government officials felt threatened by could be described as a “dance,” which came to symbolize a general anathema to civilization. In the words of an 1887 annual report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Native dance gatherings represented a “cohesion, which is bred of idleness, of a common history, a common purpose, and a common interest” which “must be broken up before the dancing will cease.”⁵² Official statements like these are revealing in that they make clear that the assault on dancing and other “cultural” practices were explicitly tied to federal anxieties about the very cohesion of Native peoples as groups, and therefore to their resistance to ongoing dispossession. Represented in official government texts as cesspools of orgiastic barbarism, dances and related forms of sociality were outlawed as part of the broader preparation of Native peoples for individualization through the allotment process.

In this sense, the prohibition of dance and its replacement via the music education programs in the boarding school system are deeply tied to struggles over the land. As Mark Rifkin has argued, dance was seen by federal agents not just as an unbecoming cultural holdover to be discouraged, but rather as the material instantiation of the kinds of Native collectivity that posed “a structural impediment to the implementation of the privatizing imaginary” and its attendant ideal of the private property-owning nuclear family.⁵³ Extending this logic, we can conceptualize the music and arts education program at Carlisle as designed to foster a kind of music making apposite to the newly assimilated Native people

⁴⁹Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light*, 66. See also Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyack, eds., *Work, Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982). As Assistant Secretary of the Interior Bryan Newland (Ojibwe) put it in the May 2022 Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, the vocational training boarding school children received left them “with employment options often irrelevant to the industrial U.S. economy, further disrupting Tribal economies.” “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report” (May 2022): 8.

⁵⁰By “prior,” I do not mean to suggest that dispossession is an earlier stage that mature capitalism has since overcome—an erroneous position refuted by decolonial Marxist scholars for decades—but rather that proletarianization requires the separation of the newly proletarianized from their existing means of subsistence. It is this separation that compels the newly dispossessed into the labor market, as they are newly “free” to work or starve. See Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 7–11. See also Susan Koshy, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd, and Brian Jordan Jefferson, “Introduction,” in *Colonial Racial Capitalism*, eds. Susan Koshy, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd and Brian Jordan Jefferson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 1–30, which theorizes the centrality of settler-colonial dispossession to the history of capitalism, developing off of Cedric Robinson’s famous theorization of “racial capitalism,” in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁵¹See Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 66–107.

⁵²United States Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1887* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 60.

⁵³Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 159–60. Relatedly, Parkhurst argues for the deep imbrication of sanctioned dances at boarding schools and the imposition of Euro-American gender norms: *To Win the Indian Heart*, 120.

in their path toward a life of agricultural and domestic wage labor and second-class possessive individualism. As historian John Troutman has argued, the federal government’s “civilization agenda [...] depended upon the close monitoring of every musical utterance both on the reservations and in the boarding schools.”⁵⁴ The outlawing of traditional practices in both contexts can therefore be seen as part of the broader material assault on Native peoples and their land. As Mohawk theorist Audra Simpson has shown, the colonial project of knowing, regulating, and suppressing Indigenous “cultures,” including dances and expressive life, was itself a way of distracting from—and even normalizing—ongoing dispossession as the material “scene of object formation.”⁵⁵

Official anxiety around apprehending Native expression thus showed that policymakers understood, in their own way, the deep relationship between music, dance, religion, and communal territorial coherence. Perhaps, then, what Robinson has described as the colonial misrecognition of Indigenous musicking as “just song” can be understood not only as the effect of a “tin ear” that refuses to hear, but also as part of the broader colonial weaponization of aesthetic culture that attempts actively to *reduce* that musicking to the merely aesthetic.⁵⁶ Such a policy mindset aims, in other words, not just to suppress but to reify Native music as so many dematerialized, commodifiable aesthetic products divorced from the politics of land and sovereignty. It obscures the “more than aesthetic” ontology of Indigenous song, which, Robinson describes, goes beyond mere cultural production or aesthetic contemplation and can operate in various contexts as law, as history, and as what Glen Coulthard and Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and musician Leanne Betasamosake Simpson call “grounded normativity.”⁵⁷ As Hopi musicologist and legal scholar Trevor Reed has relatedly argued, Indigenous sonic cultures ought to be considered as “the actual material of governance and a source of Indigenous authority,” manifesting a “sonic sovereignty” that confounds the normative separation of law and culture in settler society.⁵⁸ By placing Indigenous music and the arts into the dematerialized sphere of “cultural” difference, settler discourse severs those practices from their inherent relationship to law, politics, ecologies, and sciences, as Bissett Perea has argued. Considering these Indigenous ontologies of song in light of what she describes as their “integral” relationship to “Indigenous self-determination and resurgent movements” is essential for comprehending the larger ontological and epistemological clash of (de)colonization.⁵⁹ These insights can help guide a way of reading assimilationist federal practices against the grain in order to show that, far from being simply ignorant of the place-making power of Indigenous music and dance, settler policy explicitly sought to suppress that expressivity *because of* its power to produce, activate, and affirm place-based Indigenous solidarity and life. Moreover it is at this level that we can identify another deep parallel between music education at boarding schools and the allotment process, the latter being designed not just to dole out property in acreage but to negate Native relationships to land, transforming land from what Leanne Simpson calls “context and process” into a thing to be owned by an individual.⁶⁰ Likewise, boarding school education attempted to transform the students’ experience of music from one of functional efficacy within

⁵⁴Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 12.

⁵⁵Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 67, 96–97.

⁵⁶Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 161.

⁵⁷Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 45, 51ff. Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity,” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 249–55.

⁵⁸Trevor Reed, “Sonic Sovereignty: Performing Hopi Authority in Öngtupqa,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 4 (November 2019): 510.

⁵⁹Jessica Bissett Perea, *Sound Relations: Native Ways of Doing Music History in Alaska* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 6, 15.

⁶⁰Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 7. In language that has been cited by Native studies scholars as symbolic of the violence of allotment, President Theodore Roosevelt referred to the Dawes Allotment Act in 1901 as “a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass.” Theodore Roosevelt, “First Annual Message December 03, 1901 Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/first-annual-message-16>.

collective modes of life to one of meager, individualist recreation within a depoliticized domain of culture.⁶¹

Opera at the limits of assimilation: *The Captain of Plymouth*

In this section, I explore the implications of these incommensurabilities by focusing on a celebrated 1909 performance by Carlisle students of *The Captain of Plymouth*, a little-known comic opera. This reading aims to demonstrate a musicological approach to the cultural texts of settler colonialism that takes seriously the politics of land and place at the heart of both the ongoing processes of dispossession and Indigenous resurgence, expressive practices, and land-based struggle. Like so much opera with colonial themes or performed in colonial contexts, *The Captain of Plymouth* played what Robinson and Pamela Karantonis have identified as a “nation-building” role in the ideological production at Carlisle.⁶² However, the contradictory significations of the operatic text itself and the discrepant engagements of the students reveal how such nation building is never as univocal as it represents itself to be. Dramatic performance may have served official purposes of indoctrinating students into “civilized” aesthetic culture but, as I explore below, they produced a much more complex array of significations and engagements than Carlisle officials could understand, let alone control.⁶³ Opera in federal boarding schools, as Martha Feldman has argued of opera in a different context, “manifest[ed] the very crisis it denied.”⁶⁴

Beyond the daily musical activities, Carlisle’s prominent culture of spectacle was central to its assimilationist program. School officials deployed strategies of cultural performance that played on Native-white antagonisms by narratively resolving them on the stage. Some of Carlisle’s bands had opportunities to perform for the wider public, and these performances had the dual affordance of enjoyment for the musicians and beneficial publicity for the school itself. Like the rest of the school’s propaganda campaign, such public-relations benefits meant the reinforcement of racializing ideologies of cultural development, for instance when the Carlisle Band performed at the Columbian quadricentennial parades in Chicago and New York, under a banner reading “Into Civilization and Citizenship.”⁶⁵ Bands also played at inaugural parades for multiple presidents and the opening ceremony for the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883. These performances can be approached as dually symbolic according to the racial and national ideologies of the day. The spectacle of a group of young Native people in military dress performing Western military and patriotic music communicated the dawning arrival of Native people “into” U.S. American society, as the parade banners made explicit. At the same time, these performances created a sense of the teleological unification of the uncivilized prehistory of the continent with the arrival of a permanent state of civilization under the sign of the nation. This symbolic unification, which made the telos of the nation appear inevitable while simulating Native consent to be civilized, traveled by way of the ritual character of public musical performances. The conscription of Native musicians in these performances could thus be deployed as

⁶¹On the concept of the “mode of life” as inclusive of economic, political, social, and expressive realms of the group, see Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 65–66.

⁶²Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson, “Introduction,” in *Opera Indigene: Re/representing First Nations and Indigenous Cultures*, eds. Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 2.

⁶³In this, music and theater formed a counterpart to the other, more well-known Carlisle spectacle, namely football. Similarly to the theatrical spectacles, Carlisle athletics was a contested space of signification. Although school officials strained to mold the meaning of football into narratives of assimilability, competitive athletics also provided students a framework for developing and demonstrating their excellence, including well-publicized defeats of the football teams of east coast elite schools. See John Bloom, “The Imperial Gridiron: Dealing with the Legacy of Carlisle Indian School Sports,” in *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, eds. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 124–38.

⁶⁴Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths of Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 8. On the multiple significations of music in the boarding schools of Canada, see Beverley Diamond, “The Doubleness of Sound in Canada’s Indian Residential Schools,” in *This Thing Called Music: Essays in Honor of Bruno Nettl*, eds. Victoria Lindsay Levine and Philip V. Bohlman (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 230–39.

⁶⁵Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 122.

suggesting a kind of spectacular utopia of U.S. American liberal democracy, in which Native peoples are included as one group among other “others” in the multicultural melting pot.⁶⁶ The dissonance between myth and reality—that a national polity supposedly based on the consent of the people is in fact rooted in historical and ongoing nonconsensual destruction of existing polities—thus strives to resolve itself symbolically by way of the “inclusion” of Native performers in pageantry that celebrates teleological national destiny, representing unbecoming racial and political antagonism as a thing of the past. In addition to serving this broad nation-edifying ideological purpose, this inclusionary signifying maneuver also flattens the broad range of approaches and self-understandings that Native musicians themselves would have brought to such performances, including everything from using the opportunity to make a little money and publicly display their musical excellence to a sincere commitment to the values of democracy and dignity that national culture at least nominally espoused.

The simulation of consent through spectacle was made even more explicit by the nationalistic theatrical programming at Carlisle and elsewhere. Students were regularly made to perform plays, pageants, and operas that reenacted propagandistic narratives of U.S. American history, including narratives of the arrival of Columbus in the New World, the adventures of George Washington, and the first Continental Congress. Like the Columbian centennial parades and other national events, these productions can also be seen as performing a kind of symbolic and narrative engulfment of Native peoples into the telos of U.S. American nationhood, in that the student performers would be made literally to voice and to embody the inevitable history of the nation. Indeed, the profound usefulness of these performances for the school—both in terms of revenue from ticket sales and ideological edification—shows the symbolic power of this spectacle. However, although these performances might be seen as part of the simple hegemonic production of nationalist mythology, a closer look reveals the ambiguity and even the ambivalence of their signifying processes.⁶⁷

In 1909, the students performed *The Captain of Plymouth*, “a comic opera in three acts” composed by Harry Eldridge with a libretto by Seymour Tibbals. Based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s popular 1858 narrative poem *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, the opera centers on the early English settlers at Plymouth and their conflicts with the Pequots. With a principal cast of twenty plus accompaniment by several choruses and the school orchestra, the three-night run was a major event in the 1909 academic year. One performance was attended by a theater critic for the Philadelphia North American, and accounts were picked up in newspapers across the country. School officials described the performance as “the best ever given at Carlisle.”⁶⁸ In his annual report to the Bureau of Indian Commissioners in 1909, Superintendent Moses Friedman described it as “a remarkable evidence of the artistic temperament and love of music which is possessed by the American Indian,” praising the performance as “beautifully rendered” with “good singing [and] fine orchestral accompaniment”⁶⁹ (Figures 6 and 7).

The Captain of Plymouth tells the story of Miles Standish (played by Montreville Yuda [Oneida]), leader of a colonial army and captain of the *Mayflower*, attempting to seduce Plymouth colonist Priscilla Mullins (Carlyle Greenbrier [Menominee]). Miles, though fearless in the face of “the wild beast and savage,” is afraid of (white) women, and so must send his secretary John Alden (Albert Scott [Hoopa]) to win Priscilla’s heart on Miles’s own behalf. The story of *Captain*, as well as the Longfellow poem it parodies, is structured by what becomes a love triangle between Miles, Priscilla,

⁶⁶On the role of utopian collective feeling in settler performance settings, see Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 229–31. On the narrative construction of prehistory for nationalistic mythmaking, see Kyla Schuller, “The Fossil and the Photograph: Red Cloud, Prehistoric Media, and Dispossession in Perpetuity” *Configurations* 24, no. 2 (2016): 229–61.

⁶⁷On the inherent ambivalence of colonial and imperial musical-cultural production, see Olivia Bloechl, *Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 144ff.

⁶⁸“The Captain of Plymouth—A Comic Opera,” *Indian Craftsman* 1, no. 4 (May 1909): 47. “The Indian Craftsman (Vol. 1, No. 4),” *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/indian-craftsman-vol-1-no-4>. The *Indian Craftsman* grew out of the many school newspapers and was also produced by the school’s famous print shop, but was a longer, magazine-style publication.

⁶⁹Moses Friedman, *Annual Report: United States Indian School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, for Year Ending June 30, 1909*, 44. *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 23, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/annual-report-carlisle-indian-school-1909>.



Figure 6. Full cast of *The Captain of Plymouth*, 1909. Photographer: Everett Strong. CCHS_PA-CH3-117, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA.

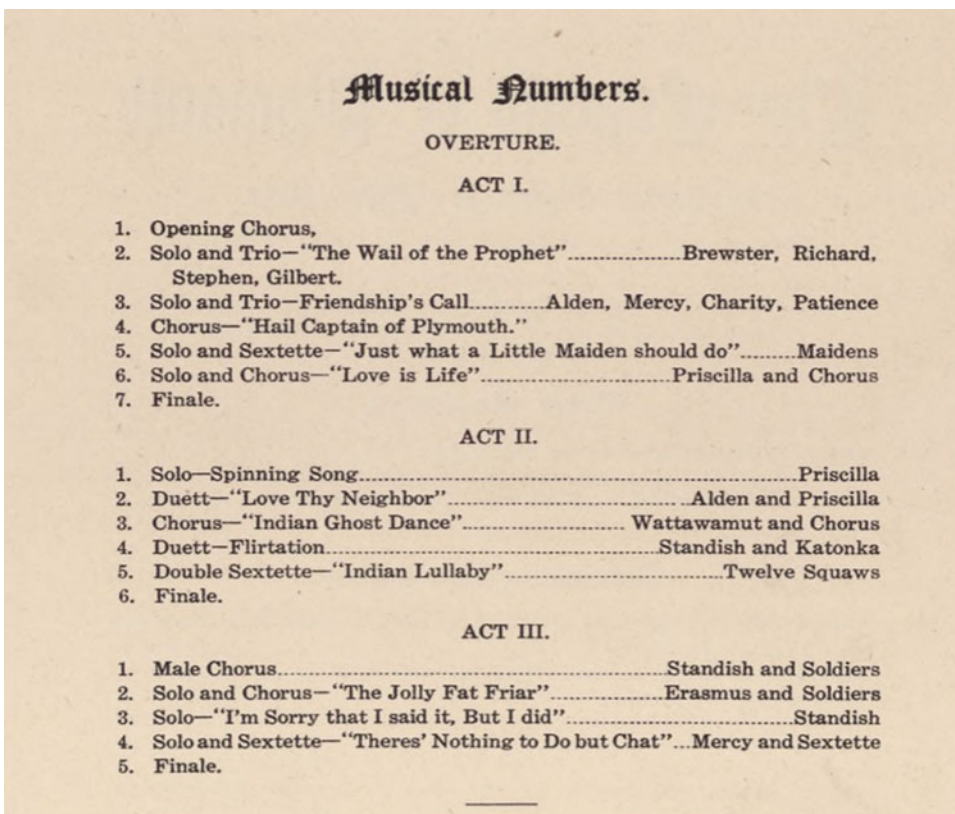


Figure 7. Program for *The Captain of Plymouth*, "by students of the Carlisle Indian School as Part of the Commencement Exercises, 1909," PI-1-7-9, Carlisle Indian School Collection, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA.

and John. In the second act, Miles and his man-at-arms Erasmus are found tied to a tree in a winter forest, having been captured by “Pequot Chief Wattawamut,” played by Harry Wheeler (Nez Perce), and a chorus of “twelve Indian men.” Wattawamut is an apparent reference to the real historical Wituwamat, not in fact a Pequot chief but a Massachusetts pniiese or “counselor-warrior” who, along with another pniiese named Pecksuot, was killed by Standish around 1622 in a “preemptive” attack in defense of the English colony of Wessagussett, nearby Plymouth.⁷⁰ In the opera, after a few minutes of comedic banter between the two captives, they are approached by Wattawamut’s daughter, the princess Katonka, described as “a tall, slim girl dressed in gaudy colors.”⁷¹ Katonka (played by Emma Esanetuck⁷²) agrees to release the men on the condition that Miles marries her and takes her to live among the settlers. After being cut loose, both men attempt to run away, but Katonka recaptures Miles and forces him to agree to marry her, after which they sing an idyllic lullaby duet, accompanied by a chorus of Native women.⁷³

Act III culminates with the wedding of Miles and Priscilla, which proceeds despite Priscilla’s non-consent because Brewster has promised her to Miles as a reward for him having vanquished the Pequots from the land. Just as Miles and Priscilla are about to wed, however, Katonka announces her objections from the crowd, explaining that “the little Captain belongs to me. He promised to marry me if I would help him to escape from the Indians.”⁷⁴ Katonka thus foils Miles’s plan to marry Priscilla, who is then given by Brewster to John (Miles’ secretary), who has fallen in love with her. That Miles is now commanded by the church father to wed the undesirable Katonka is the crowning gag of the opera’s comedy of errors.

Although Katonka is undoubtedly written as the target of ridicule, her structuring role as the hinge of the narrative also contains the opera’s own undoing. Having become by act III the last of her people (Wattawamut and the other Pequots are last seen in Pilgrim captivity at the end of act II), Katonka reappears as the interruption of the expected narrative arc: Namely, the church-approved marriage of Miles and Priscilla, the heteropatriarchal consummation of white colonial society as a literal reward for the Captain’s vanquishing of the Pequots. In Tibbals’s racialized contortion of the interrupted-wedding trope, Katonka ruins Miles’s plan by holding him to his promise to marry her, wreaking havoc on the symbolic closure of white marriage over settled, emptied land. Although Katonka is represented as the target of racist stereotypes, she also foils Miles’s triumphant arrival into social power, and in so doing disturbs the society of Plymouth itself.

⁷⁰On the pniiesesok, see Lisa Brooks, *Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip’s War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 9. Following Perea and Solis’s suggestion, pniiese and its plural form pniiesesok appears here without italics. See Perea and Solis, “Asking the Indigeneity Question,” 405. The central primary historical document on the history of the early Plymouth colony is Edward Winslow’s 1624 text, *Good News from New England*. See Winslow, *Good News from New England: A Scholarly Edition*, ed. Kelly Wisecup (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014).

⁷¹Seymour S. Tibbals and Harry C. Eldridge, *The Captain of Plymouth: A Comic Opera in Three Acts* (Franklin, OH: Eldridge Entertainment House, 1904), 16.

⁷²Esanetuck’s name also appears in Carlisle documents as “Esenetuck” or “Esentuck,” both with and without the accompanying given name “Emma.” Her tribal affiliation is listed in school records only as “Eskimo.” As Bissett Perea has explained, “Eskimo” and “Aleut” are colonial exonyms that are considered derogatory by many Alaska Native people today. There are no more specific cultural affiliations listed for Esanetuck, though her place of origin is listed as Port Clarence, AK, a port on the Bering Strait in the Nome Census Area. The 2011 Alaska Native Peoples and Languages Map places Port Clarence in the Iñupiaq language region. See Bissett Perea, *Sound Relations*, 18–20.

⁷³The cast of the chorus is as follows: Dewitt Wheeler (Assiniboine), Ernest Quickbear (Rosebud Sioux), Lyford John (Seneca), Thomas Rowland (Cheyenne), David Oldman (Cheyenne), Davis Woundedeye (or Wounded Eye) (Cheyenne), Albert Duster (Cheyenne), Wilford Minthorn (Cayuse), Bruce Goesback (Gros Ventre, Arapahoe), Benjamin Penny (Nez Perce), George Gates (Standing Rock Sioux), and Charles Warbonnet (Rosebud Sioux). The Native women’s chorus was made up of the following students: Jane Butler (Sac and Fox), Shela Guthrie (Sac and Fox), Lucy Charles (Seneca), Ethel Daniels (Ute), Julia Pena (Mission), Fannie Charlie (or Charley) (Peoria), Roxie Snyder (Seneca), Flora Eaglechief (Pawnee), Etta Hattwinny (or Hatewinny) (Nez Perce), Nora McFarland (Nez Perce), Nancy Hasholy (or Has Holy) (Standing Rock Sioux), and Rose Pickard (Wichita). These tribal affiliations appear as they are listed on each student’s information card.

⁷⁴Tibbals and Eldridge, *The Captain of Plymouth*, 24.

The contradictory significance of *Katonka* raises the question of why this particular opera was selected for performance at Carlisle. In a glowing review in the *Philadelphia North American*, Carlisle music director Claude Maxwell Stauffer was quoted as follows:

I was moved to attempt this [production] through reading an editorial in *The North American* on the civilizing influence of opera. I thought if Oscar Hammerstein can spend \$1,000,000 to civilize Philadelphians, we could spend a few weeks for the same civilizing influence on the wards of the nation. And say, do you know that I believe we got the better results.⁷⁵

The writer for the *North American* went on to marvel that such a “wonderful” performance could have been put on “entirely by children of the reservations, many of whom came to Carlisle without surnames.”⁷⁶ However, it is in light of this broader “civilizing” project that the strangeness of the opera itself raises some unsettling questions. As Mohawk scholar Louellyn White—whose great uncle John played to role of Elder Brewster—has pointed out, no “civilization” takes place in the opera at all. Steeped in racist stereotypes and ending in the sense of irreconcilable differences between *Katonka* and the settlers, the opera, White argues, “may have offered a more realistic view of white-Native relations” than the official discourse of the school itself as an institution of assimilation.⁷⁷ Furthermore, *Katonka*’s return represents, if anything, a ruination of Miles’s designs on “civilized” white society. She reappears to disrupt the smoothness of the Plymouth Colony, leading to the comedic disarray of the opera’s closing scene. Instead of what might be the expected climax of the white heterosexual couple happily riding off to set up U.S. American society on empty land evacuated of racialized obstacles, *Captain* ends with the would-be white wedding foiled by *Katonka*’s refusal to disappear. This refusal, moreover, is seen as anything but a welcome assent to assimilation. Rather, *Katonka* is rendered unassimilable, preventing Miles from enjoying the social power he claims to have earned through anti-Indigenous violence. *Katonka*’s ruination of white heterosexual narrative closure disturbs the social significations of the opera as an explicit aspect of the assimilationist aesthetic education at Carlisle. As a mythologization of the early seventeenth-century Anglo-settler venture in the Plymouth Colony, the compulsory performance of this opera by Native teenagers who did not assent to being assimilated out of existence makes what seems like a flatly nationalistic cultural text into a complex expression of what Dylan Robinson has described as “agonistic” musical performance, refusing the “settled” narrative resolution that it supposedly proclaims.⁷⁸

Conclusion: Mediations of Ghost Dance

One final striking detail raises further questions of the relationship between the surfaces and the depths of the opera’s meanings. In act II, Wattawamut and his chorus are directed to perform what the score indicates is a “Ghost Dance.” Given what was already a rather fantastical revision of the real, historical relations between English settlers and Native peoples in the seventeenth century, there is nothing particularly surprising about the historical inaccuracy of the reference to the Ghost Dance, which, contrary to the ahistorical stereotype to which it is reduced here, indexes a specific set of closely related Native spiritual revivalist movements in the late nineteenth century.

⁷⁵“The Captain of Plymouth—A Comic Opera,” *Indian Craftsman*, 47. Stauffer is here referring to Oscar Hammerstein I, grandfather of the more well-known lyricist and producer Oscar Hammerstein II. The elder Hammerstein opened the Philadelphia Opera House in 1908, the year before the Carlisle production of *Captain*. Stauffer’s description of Native peoples as “wards of the nation” is also a telling reference to the legal language in Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall’s decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), which argued that Cherokee Nation (and all Indian tribes by extension) was not an independent political entity, but rather related to the federal government like “a ward to its guardian.” *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1 (1831).

⁷⁶“The Captain of Plymouth—A Comic Opera,” *Indian Craftsman*, 47.

⁷⁷Louellyn White, “White Power and the Performance of Assimilation,” in *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, eds. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 115.

⁷⁸Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 45ff.

Standard historical accounts narrate the Ghost Dance of 1890 as a religious movement emerging from the Paiute prophet Wovoka's visions in 1889 and rapidly spreading across the continent, only to be violently suppressed at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, when the U.S. Seventh Cavalry massacred around 300 Lakota women, children, and men. As anthropologist James Mooney described it in what has become a standard text on the movement, Wovoka foresaw "that the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease, and misery."⁷⁹ However, as Nick Estes (Lower Brule Sioux) has argued, Mooney "pander[ed] to the sympathies of a US public in an attempt to make the Ghost Dance more palatable."⁸⁰ In the settler imaginary, the Ghost Dance has represented a final "outbreak" of Native resistance that was finally defeated at Wounded Knee.⁸¹ Estes and other Indigenous studies scholars have more recently questioned this "ontological reduction" and insisted on radically reframing the Ghost Dance movement not as an isolated "cult" that disappeared at Wounded Knee but rather as a symbol of broad Indigenous anti-colonial conceptions of time and space, as a "critical metaphor" for Native literary production, and as "Indigenous revolutionary theory."⁸² If the Ghost Dance (and its supposed demise at Wounded Knee) has been a symbol of the finality and futility of Native resistance in settler eyes, but has alternatively remained an expansive vehicle—both metaphorical and literal—for ongoing anticolonial theory and practice, what happens when young Native people perform what a colonial operatic script calls a "Ghost Dance" within the walls of the institution that is perhaps most representative of the violence of colonialism?

Insofar as it articulated resistance to the forces of assimilationism and axiomatic settler expansion, the Ghost Dance represented the opposite of everything that Carlisle stood for—from state education policy to a liberal-progressive philosophy of history that assumed the inevitable demise of Native peoples—and was an illegal religious practice under the 1883 "Code of Indian Offenses." Here too, however, Carlisle's "safety zone" policy was riddled with contradictions: In 1907, students performed Stauffer's arrangement of a "Song of the Ghost Dance," with "words in English."⁸³ As Troutman has argued, school officials believed that such a "dangerous" cultural form would be admissible at Carlisle as long as it were "safely contained in the students' repertoire."⁸⁴ In school newspapers from the months following the Wounded Knee massacre—to which Pratt only referred to as a "battle"—the Ghost Dance was understood sometimes as an existential threat to progress and sometimes as merely "trouble" and "foolishness." In either case it was always blamed solely on "ignorance on the part of the Indians."⁸⁵ A polemic in the school newspaper argued that the tragedy at Wounded Knee would have been prevented "had there been [a] hundred times as many Sioux boys and girls educated away from their tribes as there have been in the past ten years."⁸⁶ In fact, a number of returned students who left the school in the first decade of its existence, including Plenty Horses, Grant Left Hand, and Plenty Living Bear, found in the Ghost Dance a renewed sense of the community ties that Carlisle had

⁷⁹James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 777. Citations refer to the University of Nebraska Press.

⁸⁰Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 111–13.

⁸¹See Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 15–51.

⁸²Estes, *Our History is the Future*, 16–17; Gerald Vizenor, "Native American Indian Literature: Critical Metaphors of the Ghost Dance," *World Literature Today* 66, no. 2, 223–27 (1992); Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 129–78; Scott L. Pratt, "Wounded Knee and the Prospect of Pluralism," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (2005): 156. See also Andrew J. Chung, "Songs of the New World and the Breath of the Planet at the Orbis Spike, 1610: Toward a Decolonial Musicology of the Anthropocene," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 96–97.

⁸³"1907 Commencement Program," *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documents/1907-commencement-program>.

⁸⁴Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 172–73.

⁸⁵*Indian Helper* 6, no. 2, 24–26 (December 5, 1890): 2. "The Indian Helper (Vol. 6, No. 14)," *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/indian-helper-vol-6-no-14>.

⁸⁶"Carlisle Pupils at the Seat of War," *Indian Helper* 6, no. 19 (January 1891): 2. "The Indian Helper (Vol. 6, No. 19)," *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/indian-helper-vol-6-no-19>.

attempted to extinguish.⁸⁷ Like other practices deemed “conservative” from the perspective of liberal settler teleology, the Ghost Dance provided disaffected Carlisle survivors an energetic new structure of feeling through which they could articulate themselves within their communities.

Perhaps, then, the opera unwittingly calls up something of the unassimilable force of the Ghost Dance as a symbol of the general Native refusal to disappear (by conquest or by assimilation), a conjuring that the opera itself tries unsuccessfully to neutralize by providing semiotic and narrative closure. Nevertheless, although the archives I have consulted do not record how Harry Wheeler and the young men in the “Indian chorus” felt in performing *The Captain of Plymouth’s* version of a “Ghost Dance” (or even how they chose to stage it), the ontological clash at issue here suggests that a wider range of meanings were available to them than those which music director Stauffer could have intended. As the Osage scholar Robert Warrior has argued of boarding school history, “music and art created space within the schools for a sanctioned alternative to the totalized space that Pratt and other educators initially designed.”⁸⁸ In this case, even when the music that students were assigned to perform carried a clear (if rather overstated) “civilizing” function, the students might be seen as setting a strategic and creative intelligence to work in their realization of the music, exceeding the official school policy of assimilationist subject formation.

In its striving for meaningful, self-conscious unity and the ultimate return of all the land to Native peoples, the Ghost Dance also provided a formal resource for the emergence of “intertribal sociality” that many historians have attributed to the boarding school era itself.⁸⁹ In this way, the self-conscious sense of an Indigenous collectivity beyond particular tribal, linguistic, and geographical associations can be understood as the ironic outcome of the kind of deindividuation that the schools violently enforced under the rubric of U.S. American capitalist individuality. *The Captain of Plymouth* was performed by a cast of over eighty young people from over a dozen different Native communities all across the continent, within an institution where thousands of students from hundreds of different communities would gather and bring their personalities, identities, and densities with them to a shared experience of navigating settler-colonial structures.⁹⁰ Perhaps, for this reason, the 1909 performances of *Captain* can be seen as a kind of flashpoint in what music scholars Tara Browner (Choctaw) and John-Carlos Perea (Mescalero Apache) have discussed as the Native American musical intertribalism that forms so vital a part of contemporary Native musicking practices.⁹¹

Native peoples who negotiated government boarding schools continuously made and remade their own terms of engagement beyond the narrow expectations of policymakers and school officials. As settler-colonial policy and ideology braced under the weight of its own contradictions, students used much of what was available to them at school and rejected what they didn’t need. Even if *The Captain of Plymouth’s* deployment of a “Ghost Dance” trope was meant simply to signify barbarism, it also symbolizes the very resurgent intertribal sociality and radical visions of Native land-based sovereignty that ended up emerging from the boarding school era. Perhaps the clearest evidence for the failure of the boarding school mission is that it was exactly visions of this kind that would go on to guide continental and global Indigenous decolonial movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Despite its imposition as part of the broad “civilizing” project of the school, this collective performance of an illegal dance bore an irreducibly “more-than-aesthetic” nature that may have provided one

⁸⁷For a discussion of the case of Plenty Horses see Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 28–36, and N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 103.

⁸⁸Robert Warrior, *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 124.

⁸⁹Warrior, *The People and the Word*, 107; Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 366; Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light*, 129–30.

⁹⁰On “density” as an alternative framework to “difference that centers the heterogeneity of Indigenous social worlds,” see Chris Andersen, “Critical Indigenous Studies: From Difference to Density,” *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2, 80–100 (September 2009); Bissett Perea, *Sound Relations*, 8–17.

⁹¹Tara Browner, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); John-Carlos Perea, *Intertribal Native American Music in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

of the sparks for this new political formation. At the very least, though, it was a moment in the young lives of the students who performed it, lives that would continue to develop based not on the predetermined telos of national time but based on their own agencies, desires, and senses of self and community. This calls to mind Harry Wheeler, who as Wattawamut led the group of young men dressed up as (imagined) “Pequots” in their interpretation of the Ghost Dance. Decades later, Wheeler collaborated with linguist Haruo Aoki in the construction of a Nez Perce dictionary. Nez Perce scholar Beth Piatote has described studying with Aoki in her own process of linguistic and literary resurgence, working with materials produced both in bilingual mission schools and from Wheeler’s collaboration in the mid-twentieth century.⁹² Wheeler had applied to enroll at Carlisle on his own behalf in 1908 and left after 3 years, presumably having gotten what he wanted from the school. He returned to his home, where he would go on to become a cherished historian and spend his life helping to sustain the communal memory of his people.

Wheeler’s post-Carlisle trajectory also calls to mind Emma Esanetuck, who had petitioned to leave the school in the spring of 1909 and finally departed for her home in Port Clarence in June, just a few weeks after the performances of *Captain*. Despite what was hailed as her successful performance as Katonka, school officials marked her behavior as declining from “good” to “medium” in her final months at school.⁹³ I imagine her declining marks as just the archival impression of an unfolding refusal of the sort of “civilizing” mission that required her to stay away from her family and her community. Ultimately, Esanetuck, Wheeler, and the rest of the young people who navigated Carlisle demonstrated time and time again that it was not ultimately for the state officials to decide what these institutions would be used for. The supposedly “civilizing” effect of an opera performed at a school bent on elimination by assimilation was as much a settler fantasy as the notion that these colonial institutions—Carlisle, the system it launched, and the settler state itself—were justified, benevolent, and permanent.

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