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Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education

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Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education

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The Catch, Bear's Heart, Ledger Book Drawing.
National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian
Institution (D206231).

Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education

DIANE GLANCY

University of Nebraska Press
Lincoln and London

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They are beginning to read and write. They have learned the Lord's prayer. . . . Here were men who had committed murder upon helpless women and children sitting like docile children at the feet of women learning to read. . . . It was my privilege to preach to them every Sunday, and upon week days I told them stories from the Bible . . .

BISHOP H. B. WHIPPLE

to the *New York Daily Tribune*, March 24, 1876

From Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom:
Four Decades with the American Indian, 1876–1904*

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Fort Marion Prisoners
and the Trauma of
Native Education

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Fort Marion Prisoners

1875-1878

In 1875 at the end of the Southern Plains Indian Wars, seventy-two of the worst prisoners were taken by train from Fort Sill in Indian Territory, which later became Oklahoma, to an abandoned stone fort on the Atlantic Ocean: Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida.

The Indians had been defeated by the U.S. Cavalry. The buffalo had been slaughtered. A way of life was gone. After a council in the Wichita Mountains near Fort Sill, the Indians rode with a white flag to surrender.

From Fort Sill the prisoners rode shackled in wagons to Caddo, Indian Territory, some 165 miles east. Then they went by train to Sedalia, Missouri, Kansas City, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After two weeks at Fort Leavenworth they traveled across Missouri to the St. Charles trestle bridge into St. Louis. From St. Louis, they went to Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, Chattanooga, Atlanta, and Macon. In Florida they stopped in Jacksonville, where the prisoners went by steamer and then railroad again for the last twenty-five miles to St. Augustine, where they made their way through crowds gathered in the street. Their journey had lasted from April 28 to May 21.

Crowds had gathered at every stop along the way. On May 19, 1875, the *Daily Louisville Commercial* reported the arrival of the train with “the hardest lot of red faces that have ever plundered and murdered Western settlers on the frontier.”

But at Fort Marion, Captain Richard Henry Pratt unlocked their leg irons, cut their hair, dressed them in army uniforms, gave them ledger books in which to draw, and taught them to read and

write. He also invited Clark Mills to come from Washington DC to make life casts of the captives.

The prisoners wrote letters to the U.S. government for their release, which was granted in 1878, three years after their arrival at Fort Marion. Captain Pratt's approach was one of the beginnings of a systematic effort to educate the Indians.

Some of the prisoners:

Black Horse, Comanche, his wife, Pe-ah-in,
and daughter, Ah-kes

Gray Beard, Cheyenne

Lean Bear, Cheyenne

Ta-a-way-te, Comanche

Making Medicine, Cheyenne

Manimic, Cheyenne

Howling Wolf, Cheyenne

Bear's Heart, Cheyenne

Toothless, Kiowa

Wolf Stomach, Kiowa

Sky Walker, Kiowa

Big Nose, Cheyenne

Dry Wood, Comanche

White Horse, Kiowa

Lone Wolf, Kiowa

Spotted Elk, Cheyenne

Heap of Birds, Cheyenne

Wohaw, Kiowa

Straightening an Arrow, Kiowa

Standing Wolf, Cheyenne

Big Moccasin, Cheyenne

Matches, Cheyenne

Hail Stone, Cheyenne
Biter or Zo-tom, Kiowa
E-tah-dle-uh, Kiowa
White Bear, Arapaho
Hu-wah-nee, Caddo
Buffalo Meat, Cheyenne
Chief Killer, Cheyenne

All of them had several names: Making Medicine, for instance, was also called David Pendleton Oakerhater, Oakahaton, O-kuh-ha-tuh, Noksowist, Bear Going Straight, and Sun Dancer. Good Talk, a Kiowa, was also called To-keah-hi, To-un-ke-uh, To-un-keah, To-keah, Taung-ke-i-hi, Waterman, and Paul Tounkeuh.

In the morning I hear the birds before I see them. They are early risers. I put new seed in the feeder, and they shovel through it looking for sunflower seeds or what they want. Then, when the feeder is empty, they remember the seed they tossed out and hunt for it on the ground. The different tribes come for the seed—Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, Caddo—those were the tribes.

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A stereograph of a group of Indian prisoners at Fort Marion including Black Horse and Pe-ah-in, parents of Ah-kes (front row, middle three), labeled "Group of Comanche Indians in native costume confined in Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Florida, circa 1875." O. Pierre Havens, photographer. Photographic Study Collection, Dickinson Research Center, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City (RC2008.005.1).

Ride to Prison

APRIL 28, 1875, FORT SILL, INDIAN TERRITORY

After the Indians surrendered, the soldiers loaded them on wagons. It was in the darkness of midnight when soldiers chained them to the sides of the wagons.

The wife and daughter of Black Horse climbed into a wagon with him. One of the soldiers saw them. He tried to remove them from the wagon but they clung to Black Horse.

The soldiers couldn't take his wife and daughter from him—there was no one to care for them. —Didn't the soldiers have a wife and child?—Would they leave them?

The soldiers argued.

Hide between us—Black Horse told his daughter. That soldier was going to get someone. Another soldier shouted to move ahead—the wagon jumped forward—the other wagons followed. Black Horse's wife and daughter were with him—the soldier let Black Horse have them. There was *some* honor to those men.

They traveled for several days from Fort Sill to Caddo. Then they saw the box-on-wheels—They heard it scream—EEEEEEEE! They saw it send up smoke. It was the house-that-walks. It was the box-that-moves.

The soldiers unloaded the prisoners from the wagons and pushed them into the box. They chained the prisoners to the walls. The door slammed shut. It must have sounded like the cannon fire they remembered in battle. The house-that-walks jumped forward, moving in short jerks until the train kept moving forward and forward.

At night, the moving darkness unsettled the Indians. The noise rattled them loose from all they knew.

Most of them rode sitting in iron ropes. They were tied to the wall of the box-that-runs. The Indians had pegged their war horses to the ground—the ones they wanted to keep—the ones they didn't want taken—the ones they rode into battle.

I can't see—Ah-kes, the daughter of Black Horse cried.

Think of sitting beside me when the firelight goes out in our camp—Black Horse said. Think of the stories you heard before you fell asleep—

In the beginning, when the Maker formed people,
he put ears on the back of our head—
so we could hear what was coming from behind—
so we would not be overtaken—
but we turned our head one way then the other while he was working—
to see what he was doing—
and our ears ended up on the sides of our head.
Now we only know what happens when it is beside us—

The Train Ride

MAY 4, 1875, CADDO, INDIAN TERRITORY

The prisoners pulled against the shackles that held them in place. They struggled in fear. They were prisoners of the Indian wars. They had been taken from their tribes. Some of the prisoners knew one another, but others had been brought to Fort Sill from other places. The prisoners only knew they were taken captive in skirmishes with the soldiers. Some of them were enemies. Gray Beard was shackled next to a warrior who had killed some of his family.

They had ridden their horses across the plains under the sky. They had followed the buffalo. The wind spoke to them. The round moon on the dew of prairie grass made a sheen that lifted the night. The sky spoke with stars. All of it was given to them from the Maker's hand. Now the land rode with the prisoners in the wagons, and in the train. When they closed their eyes, did they still see the land?

Sometimes after driving all day, the road moves before me. When I close my eyes, I still see the passing land. I think it was the same with the prisoners. They could not be separated from their *place*. If they were going, then the land was going too.

Nearly thirty years ago I worked for the State Arts Council of Oklahoma. I spent the majority of residencies at three high schools in Lawton, where the Fort Sill Military Reservation is located. After school I drove into the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge was marked with barriers and the tracks of army vehicles where they practiced war. I climbed the 2,464-foot Mt. Scott in my car to look into the hazy distance of

the surrounding prairie. Later, with the help of a friend, I took a small, red granite boulder, which I still have at my cabin in the Ozarks. I remember the sound of the Howitzers. Sometimes at school, the window panes rattled. Most of the students had lived around the world. Sometimes they didn't pay attention. They knew their parents were stationed there only for a while. The idea of transience was in the air. At the end of the week I would drive two hundred miles back to Tulsa, then return for another week.

There was a museum on the army base. It must have been where the departure of the Plains Indian prisoners first registered. Somehow there was a residue of voices. A visage of the story. Not simplistic, but elemental. Plain as the southwestern Oklahoma landscape. It was the kind of *voices* I picked up as *overlay* when I traveled. I think it was where I began to recognize the dislocation at the heart of education, especially Native education.

I found an early note from research. It was written with my typewriter before I had a computer—maybe it was when I was at the museum. “This piece of paper represents the earth. There is a big water all around the earth. There is no place to hide because the water is all around.” —Lone Wolf, Kiowa, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, 1873. But I notice the date, 1873. The dates of the Fort Marion imprisonment were 1875–78. The words of Lone Wolf sound as if they were written after he had been at Fort Marion. Was the date wrong? Had I made an error in copying it? I was not able to find the source of Lone Wolf's quote. But I could see Lone Wolf sitting at the table in the casement with his ledger book. “This piece of paper represents the earth.” But it should have been dated 1875. How would Lone Wolf have known about the water before he went to the ocean? Was it a prophetic statement? Was the piece of paper a treaty that he knew from experience was worthless? How could I reconcile the problem? How often writing about history discovers mystery rather than clarity.

The prisoners felt the train beneath them. They were chained to the walls. They rode sitting up. No one said anything. They could

not have heard one another if they did. The train stopped at various places. The people were there to look at them. Word must have gone out that they were coming. How did they know? The U.S. Army had ways of communicating, but the wires for telegraph did not run everywhere. Maybe riders went ahead. Somehow they signaled because there was a crowd wherever they stopped. People gawked at them. Gray Beard was furious. He wanted to leap on the crowd. He wanted to jump the soldiers. But he would be killed.

What migration path did the train follow? How did they make the tracks that wandered across the land?

The new people came without rest. They marked the land. The prisoners had killed the surveyors. Some of them. There was no way to kill them all—to send them back. Where had the new people come from?—the Indians asked at council fires. The new people had come from a place far away. They had crossed the great waters. Now they crossed land. The Indians had to fight for the land and their lives. It's why they were now prisoners.

There were stories that the buffalo had gone inside the Wichita Mountains near Fort Sill in Indian Territory. The thunder and their voices had been one. The Indians would have followed them into the darkness inside the mountain. They were nothing without the buffalo.

The prisoners thought the soldiers would kill them. It seemed like they were taking them far away so that word would not get back to their tribes. The soldiers couldn't kill the prisoners in front of their families, though they had killed that way before. But the soldiers didn't kill them. The prisoners rode day after day until they reached a large fort made of stone. The soldiers all dressed alike. They had no difference in their clothes. No marks of bravery, except a few stripes on their clothes. They followed their leader—the one with the horn. It sounded in the morning and they were up, running, marching everywhere. The horn sounded again and they went to bed.

Captain Pratt cut the prisoners' hair and dressed them in army uniforms. He sat them in chairs at a table. Captain Pratt gave them ledger books. At first they drew to remember. But then drawing became an act of memory. They remembered because they drew.

The prisoners had been trouble causers. The soldiers sent them on a train to the great waters to get rid of them. To send them as far away from their people and land as they could. If the Indians at Fort Sill had no leaders, they would be easier to manage. What ideas could they have on their own? Or if they had ideas, they would not be able to act.

The soldiers called the great waters *ocean*. The prisoners knew it was where they were—a place where the water held its ceremonial dance.

Bear's Heart—I dreamed they tied a pencil to my hand. I dreamed they tied the ocean to our beds.

Drawing was now their war. The past brought regret and sadness because it was far away. They remembered the cries of their families as they left. How could they draw what they heard?

Tourists came to the fort to look at the prisoners. They stared when the Indians walked in town with Captain Pratt. The prisoners polished sea beans. They sold their drawings to the tourists.

Black Horse had his wife, Pe-ah-in, and his child, Ah-kes, because they had jumped into the wagon as it left Fort Sill. Where were the wives and children of the other prisoners? Would they be taken by others? Would the prisoners see them again? Would the land be there when they returned? Would they return?

Why had the new people come? What council had they sat in? Look at their wagons going farther across the land. Look at their towns where the prisoners stopped. The new people had buildings that could not be moved. They stood as a buffalo herd without legs, as teepees that could not be folded up and moved.

Buffalo Hunt, Bear's Heart, Ledger Book Drawing.
National Museum of the American Indian,
Smithsonian Institution (D206231).

The Animal Show

The prisoners complained—soldiers massacred Cheyenne and Arapaho families at Sand Creek. They massacred Black Kettle’s people at the Washita River. The warriors had ridden the plains killing settlers and land surveyors. Did they think the new people would leave?—Just turn around and backtrack across the land? The prisoners heard other prisoners talking in their own languages, but it was the same story—

November 29, 1864—Seven hundred men from the Colorado Territory militia attacked Indian villages at Sand Creek in south-east Colorado Territory, mutilating many of the Indians, including women and children.

November 27, 1868—Colonel George Custer attacked an Indian village along the Washita River in Indian Territory. Previous to that, the Indians had signed the 1867 Medicine Lodge Treaty, which required the southern Cheyenne and Arapaho to move from Kansas and Colorado south into Indian Territory. In the summer of 1868 war parties from the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, Brule, Oglala Lakota, and Pawnee attacked settlers in western Kansas and southeastern Colorado. After that, it was a further flurry of treaties, skirmishes, massacres. It was war again.

And what came from it?—Defeat. Removal from the land they had known. Blindness as to where they were going. The unknown emptiness ahead of them. The loss behind them. It was beginning to dawn.

How does anyone unknot the strands? Unfold the layers? Surrender to history? Drive back with its intent in their thoughts? What is the retrieval process?—To restore voice to an event when the stirring of voices usually comes without names attached to them.

How does anyone present the different versions of the story, the subversions and verisimilitudes that come through travel and research? The different versions of the story—sometimes picking up loose ideas like threads.

The few members of Making Medicine's family he had left watched from a distance as he walked to the wagon in chains that night at Fort Sill in Indian Territory. It had been dark, but he knew they were there. He thought about them as the prisoners jostled in the wagons. They rode with their heads bowed. For several days the wagons tossed over the rough ground. The ride was uncomfortable. The prisoners were stiff. Their bones ached. In Caddo they boarded the train. It was fear that captured them. It settled in the corners of any space they found. It came over them like brush fire. Their hearts were animals running from the flames.

I'm interested in different versions of the same story—the telling and retelling of the story in different ways—moving from third person to first and back. It's how multiple retellings seem to work. It's how I heard the prisoners' voices—their voice fragments. I wanted the multiple narrators—the rewrite of a broken history broken into different narratives. I wanted the many versions it takes to tell a story. What was said on the surface—what was thought underneath. I tried to work between the unfolding versions of history.

The train stopped with a jerk. The soldiers pushed back the door—unlocked their chains from the wall—pulled the prisoners into the air. The Indians were murderers—savages of the plains. The

people stared at them. Maybe the people wondered if the prisoners were even human.

AH-KES, THE DAUGHTER OF BLACK HORSE—The light hurts my eyes.

BLACK HORSE—Stay between your mother and me, Ah-kes.

BIG NOSE—I dreamed horses were talking to the sky. They were telling it to stay awake. The enemy was coming. The horses didn't talk with words—but with their snorting.

CHIEF KILLER—Maybe the train was telling the sky something.

HU-WAH-NEE—The train didn't know how to talk to the sky. It was an animal that pulled the wagons.

The prisoners were given a drink of water from a dipper—then loaded on the train and chained to the wall again. The door was closed. The train continued.

Ta-a-way-te's legs felt full of creek water.

Buffalo Meat felt his heart in his wrists and ankles. He felt his heart throbbing under the iron ropes. He had more than one heart beating—*Aaaaeeee!*

SKY WALKER—*Shuuuuu*, there are others riding with us—others we can't see. Not because of the darkness—but because they were from another world. Think of them—they will hold our hearts—all of us—

Ta-a-way-te slept chained to the wall with his head on his chest until he couldn't raise his head. His neck yowled with stiffness. He cried with leg cramps. His legs slept until they tingled as if wolves ate them.

MATCHES—When the soldiers opened the door of the rail car, they had to pull Ta-a-way-te out. He couldn't walk. His toes moved like warriors. They told a story—his toes had been shot with arrows.

Black Horse pushed the soldiers away. He would help Ta-a-way-te walk. The soldiers pushed back. Someone struck—the soldiers ordered the prisoners to the ground. They sat huddled together until everyone was quiet. Then the soldiers ordered them

to their feet again. Some of the soldiers pulled a few of the prisoners to their feet again—the ones who had trouble standing.

They walked through the streets where people gathered to watch them pass. The prisoners entered the fort behind the soldiers who walked with Ta-a-way-te between them.

BIG MOCCASIN—What were these stone walls we walked through? What was this damp air—this smell?—What was all that water beyond?—

AH-KES—Where's the land?—

BLACK HORSE—Under the water.

AH-KES—How do you know?

BLACK HORSE—The land holds everything—even this—

PE-AH-IN, THE WIFE OF BLACK HORSE—But what was it?—One sky facing another?

BIG NOSE—It's the ocean.

MANIMIC—The great waters—the place the soldiers came from.

WHITE BEAR—It smells like something dead.

LONE WOLF—The ocean is at war with the land. Look at it trying to climb on the land. It attacks and attacks—

STRAIGHTENING AN ARROW—The ocean is a prisoner, like us—

BEAR'S HEART—Hear it rumble—

TA-A-WAY-TE—It makes noise like the train.

PE-AH-IN—How can we know the water?—This place of no use.

TA-A-WAY-TE—What can we do with water? Could we ride a horse on it?

LONE WOLF—I knew it was here before I came.

BLACK HORSE—It is troubled—tossing—tossing.

PE-AH-IN—How can we stay here?

AH-KES—Hey, Ocean—be quiet out there—

BLACK HORSE—A trouble causer—like us.

PE-AH-IN—How can we live by this water?

BLACK HORSE—I don't think the soldiers will let us go back.

AH-KES—Why?

BLACK HORSE—The Indians broke the soldiers' laws.

AH-KES—But they aren't the Indians' laws—

In the night Black Horse heard the moaning of the prisoners—the whimpering of Pe-ah-in, his wife—the crying of Ah-kes, his daughter. He heard the pleading of others. Black Horse gritted his teeth—this darkness would not get them.

In the night Pe-ah-in held her hand over her nose. The smell did not go away. The walls were damp. They were like touching an animal that had been skinned.