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Winnebago Nation of Nebraska Response Patterns, 1865-1911:

A Gendered & Generational Analysis

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial fulfillment of
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by
Ashley Morrison, BA
History, Great Plains Studies, Women & Gender Studies
College of Arts & Sciences

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Faculty Mentors:
Margaret Huettl, PhD, History Department
Katrina Jagodinsky, PhD, History Department

Abstract

During the era of federal assimilation policy, the Winnebago people asserted their cultural identity and history at every step of allotment and boarding school policy. From their distinct responses, Winnebago men and women defended their autonomy and sovereignty to federal intervention. By examining their unique opinions, a more cumulative understanding of the various tactics the Winnebago people used can be further explored. Gender, education, and generation shaped individual responses. Through demanding an inclusion of women in allotting land to taking children away from the Winnebago Industrial School, the Winnebago people resisted against the paternalistic control of the United States. These reactions and tactics demonstrate the diverse, complex reality in Winnebago people's responses to colonialism. In highlighting these distinct strategies, future scholars can further dismantle the binaries imposed by federal Indian policy and promoted in historical documents.

Key words: Native American/American Indian/Indigenous—Winnebago/Ho-Chunk Nation of Nebraska; 19th Century; Allotment; Indian Boarding Schools; Assimilation Policy; Federal Indian Policy; History; Great Plains Studies; Women & Gender Studies;

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On Wednesday, August 16th, 1865, Winnebago and Omaha chiefs, interpreter for the Winnebago, Superintendent E. B. Taylor, Omaha Indian Agent Furnas, and Winnebago Indian Agent St. A. D. Balcombe came together for a general council.¹ This would be the first official meeting between the Winnebago chiefs and E. B. Taylor since the Winnebago Nation's signing of the 1865 treaty purchasing land from the Omaha reservation. Nerves could have been running high, with representatives of all groups worried about the outcome of the council. Not only would this meeting establish first impressions, these Winnebago leaders also wondered about securing the proper authority and respect for their people. With a lot resting on their shoulders, these chiefs had a duty to satisfy the expectations of their people.

During this meeting, Superintendent Taylor asked several questions regarding the Winnebago Nation's well-being and satisfaction with their Indian Agent, their time on the Omaha reservation, and their desire to purchase a portion of the Omaha reservation.² Through their interpreter, Young Prophet and the other chiefs asked Taylor for an additional day to deliberate so they would have enough time to properly answer these "important questions" submitted by the federal government. Before returning to their lodgings, the chiefs mentioned the customary practice for new Superintendents, on their first official visit, to provide "a beef and some tobacco."³ Honoring this custom demonstrated a material sign of Taylor's regard and friendship with them. Following this custom, Taylor offered the Winnebago leaders these goods

¹ Agent Robert Wilkinson Furnas would later become the Governor of Nebraska; Agent. St. Andre Durand Balcombe had been named the Indian Agent for the Winnebago Nation in 1861 when they were still in Minnesota by President Abraham Lincoln.

² Compared to the American government officials he named, Superintendent Taylor did not provide the names of any of the Winnebago chiefs besides Young Prophet. Therefore, the Winnebago people mentioned are only speculations on the chiefs potentially at the council. In the same year, the Winnebago chiefs traveled to New York City, where they posed for their photograph to be taken with Agent Furnas and two interpreters. The chiefs pictured included Young Prophet, Whirling Thunderbird, White Breast, Little Decorah, and Little Hill. Additionally, the interpreter mentioned by Superintendent Taylor could have been either Alex Payer or Michael St. Cyr.

³ United States. Office of Indian Affairs. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*. (Washington D.C.: G.P.O., 1865) 408.

from the supplies of Agent Furnas and the Omaha reservation.⁴ Winnebago chiefs measured Taylor's compliance with their traditions to determine whether he would respect their cultural traditions by participating. Indirectly, these Winnebago chiefs asserted their cultural identity and sovereignty as a nation by insisting on diplomatic ritual between the two nations' representatives.

On the following day, August 17th, 1865, the council reassembled once more. Chosen among the other Winnebago chiefs to speak, Chief Young Prophet came forward. Chief Young Prophet was an imposing man, likely wearing a mix of both Winnebago and European style dress. He began the meeting by stating that the Winnebago Nation was satisfied with the purchase of a portion of the Omaha reservation. Continuing, Young Prophet declared their desire for the treaty for the purchase of their new reservation to be ratified. Ratifying the treaty ensured their new reservation would be ready at the earliest possible time, along with the requested buildings to improve their new land. Some of these buildings included a flour and sawmill, mission house, dwellings for the members of the nation, and other necessities for farming their new land. At this point, all the Winnebago chiefs present expressed their approval of Young Prophet's words, conveying a united front as a nation with Superintendent Taylor.⁵

Moving to the question asked the previous day, Young Prophet addressed the nation's dissatisfaction with their Indian Agent, St. A. D. Balcombe. Young Prophet explained that Agent Balcombe was an unfaithful officer who did not care about the welfare of the Winnebago people and only worried about making money for himself at the expense of the nation. Therefore, the Winnebago people requested an honest, faithful agent who would look after their interests and prevent any further suffering as experienced at the Crow Creek reservation. From here, many of the other Winnebago chiefs and men present spoke against Agent Balcombe, mentioning a

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

multitude of specific charges of bad faith and dishonest practices. Ending his special report, Taylor concluded that “the Winnebago would succeed better as a tribe under the agency of some man in whom they have more confidence, and in whose integrity they have implicit faith.”⁶

While paternalistic language littered Taylor’s special report, the agency and sovereignty asserted by the Winnebago Nation was evident throughout the council. Such instances of self-advocacy and resistance can be found throughout the history of the Winnebago Nation in Nebraska. Even though this example is male-dominated, men are not the only ones that assert their agency on matters significant to the Winnebago people. By suspending the council, the Winnebago chiefs likely brought the issues to their people, where the voices of women and other men could state their responses, experiences, and opinions. Additionally, these responses potentially opened a discussion among the various bands on their experiences. Despite Taylor’s effort to address Winnebago men only, the tribe managed to ensure a communal discussion involving men and women.

Ho-Chunk Culture: Continued Resistance to Assimilation

In order to tell a more complete story about Winnebago responses toward assimilation policy, we must first understand the culture that informed those responses. Education, religion, and kinship customs all shaped how individual Winnebago men and women navigated allotment and boarding schools. These cultural norms and traditions influenced responses at every step, illustrating the survival of Winnebago culture even when the federal government attempted to destroy that tradition. With these experiences and cultural traditions, the Winnebago people adapted to federal assimilation policy without sinking into the binary of traditional and assimilated.

⁶*Ibid*, 409.

For the Winnebago Nation, education intertwined religion and kinship to benefit future generations. Whether formal or informal, education provided a direct way to teach the significant traditions, values, and norms of the nation. In the early nineteenth century, the traditional Winnebago education system used a mixture of formal and informal techniques to instill cultural values and norms. Formal aspects focused on the ceremonial education, which recognized the “stages of growth” of childhood development.⁷ In contrast, informal aspects of education focused on the child identifying with role models, learning perception with adult relatives, and absorbing wisdom and knowledge of the Winnebago Nation through “daily contact with...people and their relationship to nature and the cosmos.”⁸

These formal and informal educational experiences occurred in fixed spaces, where the religious and environmental worlds were not separated from learning. More formal aspects took place in a sweat or medicine lodge, places associated with ceremony. With informal educational aspects, members of the child’s family or clan collaborated to instruct and care for them in an oval lodge. When aspects of this teaching contained more formal educational characteristics, they easily connected to the religious ceremonies placed within the sweat and medicine lodges.⁹ Through these formal and informal educational systems, the Winnebago Nation established and strengthened the child’s family and clan loyalties. By strengthening these relationships, the child learned and grew to be “worthy of the pride and respect” of the Winnebago Nation.¹⁰

Winnebago education included six “headings” of learning: naming, storytelling, fasting and vision quests for boys, fasting and menses for girls, curing and healing for religious

⁷ Woesha Cloud North, “Informal Education in Winnebago Tribal Society with Implications for Formal Education,” PhD dissertation, The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, (1978): 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

leadership, and preparation for vocation.¹¹ While there are a few gendered differences in education, they revolve around a singular aspect relevant to their adulthood. Focusing on naming ceremonies specifically, they introduced an individual's "place in the tribe and the universe."¹² By learning fasting, children learned "self-control" where the fasting duration gradually increased.¹³ Every aspect of Winnebago education had a reason and greater discipline when they became adults. With the assistance of the extended family, especially the mother's brother, the children would be taught and disciplined.¹⁴ As the nineteenth century wore on, however, federal assimilation policy and the General Allotment Act of 1887 attacked the traditional education system. Through assimilation policy, boarding schools gained legal authority to forcibly remove "children from [their] parents and homeland" for the benefit of the child.¹⁵ These boarding schools prevented Winnebago cultural traditions to be taught, therefore intending the next generation of Winnebago children to be assimilated into white American society.

Beyond imparting cultural knowledge to future generations, other cultural practices reveal the adaptability of the Winnebago Nation. Unique to the Winnebago people, the kinship dynamics are more complex rather than just patrilineal or matrilineal. Historically, the Winnebago people were matrilineal, following descent from the mother's line.¹⁶ In *The Winnebago Tribe*, Paul Radin described the Winnebago as patrilineal, but acknowledged the importance of the avuncular, in which the mother's brother or uncle was the head of the house.¹⁷

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8

¹² Renya K. Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe and Elizabeth Bender Cloud*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018): 25.

¹³ Renya K. Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 26.

¹⁴ Jeff Hart, "Exploring Indigenous Tribal Leadership: The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, December 2004, 25.

¹⁵ Woeha Cloud North, "Informal Education in Winnebago Tribal Society," 8.

¹⁶ Joan Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989): 161.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Ho Chunk Culture (n.d.), Milwaukee Public Museum cited from Jeff Hart, "Exploring Indigenous Tribal Leadership," 25.

However, if a Winnebago woman marries a man without a clan or “reckons descent” in the mother’s line, these children belong to the mother’s clan until the next generation for the children of these children.¹⁸ With these exceptions, the Winnebago social structure could easily adapt to include potential children that would have been left without a clan.

With the involvement of all community members in federal negotiations, opinions about assimilationist policies varied, primarily depending on education and age. The Winnebago Nation responded in varying ways to changing federal policies, accommodating, ignoring, and resisting new requirements like allotment, boarding schools, and missionary presence imposed by the federal government. In their diverse responses, the Winnebago Nation proves the fallacy of scholarly assumptions about Native passivity or compliance, which erases a rich history of involvement. By exploring the multitude of responses by the men and women of the Winnebago Nation more deeply, scholars reaffirm the complexity of Native nations, both internally and externally. The Winnebago Nation’s agency and complex responses to allotment, narrated in the following pages, challenge the destructive stereotypes that continue to persist into the twenty-first century.

Treaties & Removal: Winnebago Experiences

In the historical context of the United States, treaties with Native nations have a complicated place. Many treaties emerged from “uncoerced negotiations” between sovereign nations, similar to the formal agreements made between the United States and European nations.¹⁹ However, such an idyllic treaty-making scenario did not occur between the United States and the numerous Native nations. However, the United States, in its drive for resources

¹⁸ Paul Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970): 144.

¹⁹ Donna L. Akers, “Decolonizing the Master Narrative: Treaties and Other American Myths,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 29, no. 1 (2014): 59.

and land, neglected to negotiate honestly and fairly with Native nations. In almost every instance of treaty-making, the federal government desired Native nations “to give up their lands and natural resources” for a penny on the dollar.²⁰ A majority of treaties were created predominantly by the U.S. government to provide land to white Americans for settling.²¹ For some Native nations, however, treaties with the United States recognized tribal sovereignty, jurisdiction, and self-determination.²² Furthermore, the United States regularly avoided dealing with Native nations as “equals,” resulting in delegitimizing the fundamental basis of treaties.²³ With the Ho-Chunk Nation, the goal of treaty-making was no different for the United States.²⁴

From the 1830s through 1865, when they bought the land from the Omaha Nation in Nebraska, the Winnebago Nation faced multiple westward removals.²⁵ Growing pressure from white American settlers for the Winnebago Nation to cede “their lands and leave Wisconsin,” led to treaties in 1829, 1832, and 1837.²⁶ With the treaty of 1837, the Winnebago people were removed from Wisconsin to a reservation in Iowa.²⁷ Many Winnebago people considered this treaty “fraudulent,” causing a permanent division between tribal members supportive of the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² This is specifically referencing the aspects of treaties which reaffirmed Native rights over the land and resources, seen with the Treaty of St. Peters of 1837 for the Ojibwe and the Navajo Treaty of 1868 for the Diné (just to name a few instances.)

²³ Donna L. Akers, “Decolonizing the Master Narrative: Treaties and Other American Myths,” 63.

²⁴ For further reading on allotment, refer to: Wilkins, David E. and K. Tsianina Lomawaima. *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law*. Norma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001; Williams, Jr. Robert A. *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989;

²⁵ For many Native American nations, the names associated with them were usually provided by a different nation, leaving a complicated legacy behind. Historically, ethnologists and fur traders used the name “Winnebago” to signify the nation of people discussed. For the Nebraska nation, they continue to use Winnebago, while the Wisconsin nation officially reestablished themselves as the Ho-Chunk Nation in 1993.[#] Furthermore, words such as “tribe” and “Indian” will be used sparingly; instead, I will use “Nation” and “Native American.” Therefore, the word choices made are intentional.

²⁶ Edward J. Pluth, “The Failed Watab Treaty of 1853,” *Minnesota History* 57, no. 1 (Spring, 2000): 2.

²⁷ Treaty with the Winnebago, 7 Stat., 544, November 1, 1837, Proclaimed June 15, 1838 cited from David Lee Smith, *Winnebago Tribal History*.

treaty and others dissatisfied with the decision.²⁸ In 1846, the Winnebago Nation once more was removed to two separate locations in Minnesota.²⁹ While in Minnesota, many Winnebago focused their efforts on farming land and building homes in their cultural traditions.³⁰

After the Dakota War of 1862, the Winnebago people, who were not involved in the conflict, were forced to leave their reservation homes and crops in Minnesota and relocate to “an undesirable parcel of land” on the Crow Creek reservation in South Dakota.³¹ Many of the older leaders died as a result of this forced removal, and some aspects of Winnebago culture and social life were “disrupted and disorganized.”³² While on the Crow Creek reservation, many Winnebago people died from “starvation and exposure” due to a lack of resources.³³ To escape such circumstances, a large number fled from South Dakota in their hope to survive, taking refuge “among the Omaha.”³⁴ With every new treaty in this era, the United States forced the Ho-Chunk Nation to leave their land, crops, and any improvements made at the time. Beyond the material possession left in every relocation, the Ho-Chunk people lost access to their dead loved ones, who were buried on old reservations, along with the traumatic process of relocating in which family members, elders, and other members could die on the journey.

Unlike previous Winnebago reservation relocations, the move to the Omaha reservation in Nebraska was intentional and voluntary. According to Robert Furnas, the Indian Agent for the

²⁸ Edward J. Pluth, “The Failed Watab Treaty of 1853,” 2.

²⁹ Treaty with the Winnebago, 9 Stat. 878, October 13, 1846, Proclaimed February 4, 1847 cited in David Lee Smith, *Winnebago Tribal History*.

³⁰ Nancy Oestreich Lurie, “The Indian Claims Commission Act,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 311, (May, 1957), 57. While on their Minnesota reservation, the Ho-Chunk Nation faced a division between heading back to their original homeland in Wisconsin or staying in the Great Plains. Ultimately, this results in the creation of two federally recognized nations, one in Nebraska and the other in Wisconsin, circa 1870s.

³¹ Edward J. Pluth, “The Failed Watab Treaty of 1853,” 19.

³² Nancy Oestreich Lurie, “The Indian Claims Commission Act,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 311 (1957): 57.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Omaha Nation, five Winnebago men in the fall of 1863 traveled down from Crow Creek, South Dakota, approximately a three-day trek to the Omaha reservation. Upon arrival, these men asked “if one hundred fifty of their people could be subsisted” on the land.³⁵ Once the Omaha Nation accepted this proposition, the Winnebago people slowly made their way down. In the spring of 1864, “twelve hundred starving Winnebago” relocated themselves “on the bottomland where Blackbird Creek flows into the Missouri.”³⁶

A few years later, the Winnebago Nation’s situation improved from inadequate resources and the devastation of multiple removals. As refugees in Nebraska, the Omaha Nation provided the Winnebago people with corn, and the federal government provided rations.³⁷ Even with these provisions, Agent Furnas stated in a letter to Superintendent Taylor that their condition remained “pitiful.”³⁸ Around this time, on May 3rd, 1864, the Omaha chiefs met in council agreeing to let the Winnebago people stay but only if they obeyed their “stringent by-laws.”³⁹ These laws prohibited “drinking, gambling, war dances, setting fire to the prairies,” and restricted movement beyond the reservation unless they held a permit.⁴⁰ Things continued under this agreement between the Omaha and Winnebago Nations until January 1865.

Ordered by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Dole, Omaha Indian Agent Furnas brought a delegation of Winnebago chiefs to Washington, D.C., “to negotiate the sale” of part of the Omaha reservation to the Winnebago Nation.⁴¹ By March 7th, 1865, the Omaha “sold

³⁵ David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: the Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1997): 159.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Furnas to Taylor, May 3, 1864, LR, Omaha Agency, 1864-70; La Flesche to Graff, Apr. 30, 1864, in *Furnas Papers, 1844-1905* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society)

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 160.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

one hundred thousand acres of the north end of their reservation” to the Winnebago Nation.⁴² As payment, the Omaha Nation received fifty thousand dollars along with seven thousand dollars “in reparations for subsisting the Winnebago Nation over the previous year.”⁴³ On the following day, the Winnebago people located in Nebraska signed the treaty, exchanging the Crow Creek reservation for their new reservation.⁴⁴ From this exchange, both the Omaha and Winnebago Nations demonstrated their sovereignty. Significant, however, is the strong intervention and control of the United States government throughout the selling process of the Omaha Nation’s land to the Winnebago Nation. At every step, the federal government is present, even the required writing of the treaty, contrary to the oral tradition of both Nations. Their control is most evident in the required ratification by the United States to make the treaty legally binding. A full year had passed when the federal government ratified the treaty between the Winnebago and Omaha Nations in February 1866.⁴⁵

After the completion of the treaty, the Winnebago Nation recovered as best they could, “putting in small gardens” and “hunting in the wooded area” along the Missouri River bordering the eastern section of their reservation.⁴⁶ Even so, the Winnebago people “continued to die in large numbers.”⁴⁷ To gain some control, several Winnebago people stole horses from the Omaha

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, vol. 2, 872–73; Furnas, “Memoranda on Trip to Washington, February- March 1865,” *Furnas Papers*, n. pag.; Robert C. Farb, “Robert W. Furnas as Omaha Indian Agent, 1864–1866,” *Nebraska History* 32.3 (1951): 186–203, and 32.4 (1951): 268–83; Callon to Denman, May 9, 1868, and Denman to Mix, May 27, 1868, LR, Omaha Agency, 1864–70 cited in David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 160.

⁴⁶ David Lee Smith and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, “Winnebago,” in *Winnebago Tribal History* (Winnebago: Nebraska Indian Community College, 1987): 700.

⁴⁷ Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, vol. 2, 872–73; Furnas, “Memoranda on Trip to Washington, February- March 1865,” *Furnas Papers*, n. pag.; Robert C. Farb, “Robert W. Furnas as Omaha Indian Agent, 1864–1866,” *Nebraska History* 32.3 (1951): 186–203, and 32.4 (1951): 268–83; Callon to Denman, May 9, 1868, and Denman to Mix, May 27, 1868, LR, Omaha Agency, 1864–70 cited in David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 160.

Nation.⁴⁸ Travelling to Iowa, the Winnebago people sold the stolen horses to white settlers for money to benefit themselves and their families. Thus, the relationship between the two nations started to spiral downwards, leading to mutual animosities that endured into future dealings.⁴⁹ In various ways, the Winnebago people used different tactics to secure food, money, and other resources for their people, even to the detriment of the relationship with another Native nation.

The History of Allotment

Tribes were not the only parties dissatisfied with the ill-fated sequence of treaties and removals that dominated federal Indian policy for the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. The federal government retooled its stance toward Indigenous diplomacy and sovereignty when they ended treaty negotiations in 1871 and politicians joined reformers to build an assimilation campaign that included the 1887 Dawes Act, or Allotment Act. The United States established allotment to reduce and eventually dissolve Native identity. At its core, allotment policy aimed to assimilate Native peoples and nations into American society, to break down the identity of Native communities and nations, and finally to “rescue” Native peoples from “their ‘primitive’ lifeways.”⁵⁰ Additionally, the United States intended for allotment to decimate “tribally held land” and the “Indian land base” to allow further westward expansion.⁵¹ Therefore, allotment policy focused predominantly on destroying Native communities by emphasizing private land ownership and capitalist, gendered agricultural production on reservations.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Padraic I. McCoy, “The Land Must Hold the People: Native Modes of Territoriality and Contemporary Justifications for Placing Land into Trust through 25 C.F.R. Part 151.” *American Indian Law Reviews* 27, no. 2 (2002): 447-448.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 448.

⁵² For further reading: Prucha, Francis Paul. *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986; Genetin-Pilawa, C. Joseph. *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Even before the passage of the General Allotment Act of 1887, plans for allotment were well underway. Once precursor to the General Allotment Act was the allotment of the Omaha reservation. Alice Fletcher, a white American ethnologist, anthropologist, and social scientist, also played a significant role in the Omaha Nation's process of allotment through her relationship with Francis La Flesche, an Omaha ethnologist.⁵³ Her actions also stemmed from the Omaha Nation's real fear of removal, as they had just seen their allies, the Pawnee forcibly removed to Indian Territory. Therefore, Fletcher reasoned that the "legal recognition of their allotment" would prevent the Omaha Nation's forced removal.⁵⁴ Working virtually by herself, Fletcher wrote and submitted an "act that...temporarily secured the Omaha in the possession of their allotments and of most of the reservation."⁵⁵ From the beginning of the process, white reformers "lauded the Omahas" as the example and potential of allotment in civilization.⁵⁶ In reality, these white reformers ignored the real conditions on the reservation, instead of focusing on the "glowing reports of success."⁵⁷

The federal government imposed allotment on the Winnebago Nation's new reservation via the Act of February 21, 1863. This act allotted Winnebago heads of families eighty acres of land for cultivation and improvement.⁵⁸ These allotments would also be "vested in said Indian and his heirs, without the right of alienation, and shall be evidenced by patent."⁵⁹ Officially

⁵³ More information on both Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche can be found here: Mark, Joan. *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. Green, Norma Kidd. *Iron Eye's Family: The Children of Joseph La Flesche*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969.

⁵⁴ David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 235.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; Price, "Report," *ARCIA*, 1883, lxiii; Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land* 70-77; Fletcher and La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, vol. 2, 639.

⁵⁶ Tonia M. Compton, "Proper Women/Propertied Women: Federal Land Laws and Gender Order(s) in the Nineteenth-Century Imperial American West," *Dissertations, Theses, & Student Research, Department of History*, 19 (2009): 105.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Act of February 21, 1863, ch. 53, Statute 4, 12 Stat. 658 Sec. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

created between 1871 and 1872, these allotments were labeled as “Leaming” allotments, named after the allotting agent. In total, the 1863 provisions created 487 allotments.⁶⁰ Throughout the process of creating the “Leaming” allotments, the federal government started the groundwork of workshopping the allotment policy for use on other reservations.

During the time between these two acts, the lobbying work of white women in the Women’s National Indian Association (WNIA) revealed the gendered results desired from allotment. Founded in 1879, a group of American women went on reservations to convert Native Americans to Christianity and assimilate into white American culture.⁶¹ By dividing the land up, these women assumed Native men would grow as “providers for their families,” while Native women would “maintain proper homes.”⁶² Many white Americans incorrectly assumed that Native men were all lazy while Native women were drudges forced to do all the hard labor of the family. In reality, this stereotype was a misrepresentation of Native gendered norms. Women from the WNIA focused on Native women and the family home as “the primary site for civilizing the Indian.”⁶³ Furthermore, the general assumption for assimilating via allotment involved Native families “adopt[ing] the American patriarchal gender order.”⁶⁴ While it seemed positive on the surface, in reality, these WNIA women were not trying to liberate Native women. Instead, their goal was to mold “Native women into proper white women.”⁶⁵ From its inception,

⁶⁰ *Analysis of Legal Issues Relating to Tribal Land Use and Control on the Omaha and Winnebago Indian Reservations* (Lincoln, NE: Omaha and Winnebago Indian Reservations of Nebraska, 1974): 10.

⁶¹ Valerie Sherer Mathes. *The Women’s National Indian Association: A History*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015.

⁶² Tonia M. Compton, “Proper Women/Propertied Women,” 98.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

allotment was intended to disrupt tribal sovereignty and gendered cultural values for the comfort of white American society.⁶⁶

In addition to the work of the WNIA, Henry Dawes, the primary Congressman behind the allotment policy, argued that the act “protected Native women from white men who would enter the reservation, start a family, and then desert them when his opportunities...disappeared.”⁶⁷ Dawes continues, declaring that “whosoever takes an Indian woman for his wife, takes her to his home, and his heritage and the heirship of his household, and she becomes a white man rather than he an Indian woman.”⁶⁸ Dawes’ argument focused only on the relationships between white men and Native women, with no mention of Native man and white woman. Therefore, it becomes evident that Dawes intended for the new law to only protect white men’s property rights over his Native wife’s land. Once more, the United States deployed the stereotype of Native Americans as ‘passive’ and ‘defenseless’ to steal their lands away from them.

It was not until the passage of the General Allotment Act of 1887 that the second category of allotments occurred for the Winnebago Nation in Nebraska. In the twenty-four years between both acts, the federal government revised the allotment policy to discuss further the patents mentioned in the 1863 Act. Under section five of the act, the federal government planned to hold the patents in trust for twenty-five years for the “sole use and benefit of the Indian.”⁶⁹ The first schedule of Dawes Act allotments totaled 955 and were known as “Fletcher”

⁶⁶ For further reading on gendered responses to allotment: Stremlau, Rose. *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

⁶⁷ Tonia M. Compton, “Proper Women/Propertied Women,” 98.

⁶⁸ Henry Dawes, “Past and Present Indian Policy,” Address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association, Hartford, Connecticut, 1892 in Henry L. Dawes Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶⁹ General Allotment Act, Act of February 8, 1887, Ch. 119, 24 Stat. 388, Sec. 5

allotments.⁷⁰ Later, allotments under the General Allotment Act were known as “Rankin” allotments, named after Col. Rankin, who created them.⁷¹ Agents placed the “Fletcher” and “Rankin” allotments in a “checkerboard pattern of land tenure,” intended to increase “physical and cultural intermingling with non-Indians.”⁷² These interminglings between Winnebago and American settlers were possible since the Secretary of the Interior controlled negotiations with the Winnebago Nation on reservations for the “transfer of all ‘excess lands.’”⁷³ By doing this, the federal government expected for further assimilation via contact and taking of Native lands for the use of Americans.

Pro-Allotment Winnebagos & Alice Fletcher

During the allotment process, various Winnebago people involved themselves in the process rather than being passive observers. Some members actively advocated for placing themselves in the “most desirable positions on their own reserve.”⁷⁴ These reactions developed from the recent voluntary migration of the Winnebago Nation to Nebraska. Previously, the Winnebago Nation had been in Minnesota, improving their land and farming successful crops. Since the Winnebago people had already experienced life on an extremely harsh reservation landscape before, they fled to Nebraska. Many of them did not want to be forcibly removed again. Another reason for desiring allotment might have been fear that Winnebagos could share the fate of the recently removed Pawnee.⁷⁵ For these pro-allotment members, allotment might have seemed like a safeguard against forced removal.

⁷⁰ *Analysis of Legal Issues Relating to Tribal Land Use and Control on the Omaha and Winnebago Indian Reservations*, 12. Additionally, these were named after Alice Fletcher, the allotting agent at the time.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Padraic I. McCoy, “The Land Must Hold the People,” 448.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Letter, Chas. Mathewson to Col. E. B. Taylor, June 10, 1866, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. Northern Superintendency. Records, 1851-1876. M527, Reel No. 35, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁷⁵ Another major push for allotment was the 1879 Standing Bear decision which detribalized the Ponca Nation. With the ruling of this court case, the Standing Bear and other Ponca member’s federal status of being Native was

Through her work Alice Fletcher was considered an advocate for Native American rights; however, her advocacy and assumptions reveal strong assimilative undertones and colonialistic attitudes. Her colleague and mentor, anthropologist Frederick Ward Putnam considered Fletcher to be an outspoken activist for “Indian education” and “individual allotment of Native land.”⁷⁶ Fletcher rejected the belief that “gradualism of the reservation system” was the best way to assimilate Native Americans as previous politicians and scholars assumed.⁷⁷ Instead, Fletcher asserted that Native nations needed to “embrace individual land ownership, literacy, and exclusive monogamy” by completely breaking away from previous cultural ways of life.⁷⁸ Even though Fletcher and other white women advocated for Native Americans, the lack of Native American voices in their advocacy reveals the inadvertent assimilative and racist undertones present.

Through her involvement with Native policy, Fletcher served as a connection between the anthropological community and federal politicians.⁷⁹ Indian Affairs Commissioner Morgan appointed Fletcher as the Winnebago reservation’s allotting agent in 1887.⁸⁰ As an allotting agent, Fletcher “supervis[ed] the survey, document[ed] the assignment of land, ke[pt] a written

taken, and as cuh they could no longer be on Native land. (U.S. ex Rel. Standing Bear v. Crook, 25 F. Cas. 695, 5 Dill. 453 (D. Neb. 1879))

⁷⁶ Alice Fletcher to Frederick W. Putnam, 6 March 1890, Putnam Papers cited from Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: the Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). Frederick Putnam (1839 - 1914) is widely known as the “Father of American Archaeology.” Additionally, Putnam was the curator of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology from 1874 to 1909. During his curatorship, he recruited many students, including both Native Americans and women. Alice Fletcher cited Putnam for encouraging her interest in Native American culture. She began working for him at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology soon afterwards.

⁷⁷ Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: the Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984);, 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Alice Fletcher to Frederick W. Putnam, 6 March 1890, Putnam Papers cited from Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise*.

⁸⁰ Linda M. Waggoner, *Firelight: The Life of Angel De Cora, Winnebago Artist* (Norma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008): 42; Fletcher worked from August 1887 to March 1888. She began her work again from August 1888 to December 1888.

record of her work, and [taught] those who received allotments the basics of property ownership within a capitalist system.”⁸¹ Along with these duties, which were rarely assigned to women since most agents were men, Fletcher continued working on a “set of prior surveys and maps; a (rudimentary and incomplete) tribal census; and funding to provide rations, office supplies, and support personnel.”⁸² From the assimilative tactics used at boarding schools, Commissioner Morgan believed Fletcher’s “work was...greatly aided by the returned students.”⁸³ He even believed her work would have been “wholly unsuccessful” without these children because of their bilingualism and forced indoctrination into American norms.⁸⁴ With the help of these returning students, all Fletcher needed to focus on was completing the tribal census in regards to Winnebago heirship and head of families.

Among the Winnebagos, Fletcher began advocating early for an amendment to the Dawes Act that would “include allotments for all tribe members” primarily in response to many Winnebago people who “insisted that all women receive land.”⁸⁵ Their rationale arose from their distinct kinship system, and as such, the Winnebago people wanted the land division to include “every Winnebago man, woman, and child” in receiving eighty acres.⁸⁶ From their involvement, Fletcher agreed to the Winnebago nation’s request of “eighty acre allotments for everyone” instead of the standard hundred-and-sixty acres given to “male heads of household.”⁸⁷ From their positive reaction to allotment, Fletcher incorrectly characterized the Winnebago Nation as “easy-

⁸¹ Nicole Tonkovich, *The Allotment Plot: Alice C. Fletcher, E. Jane Gay, and Nez Perce Survivance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012): 104.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸³ Morgan to the Secretary of the Interior, 30 November 1892, Thomas Morgan Papers, RLM cited from Linda M. Waggoner, *Firelight*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Tonia M. Compton, “Proper Women/Propertied Women,” 269.

⁸⁶ Joan Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*, 161.

⁸⁷ Joan Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*, 160-161 cited in Tonia M. Compton, “Proper Women/Propertied Women,” 269.

going—and so resigned to government interference—that although uninterested in allotment, they cooperated with her.”⁸⁸ Her characterization erased the significance of the Winnebago Nation’s response to allotment: change one hundred and sixty acres to eighty acres for all. Once the Nation secured this amendment, future interactions with Fletcher were amiable since the probability of removal disappeared.

The History of Boarding Schools: Impacts, Beginnings, & Legacy

Through boarding schools, federal assimilative goals integrated into Native children’s lives by breaking down tribal identity. These institutions, often run by religious organizations, intended to “save” these children by teaching Christian values and American ideals. Many Native children lost a vital connection to their communities, language, and culture. Through the tactics used, these boarding schools forced Native children to choose between their culture and the taught American culture. As a result, these Native children usually found it difficult to reconnect to their community and culture.⁸⁹

Specific to the Winnebago Nation in Nebraska, there were three agency schools, along with an industrial school built a few years later. In 1871, the first agency school was founded, initially set up as a day school. In these agency schools, Winnebago children studied a range of subjects that included “spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography” where learning occurred in structured authority.⁹⁰ Based on a majority of parents refusing to send their children to boarding schools, the day schools offered a more reasonable compromise for education. These parents were aware that when their child attended an Indian boarding school, the child would

⁸⁸ Letter, Charles Perry to Alice Fletcher (Alice Fletcher Papers, Other Tribes, 1882-1922 [26], AFFLP, NAA) cited from Linda M. Waggoner, *Firelight*.

⁸⁹ For further reading, refer to: Child, Brenda J. *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

⁹⁰ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1869*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 348.

“never again see [their] parents” or even interact or associate with them while away.⁹¹ In contrast, a day school allowed the children to return home every day. Furthermore, day schools did not interfere with the active outdoor life of the children. In the 1868 annual report, Agent Mathewson highlighted the positives of the day schools since it was essential to the “good health and physical well being” of the Winnebago children as it was to the “wild wolf that roams the prairie.”⁹² Once more, the school Principal, who managed and controlled the education, revealed their racism by equating Native children to animals. Luckily, these children returned home every night, to parents, grandparents, and family members who could remind them of who they are and offer the respect disregarded by white teachers.

In letters reporting on assimilation progress, Agent Mathewson regularly stated that the Winnebago people desired reservation day schools for the “future prosperity of the tribe.”⁹³ In the succeeding Agent’s annual reports, White revealed a more complicated reality to the Winnebago people’s responses to the day schools. In September of 1869, Principal Sidney Averill reported that the older Winnebago people showed indifference “to plans and purposes of education,” which left children without motivations and teachers without “moral aid.”⁹⁴ To combat this issue, the schools used bribery to have the children to attend by giving out “rations of flour and meat” weekly for regular attendance.⁹⁵ In 1873, the agency schools switched to giving out “crackers, at the noon recess” to each child as another attempt to increase

⁹¹ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1868*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 226.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1867*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 287.

⁹⁴ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1869*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 348.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

attendance.⁹⁶ Even with his countermeasures, attendance was still low. From the influence of the elected chiefs, school attendance continued downwards. Many parents additionally went to the agency schools and took their child home. In the 1874 annual report, Agent Bradley described how the newly elected chiefs used their influence to decrease day school attendance.⁹⁷ Because of the Winnebago people's response, the agency schools were not effective in implementing white American cultural values onto the reservation.

Plans for an industrial school began September 1870, at the request of current agency employees.⁹⁸ Compared to a day school, the industrial school specialized in teaching students vocational and industrial skills and jobs, such as shoemaking, carpentry, and blacksmithery. It was not until 1872 that the industrial school got approval from the Office of Indian Affairs. In the 1872 annual report, the Winnebago agency prepared to build a brick building to serve as the "industrial and boarding-school."⁹⁹ Four years later, in 1876, the first substantial report on the Winnebago Industrial School was published. Agent White discussed the removal of the Winnebago children from their parents, along with the encouraging progress of assimilation. Beyond classroom duties and learning, the industry skills were gendered to mirror the gender roles found in white American society. The girls were taught to "cook, sew, and do general housework," while the boys learned "the use of tools, farming, &c."¹⁰⁰ These industrial and

⁹⁶ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1873*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 190.

⁹⁷ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1874*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 210.

⁹⁸ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1870*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 228.

⁹⁹ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1872*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 219.

¹⁰⁰ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1876*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 102.

boarding schools intended for Native children to discard their Winnebago cultural gender norms and instead conform to white American gender roles.

By 1891, Superintendent Robert E. Evans of the Winnebago Industrial School reported a decrease in runaway children. One of the earlier goals for the industrial school succeeded by increasing attendance. In one instance, a student “ran away from home to come to school.”¹⁰¹ Further in his report, however, Superintendent Evans explained how the Winnebago people visited the school daily. These parents “retard[ed] [the childrens’] English speaking,” “persuad[ed]....[them] to run away,” and abstain from their allotted work.¹⁰² Superintendent Evans specifically requested two white employees to fill the positions of assistant matron and assistant cook to combat these issues.¹⁰³ His rationale derived from no Winnebago woman “who would want these positions” and who, after a month’s work, would be “anything but a detriment” to the Winnebago children.¹⁰⁴ Pushing past Evan’s problematic language, Winnebago women and men continued to share, teach, and care for the children by asserting Winnebago cultural authority before white education. Boarding school education was to provide future generations of Winnebago people the ability to adapt to the white settlers now around them; American education was never intended to replace Winnebago education and cultural teachings

Even with all of this work, attendance at the agency school remained low. Not only were parents taking their children home, but outside boarding schools also reduced the number of resident pupils. In the 1886 annual report, Agent Chas. H. Potter stated how other boarding schools recruited from reservation schools. Similarly, the Winnebago agency schools were at a

¹⁰¹ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1891*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 291.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

“disadvantage if not an injustice” since their pupils were stolen from their tutelage.¹⁰⁵

Winnebago parents more directly felt the absence of their children being stolen from other boarding schools, not only the loss of future Winnebago generations, but the familial ties that binds parent and child together. Since many Winnebago children were removed from the reservation, it is only right to discuss the role of boarding schools in allotment since it complicates responses further.

While there are a plethora of boarding schools recruiting Winnebago children, many ended up at the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In promotional materials, the Carlisle institution advertised itself as a “center for valuable education” and a “place saving the lives of Native children.”¹⁰⁶ In reality, this could not be farther from the truth. Once the children arrived at Carlisle, white matrons cut their hair, destroyed their old clothing, redressed them into new uniforms, and renamed them with Anglo names.¹⁰⁷ These were just some of the tangible ways Carlisle erased a child’s Native identity. Besides the physical erasure, Native children also received severe punishments when they “spoke their original language or express[ed] any religious or spiritual beliefs” from their culture.¹⁰⁸ These punishments resulted in either the loss of meals or confinement in the institution.¹⁰⁹ Other forms of discipline included excessive use of corporal punishment, cutting of

¹⁰⁵ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1886*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 188.

¹⁰⁶ John S. Milloy and Mary Jane Logan McCallum, *A national crime: the Canadian government and the residential school system, 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017): xv.

¹⁰⁷ 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, 2011): 230.

¹⁰⁸ Kaytlyn Lowhorn, “The Carlisle School’s Impact on Indian Identity,” *Aletheia* 1, no. 1 (2016): 5.

¹⁰⁹ Christine Bolt, *American Indian policy and American reform case studies of the campaign to assimilate the American Indians* (London: Unwin Hymand, 1990): 222-223.

traditionally long hair of Native youth, and imprisonment of pupils in school jails.¹¹⁰ Discipline at Carlisle could range in severity but was brutal and cruel at every level.

In terms of curriculum, Carlisle focused on trades and industries to transform the Native children into industrious, assimilated citizens. For classroom-based education, Native students learned the English language, along with the skills significant to American society from time management to teamwork.¹¹¹ Skills were also taught based on American gender norms. From these experiences, Native children were forcibly assimilated into accepting American cultural norms since they had no contact with their culture or community for many years. From this loss, many Winnebago children never learned or forgot essential aspects of their culture, language, and identity by lacking access to the people, language, and culture found on their reservation. From their experience with the boarding school system, these Winnebago had contradictory, complex responses to assimilation.

Winnebago Responses: Complex & Unique

Throughout the process of allotment headed by Alice Fletcher, Winnebago men and women were active members in either opposing or advocating for allotment. In the 1886 annual report, Agent Chas. H. Potter stated that some of the Winnebago people requested a reallocation of their lands.¹¹² When the reservation land was first allotted, a large percentage were recorded under English names that were “unknown to the allottee or to the English-speaking members of the tribe.”¹¹³ Without the Winnebago name recorded, it was impossible “to establish [the]

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Owen Lindauer, 1998 “Archaeology of the Phoenix Indian School,” Available at the Archaeological Institute of America website: <http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/phoenix/index.html>; Marr n. d.

¹¹² United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1886*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 188.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

identity of the allottee.”¹¹⁴ If the identification of the allottee was confirmed, the allotted lands assigned were not “of their own selection.”¹¹⁵ From this interaction, the Winnebago people involved asserted that their Winnebago name needed to be associated with their allotment. In doing so, it created a safeguard against their land patents being delegitimized by white settlers. Additionally, the assertion that land selection illustrates the active involvement of the Winnebago people throughout the allotment process. Furthermore, for a person to know the allotted land associated with them was incorrect required the person already to have made the initial selection when allotment first occurred.

After witnessing the Indians Wars of the mid-1800s, some Winnebago people advocated for allotment as protection from forced removal. In a letter dated March 11, 1882, to Hon. E. Whittlesey, General W. Wilkinson stated that many “Indians are thoroughly convinced that it is civilization or extermination, and *they don't fancy extermination.*”¹¹⁶ While not directly mentioning the Winnebago Nation, such fears may have been a deciding factor. The threat of extermination potentially stemmed from their forced removal after the Dakota War of 1862. They might even have learned of other wars between the U.S. government and other Native nations.

Also mentioned in the letter, General Wilkinson observed the complex and diverse reactions to being ‘civilized’ for many Native nations and individuals. From his observations, there were three distinct ‘classes’: anxious “to get to living as whites,” “held back by traditions,” and “held back with selfish designs.”¹¹⁷ This latter group was identified as ‘mixed blood’ Native

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Correspondence from General W. Wilkinson, U.S. Indian Agent to Hon. E. Whittlesey, 11 March 1882, Alice Cunningham Fletcher Papers - Winnebago Allotment Correspondence, Box 4A, 1887-88, National Anthropological Archives, Washington, D.C., United States. (Italics added for emphasis by the author.)

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Americans who were “scheming to live at [the] expense of weaker ones [Native people].”¹¹⁸ Not only is the language extremely racist, but it also resulted in many ‘mixed blood’ Winnebago people losing their land by being labeled as “competent.”¹¹⁹ Through the “competency” label, the allotted land was moved out of trust status, meaning their land could be taxed, sold, leased, and mortgaged.¹²⁰

Even with these different ‘classes’ of Native people, Wilkinson argued that the main reason for Native people to advocate for allotment was to keep the “lands they know to be their own.”¹²¹ Interestingly, Wilkinson tacked on “and then sell off the remainder of their lands for their benefits.”¹²² In contextualizing this phrase, it becomes more evident that Wilkinson is misrepresenting the Winnebago Nation. The selling of unallotted reservation land could only occur through the direction of the Secretary of the Interior.¹²³ Some Ho-Chunk people sold their Nebraska allotments to move back to their homeland in Wisconsin. After their forced relocation to Nebraska in 1874, these individuals were dissatisfied with the Nebraska reservation and desired to return home.¹²⁴ Therefore, the selling of allotments resulted from varied reasons based on their personal decisions.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ While this thesis does not go into specific details on the use of “competency” with assimilation and the General Allotment Act, it does result in the government distinguishing between “real” Native Americans to rationalize the removal of rights from mixed-descent Native Americans. For more information on the subject of blood quantum, refer to Katherine Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017) and Se-ah-dom Edmo, Jessie Young, Alan Parker, and Robert J. Miller. *American Indian Identity: Citizenship, Membership, and Blood*. Prager, 2016.

¹²⁰ General Allotment Act of 1887, 24 Stat. 387.

¹²¹ Correspondence from General W. Wilkinson, U.S. Indian Agent to Hon. E. Whittlesey, 11 March 1882, Alice Cunningham Fletcher Papers - Winnebago Allotment Correspondence, Box 4A, 1887-88, National Anthropological Archives, Washington, D.C., United States.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations (General Allotment Act or Dawes Act), Statutes at Large 24, 388-91, NADP Document A1887.

¹²⁴ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1877*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 148-150.

Even though the U.S. government desired for the Winnebago people to become ‘assimilated farmers,’ it never fully occurred. In the 1891 annual report, Agent Robert H. Ashley discussed his frustration of being unable “to induce allottees to remain on their farms” during the winter months and “not return to live in the timbers.”¹²⁵ These migratory actions parallel when the Winnebago people first arrived in Nebraska circa 1860. In almost thirty years, the Winnebago people continued to assert their Native identity by continuing their cultural traditions and practices.

Another aspect of the Winnebago people’s responses to allotment involved land leasing. Officially, Congress authorized “the leasing of both allotted and un-allotted...lands” in the February 28, 1891 Act amending the General Allotment Act.¹²⁶ Officially, leasing allotments was for an allottee who was “incapable of farming his own land.”¹²⁷ For many Winnebago people with allotments, leasing their farmland allowed them to remain in small settlements “down in the timbers.”¹²⁸ Other Winnebago people may have realized that the value of land had increased, and therefore some of them found it “more profitable to lease the land” and live off the revenue rather than participate in commercial agriculture.¹²⁹ Once more, the leasing of allotted land depended on the decision of the allottee, therefore the reasoning for doing so was complicated and personal rather than the stereotyped reason.

Generally, the Winnebago people responded to assimilation in distinct and complex gendered ways through their dress, religion, and role in the community. Additionally, many

¹²⁵ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1891*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 287.

¹²⁶ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1892*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 71. (26 Stats., 794)

¹²⁷ Leonard A. Carlson, *Indians, Bureaucrats, and Land: the Dawes Act and the Decline of Indian Farming* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981): 37.

¹²⁸ David Lee Smith, *Winnebago Tribal History*, 700.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Merwin Page, *In Camp and Teepee: An Indian Mission Story* (New York: Revell, 1915): 200 cited from David W. Messer, *Henry Roe Cloud: a biography*, (New York: Hamilton Books, 2010).

responses also differed based on boarding school attendance, in which attendees were more likely to have contradictory answers that blended their education with Winnebago cultural customs. Throughout these reactions, it becomes apparent that older generations and women resisted assimilation more than younger generations and men. However, resistance can also include manipulating policy for the benefit of one's self and community.

Through their dress, Winnebago women asserted their cultural autonomy by continuing to wear traditional clothing appropriate for their nation. Even before allotment, Indian Agent Howard White complained that the women “still persist[ed] in wearing their peculiar style of dress.”¹³⁰ In 1888, Sophie Little Bear, returning from the Hampton Institute, “went back to her friends and Indian life.”¹³¹ Also, in 1888, a Hampton employee visited and found Sophie Little Bear in “full Indian dress” with “her baby bound to its board cradle and decorated with Indian trinkets.”¹³² By returning to her Winnebago cultural roots, Sophie Little Bear demonstrated her autonomy over self, rejecting the boarding school teachings. Although, when another employee visited a few years later, however, Sophie Little Bear and her family had “greatly improved” by showing “an earnest ambition” to have a “nice and well-ordered” home.¹³³ Even with this shift, Sophie Little Bear continued to assert her autonomy by making her decisions. In a short time, Sophie Little Bear went through a cultural shift revealing the competing expectations placed on her by her Winnebago community and the assimilative teachings from the boarding school.

¹³⁰ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1872*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 218.

¹³¹ Hampton Institute, *Twenty-two Years' Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia: records of Negro and Indian graduates and ex-students with historical and personal sketches and testimony on important race questions from within and without, to which are added ... some of the songs of the races gathered in the school: illustrated with views and maps* (Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893): 357.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

After graduating from Hampton Institute, Fannie Earth “married in 1888 by Indian custom” and was living “to all appearances as does the rest of the tribe.”¹³⁴ However, that did not mean Fannie Earth did not integrate some of her schooling seen in her letters, which showed “a very different life” than what was occurring in the physical world.¹³⁵ Through dress, these women demonstrated their autonomy in using clothing to display their resistance against assimilation or adapting some aspects of Euro-American culture into their lives.

In the end, though, these women were still Winnebago citizens, using their position in the community to signal their support towards the integrity of the nation. With her boarding school education, Julia St. Cyr assisted her community by giving legal advice for Native Americans to navigate the white courts. In an article entitled “Indian Woman Lawyers,” it discussed “when an Indian of either of those tribes [Winnebago or Omaha] gets into trouble he goes to Miss St. Cyr for advice.”¹³⁶ St. Cyr was an integral part of her community. Through her role, “half the disputes...never reach...a court of law at all.”¹³⁷ Thus, Julia St. Cyr assisted in protecting Winnebago tribal jurisdiction and sovereignty from federal interference.

Similarly, Susie Young Mitchell utilized her role as a “homemaker” to benefit her “6 children” by holding allotted land.¹³⁸ From her membership in the Winnebago Nation, Mitchell was allotted land that she planned to “never sell” in hopes of keeping “it for [her] children.”¹³⁹ In adapting to individually owning land, Susie Young Mitchell continued to value the land and people surrounding her allotted land. In both cases, the role these women played in the

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ “Indian Woman Lawyers,” *The Indian’s Friend* 20, no. 6 (February, 1908): 5.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Record of Graduates and Returned Students, 1910, NARA 1327, Box 65, Folder 3291, Susie Young Mitchell Student Files, Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, Carlisle, PA.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

Winnebago community, large and small, illustrates how Winnebago women in any setting used their positions to benefit their communities and families in distinct ways.

For Winnebago women, generational divisions and boarding school experiences shaped their responses to religion. In Indian Agent Taylor Bradley's 1874 annual report, he stated that "few of the women or children attend[ed]" Sunday church services.¹⁴⁰ Since the boarding school system was just starting, older Winnebago women were the ones primarily against attending these religious services. Approximately a decade later, Alice Green Cloud Payer stated in a Carlisle record that she was a "member of the Mission Church."¹⁴¹ Interestingly, Green Cloud Payer did not mention advocating for Christian conversion in the Winnebago community. Therefore, Winnebago women had distinct refusal-based responses via religion to assimilation policies.

Shifting to Winnebago men, their responses occurred more publicly, whether opposed or for assimilation policy. With the more 'assimilated' Winnebago men, they responded to assimilation policy by accepting Christianity and farming their land. Returning September 1889, Frank Tebo was the first Winnebago "to get a marriage license and marry...according to Christian and civilized customs."¹⁴² As such, the Hampton visitor considered Tebo "an example to the young men of his tribe."¹⁴³ Tebo's actions revealed that allotment and assimilation policies had the potential to be successful, as assumed by policymakers. Similarly, William Henry Harris "posed as a leader and general adviser" on the Winnebago reservation.¹⁴⁴ Although the Hampton

¹⁴⁰ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1874*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 210.

¹⁴¹ Record of Graduates and Returned Students, 1911, NARA 1327, Box 65, Folder 3278, Alice Green Cloud Payer Student Files, Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁴² Hampton Institute, *Twenty-two Years' Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia* (Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893): 466.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

visitor also commented that Harris “has done nothing more practical in the helpful line.”¹⁴⁵ Based on American values, the visitor alluded to Harris not farming or making a living via physical labor. Therefore, Harris demonstrated how some Winnebago boarding school returnees might have navigated their new position on the reservation. Similarly, David St. Cyr also fit this complicated position by gaining employment in 1888 as a “clerk and interpreter at the agency.”¹⁴⁶ Since then, however, reports suggested that things had not been “so favorable.”¹⁴⁷ While vaguer than Harris, the Hampton report illustrates that St. Cyr was potentially not as successful in following the American farming model or that his crops failed. From these Winnebago men’s experiences, their public responses to assimilation policy resulted in noticeable contradictions.

Based on a generational and educational divide, Winnebago men also had varied responses to religion. In the 1874 annual report, Agent Bradley described how the religious service at the Sabbath school was “tolerably well attended by the male portion of the tribe.”¹⁴⁸ When compared to the response of Winnebago women, the Winnebago men passively participated in these Christian services. For some of the men, one reason could be the chance these men had to practice “reading from the Testament” in English.¹⁴⁹ Other participating men might have attended since the services were also “read.... in their own language.”¹⁵⁰ Another rationale might have to do with the cultural importance of maintaining positive relationships

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 365.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ United States. Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1874*, Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 210.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

between themselves and the United States. For some Winnebago men, the reasoning behind attending differed beyond the conversion to Christianity, as assumed by Agent Bradley.

As the nineteenth-century came to an end, John Rave brought a new religion that combined peyote medicine with Christian and other religious elements to the Winnebago reservation, later known as the Union Church.¹⁵¹ As this peyote religion grew on the Winnebago reservation, a hostile began to fester between conservative religious members who saw peyote as a “threat to old Winnebago customs.”¹⁵² When the hostility was at its height circa 1906, Albert Hensley introduced more Christian influences gained from his experiences at the Carlisle Boarding School.¹⁵³ Before attending Carlisle, Hensley met Alice Fletcher, who remarked through an interpreter that Hensley “ought to be [in] school” in 1887.¹⁵⁴ With Fletcher’s assistance, Hensley attended school, even though his “father would not let [him].”¹⁵⁵ In Hensley’s autobiography, he described his homelife in which his mother died during his infancy, his paternal grandmother died when he was only five years old.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the prospect of leaving his bleak life on the reservation must have been the opportunity of a lifetime for Hensley. With Hensley’s influence, Bible reading was added to the religious service, focusing on the New Testament, specifically Revelations. Through peyote, many worshippers “grasp[ed] the meaning of the Bible” when it had previously been incomprehensible before.¹⁵⁷ From this blending of

¹⁵¹ Hazel W. Hertzberg. *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 246.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Record of Graduates and Returned Students, 1910, NARA 1327, Box 43, Folder 2144, Albert Hensley Student Files, Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, Carlisle, PA; Miss M. V. Gaither was a Superintendent from Umatilla, Oregon.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Hensley’s autobiography, written in his own hand to Miss Mollie V. Garther, superintendent of the Springfield Indian School in South Dakota. Mollie V. Garther to Superintendent O. H. Lipps, February 25, 1916, in Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, File. No. 44674-32-820. Cited from Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity*, 248.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Radin, *Winnebago Tribe*, pp. 395-396.

Christainity and Winnebago traditional religion, many younger men after returning from boarding school joined the religion since it granted them more leadership in comparison to the Medicine Lodge, composed predominantly of older men of the Winnebago nation.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, the Union Church granted many Winnebago men the opportunity to find a compromise between Winnebago cultural customs and Christian teachings in addition to the positions of leadership on the reservation.

With greater religious freedom, the answers found on these young men's Carlisle Boarding School post-graduate reports reveal an omission of their cultural hybridity. In Hensley's report, he discusses his attempts to teach Winnebago people "both young and old....about God and & Jesus."¹⁵⁹ On the Winnebago reservation, however, some people called Hensley a "mascal eater," referencing the Union Church established 1906.¹⁶⁰ With the conflicting information Hensley provided to different people, it becomes apparent that Hensley hid his involvement with the Union Church from the Carlisle Boarding School. For many of these younger boarding school-educated people, the tension between their Winnebago culture and white American culture must have been immense.

In comparison, John Baptiste, used his Carlisle boarding school education to "reform [other Winnebago people] from their heathen ways" by using the "bible as a guide book."¹⁶¹ At the time of the survey in 1893, Baptiste held a position dealing with Etymology, and Smithsonian ethnology of the Winnebago Nation. Other positions Baptiste held on the

¹⁵⁸ Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity*, 249.

¹⁵⁹ Record of Graduates and Returned Students, 1910, NARA 1327, Box 43, Folder 2144, Albert Hensley Student Files, Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Record of Graduates and Returned Students, 1893, NARA 1327, Box 134, Folder 5267, John Baptiste Student Files, Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, Carlisle, PA.

Winnebago reservation included the U.S. Indian Police and U.S. Government Interpreter.¹⁶² Mentioned in his Graduate Report, Baptiste mirrored Euro-American rhetoric about Native Americans by creating a cultural binary favoring white American society. Furthermore, Baptiste's attempts derived from the hope of "[his] people" following a "true Standard" since the "race set before [them had] just begun."¹⁶³ Through religion, many Winnebago men used the opportunities presented by assimilation policy to benefit themselves and their nation.

Previous Literature on Assimilation, Boarding Schools, and Allotment

In all federal assimilation policies, the relationship between the United States and Native American nations reveal goals of settler colonialism. In "Decolonizing the Master Narrative: Treaties and Other American Myths," Donna L. Akers argues various scholars need to challenge the master narrative of Native nations willingly giving up their land, therefore being forced to rely on the "parsimony, cruelty, and ill will of a racist nation."¹⁶⁴ Some of the specific historical events Akers cites in "Decolonizing the Master Narrative" include the Dawes Act of 1887 and treaty-making. With these historical events, Akers illustrates how the United States government manipulated Native nations to steal their land.

Through her article, Akers demonstrates the importance of reexamining the Turner thesis and challenging the "feel-good history" surrounding Native nations and the United States, reminiscent of *The Legacy of Conquest* by Patricia Limerick and her examination of Western expansion.¹⁶⁵ While Akers's article provides a basis for the research and questions asked here, it lacks the Native nation's response to these actions. In some ways, Akers causes many Native

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Donna L. Akers, "Decolonizing the Master Narrative," 73.

¹⁶⁵ Also known as the "Frontier Thesis," Frederick Jackson Turner argued that American democracy and identity was formed from the American Frontier. Furthermore, Turner stated that the American Frontier was now closed in 1893 when he spoke at the Chicago World's Exposition.

nations to be seen as ‘passive’ actors in their history. Therefore, an exploration of the differing responses, reactions, and forms of resistance of Native Americans to specific historical events, such as removal, allotment, and Indian boarding schools, is critical. Through telling these types of histories, Native nations shift from the passive victim archetype legacy found in earlier historical studies to active members in their own history.

Between 1887 and 1934, the federal Indian allotment policy caused the systematic loss of approximately two-thirds of Native American reservation lands. In *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*, Rose Strelau humanizes the Cherokee families affected by allotment by telling their stories. Strelau examined three dozen families in the region of Chewey on the Cherokee reservation, to “enable readers to understand allotment through the complicated experience of human beings.”¹⁶⁶ Through the experiences of the Cherokee allottees, Strelau challenges the reduction of Native nations down to numbers on a census roll by the allotment policy. Thus, her research dismantles another piece of colonialism in the United States. As Strelau clarifies, her study only “illuminates the range of common responses” to allotment, reminding readers that cultural persistence should be measured by adaptability rather than consistency.¹⁶⁷ As such, the experiences of these Cherokee families demonstrate the complexity of responses and actions to allotment.

Property and ownership rights shaped the experience women had in the establishment of the American West. In “Proper Women/Propertied Women,” Tonia M. Compton examines how African American and white women moving westward and Nez Perce women forced onto an Idaho reservation shared the similar experience of becoming “property owners.”¹⁶⁸ Compton

¹⁶⁶ Rose Strelau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011): 8.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Tonia M. Compton, “Proper Women/Propertied Women,” ii.

discusses how the General Allotment Act established greater protection to Native women's property rights compared to white women.¹⁶⁹ The gendered rhetoric Dawes used for the General Allotment Act illustrates how Native women property owners were exploited by white Americans to legally take ownership of tribal lands. From this analysis, Compton asserts how lawmakers and reformers used gendered rhetoric and language to accomplish their colonial goal of assimilation. All of these groups used their mission of advocating for Native women in harmful ways that ignored these women's agencies and voices. Through contextualization, the tactics and goals of non-Native American organizations illustrate an inherent racism that overlooked the sovereignty of Native nations. Compton's dissertation contributes a foundation of what various Native Americans responded to for allotment and assimilation.

Alongside allotment, assimilation via Indian boarding schools affected Native nations. In "Some Day a Great Harvest: A History of the Foundation of St. Augustine's Indian Mission, Winnebago, Nebraska, 1888 to 1945," Patrick M. Kennedy argues that St. Augustine had a positive side. Thus, previous generalizations of mission schools erase the complex history and legacy of these institutions. Within the first chapter of his dissertation, "Patterns on the Landscape," Kennedy examines the impact of physical location and its history before St. Augustine's. By contextualizing the physical location, Kennedy provides a frame of reference for the environment St. Augustine's Indian Mission was built.¹⁷⁰ When discussing allotments of the Omaha and Winnebago reservations, Kennedy predominantly focuses on the 'progressive' Native Americans of each nation, thereby erasing negative responses to allotment. Through erasing these reactions, Kennedy ignores dissenting voices not only of allotment but also of St.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 98-9.

¹⁷⁰ Patrick M. Kennedy, "Some day a great harvest: A history of the foundation of St. Augustine's Indian Mission, Winnebago, Nebraska, 1888 to 1945" Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska Omaha, 2004: 285.

Augustus. Therefore, while Kennedy's examination of the educational institutions illustrates their significance on the reservation; it also erases dissenting Native voices to education, allowing a one-note monotonous one-sided view to persist.¹⁷¹

Anthropology & Ethnology: Academia Clouded with Stereotypes

In the United States, anthropologists and ethnologists went and studied various Native nations, bringing back a plethora of primarily incorrect, racist information for the consumption of the average American interested. Topics studied include the origins of the 'Native American,' the effects of "disease and customs," and the "body's limitations and deficiencies."¹⁷² In many cases, the representations of Native bodies were refigured to fit within American standards. Furthermore, anthropologists assisted in dehumanizing Native nations by "depersonaliz[ing] and desacraliz[ing]" their bodies.¹⁷³

From these studies, ethnology emerged as a "science," which classified racial groups predominantly on "external physical characteristics;" these characteristics included hair, skin color, and physiognomy.¹⁷⁴ Not until decades later did ethnology shift away from racial differences, therefore providing further grounding for Americans and Manifest Destiny.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Kennedy's master thesis is only one source of many that discusses the role boarding schools had in Native American experiences, responses, and histories. For further readings refer to: La Flesche, Francis. *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932; Child, Brenda J. *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000; *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, edited by Jacqueline Emery. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017; Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1995.

¹⁷² Robert E. Bieder, "The Representation of Indian Bodies in 19th Century American Anthropology," *American Indian Quarterly* (Spring 1996): 166.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁷⁵ Manifest Destiny is the 19th-century doctrine that the expansion of the United States through the American continent was both justified and inevitable. For more information on Manifest Destiny, please refer to Sam W. Haynes and Robert Walter.. *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008.

For the Ho-Chunk Nation, Paul Radin was the primary American cultural anthropologist who wrote a multitude of works from studies found in the Bureau of American Ethnology annual reports to autobiographies of Ho-Chunk chiefs. Published in *Museum Bulletin* as part of the Anthropological Series in “The Social Organization of the Winnebago Indians: An Interpretation,” Radin details the twofold division and clans of the Ho-Chunk from an outsider perspective with no direct input from the people. By placing cultural and social information about Native nations in a museum publication, Radin and other anthropologists demonstrated how these communities were not human and only there for the benefit and entertainment of the American public.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, the placement of Native culture in the setting of a museum publication reaffirmed the stereotype of the “Vanishing Indian.” A stereotype that also assisted in jumpstarting the anthropologist and ethnologist fields of studies in hopes of capturing the essence of the “noble savage.”

Beyond this essay, Radin is most well-known for his complete study entitled *The Winnebago Tribe*. In the text, Radin describes the history, kinship relationships, and material culture of the Ho-Chunk Nation. Even if the observations were not intended to be racist, when compiled with other studies of Native nations and communities, any good intentions become minute. These studies and observations by anthropologists were taken from these communities without proper context and understanding. Radin’s ethnologic work demonstrates one of the many ways Native nations were further stereotyped by American society.

Winnebago Indian Agents: Their Role, Influence, & Power

¹⁷⁶ Museums during the late 19th century and early 20th century were developed primarily as forms of entertainment and education. Therefore, museums and anthropologists collected various artifacts with artistic, cultural, or scientific significance to be displayed to the general public. Many times, ordinary objects in a community were appropriated by these anthropologists.

Academic stereotypes formed by social science did not exist in a vacuum; Indian Agents impacted the Native reservations they managed through their assumptions. Contextualizing these agencies, it reveals the amount of influence and control these individuals had over the reservation. For the Winnebago Nation in Nebraska, the hierarchy of power began with an Indian Agent at the bottom. Defined by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Winnebago Indian Agent managed the Winnebago people living “north of the Omaha Indians in eastern Nebraska.”¹⁷⁷ This Indian Agent would then report to the Northern Superintendency, who managed the agents.

The Northern Superintendency, wielded enormous control over the programs, and funding on each reservation. Therefore, when the Quakers governed the Northern Superintendency, religion became the central focus in these programs.¹⁷⁸ Not only did they oversee the Winnebago reservation, they also governed the Pawnees, Iowas, Otoes, Sacs and Foxes, Omahas, and Santee Sioux.¹⁷⁹ The superintendency focused primarily on supervising the relations between Native nations and between Native and white interactions.¹⁸⁰ In this position of power, the Quakers advocated a “general program of assimilation” based on the creation of family farms and the dissolution of the reservation.¹⁸¹ In this program, the Quakers created a direct relationship between the “acceptance of white ways” and the “establishment of economic prosperity.”¹⁸² There was an understanding of the relationship between cultural assimilation and the development of agriculture at the Northern Superintendency, which mirrored the goals of the federal assimilation policy. However, the Northern Superintendency’s control ended in June 1876

¹⁷⁷ Edward E. Hill, *The Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880: Historical Sketches*. (New York, NY: Clearwater Publishing Company, Inc., 1874: 10-14.

¹⁷⁸ Clyde A. Milner, “Off the White Road: Seven Nebraska Indian Societies in the 1870s--A Statistical Analysis of Assimilation, Population, and Prosperity,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1981): 37.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Description of the Records, M 527, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, Northern Superintendency Records, 1851-1876, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, MN.

¹⁸¹ Clyde A. Milner, “Off the White Road,” 37.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

with its disbandment by decree from the federal government. Thus, the Winnebago Agency gained more localized control.¹⁸³

From their position, Indian Agents controlled how Winnebago individuals used the annuity money, the rations imported to the reservation, and the appointment of the Winnebago police. In a letter sent January 22, 1866, to Superintendent Col. E. B. Taylor, Indian Agent Chad Mathewson justified the requests of the Winnebago chiefs for new clothing through the lens of assimilation policy. For Agent Mathewson, wearing the “Blanket as a constant article” was an “insurmountable barrier to successful labor.”¹⁸⁴ With the inclusion of clothing, Mathewson illustrates the necessity of the Winnebago people to be successfully assimilated involved not only labor but appearance. Furthermore, Mathewson justified the “Winnebagoes in Council[‘s]” request through the assimilative potential of shifting their clothing away from traditional garb.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, Mathewson suggested ways to force Winnebago adults and children to follow the government’s plans. Seen most drastically in a letter sent January 23, 1866, to Superintendent Taylor, Mathewson wrote that the strongest appeal to a Native person’s reasoning was through “controlling organ [the] stomach” which “seldom fails.”¹⁸⁶ Evident throughout his correspondence, Mathewson placed himself as a father figure to the Winnebago people, since his “judgement will be sufficient for their support.”¹⁸⁷ In reality, Mathewson’s assumed paternalism derived more from superiority over the Winnebago people than actual affection for them. From

¹⁸³ Three years later, the Omaha and Winnebago Agencies consolidated. Through this consolidation, the problems between the Omaha and Winnebago Nations furthered to escalate. (Edward E. Hill, *The Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, 104.)

¹⁸⁴ Letter, Chas. Mathewson to Col. E. B. Taylor, January 22, 1866, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. Northern Superintendency. Records, 1851-1876. MS527, Reel No. 35, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Letter, Chas Mathewson to Col. E. B. Taylor, January 23, 1866, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. Northern Superintendency. Records, 1851-1876. MS527, Reel No. 35, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁸⁷ Letter, Chas. Mathewson to Col. E. B. Taylor, April 17, 1866, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. Northern Superintendency. Records, 1851-1876. MS527, Reel No. 35, Minnesota Historical Society.

this brief examination, the Winnebago Agent's opinions affected the lives of the Winnebago people through the paternalistic, assimilative, and racist language used.

Primary Source Documents Evaluated

Critical examination of the documents related to the Winnebago Nation reveals the complexity of Winnebago people's relationships and responses to treaty negotiation, removal, allotment, and assimilation policy. Without a critical analysis, the biases and assumptions in these documents would only provide an one-sided narrative of assimilation policy. Most primary source information is found in the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. These annual reports reveal changes the Indian Agent found on the reservation during their time managing the agency. Beyond the annual reports, other documents included agency records and correspondents. These reports also offer critical insight into the reasoning behind the decisions made on the reservation. Throughout all of these documents, their imperialistic and colonial language reveals the role of federal policy.

In addition, the treaties between the Winnebago Nation and the United States government physically acknowledge the expectations and agreements made. However, these treaties need to be analyzed critically because of the legacy of "broken treaties" between the United States and various Native nations.¹⁸⁸ Beyond this legacy, some treaties the Winnebago Nation signed illustrates the active involvement over their jurisdiction and self-determination. Overall, these treaties demonstrate the broader federal Indian policy at the time, especially the shift from removal to assimilation.

Allotment was not the only federal policy occurring at the time; Indian Boarding School experiences further complicated responses to allotment. Therefore, the examination of these

¹⁸⁸ Donna L. Akers, "Decolonizing the Master Narrative," 59.

schools reveals the invasive, paternalistic nature of federal Indian policy. In student files, Winnebago men and women told their stories in the graduation reports. In many instances, these documents provide basic information on property, marriage, and work. When given the opportunity to discuss “interesting facts,” these Winnebago alumni provided essential details about their lives, experiences, and responses to the current situations felt on their reservation. These reports assist in humanizing the clinical language found in agency reports and other documents. In addition, various boarding school newspapers, either run by the Native students or institutions, demonstrate the relationship between allotment and the boarding schools in furthering the goals of the federal assimilation policy. Through the multitude of documents and sources, a well-rounded examination of the Winnebago Nation’s complicated and varied responses and reactions to the allotting of their reservation in Nebraska.

Further research could devote time to integrating Nebraska newspapers, Industrial Reports, and census rolls. By examining these sources, more time could be in evaluating the relationships and responses between the white settlers in Nebraska and the Winnebago people. These newspapers also could reveal the general opinion of white settlers towards the Winnebago people. In combination with information gathered from the census rolls and these newspaper articles, specific Winnebago men and women can be traced throughout history. Information pulled from the Office of Indian Affairs Industrial Reports contextualizes family dynamics, households, property, and landowning. Therefore, further in depth analysis into these sources could further dismantle traditional binaries associated with Native American communities.

Reflecting on Winnebago Agency

From these distinct responses, Winnebago men and women, individually and collectively, asserted their autonomy and sovereignty in response to federal assimilation policies. These

responses connected with not just allotment policy, but rather the Indian boarding school system and other avenues of assimilation policy. By examining all responses, whether positive or negative, a more cumulative overview of the Winnebago people's responses becomes clearer. Responses were usually divided by gender, education, and generation. Winnebago women responded more personally while Winnebago men publicly responded. Even when these differing responses, the general pattern of gendered and generational opinions stayed consistent. Additionally, these responses varied based on a student's boarding school attendance. Through these boarding schools, both Winnebago men and women responded in more complex, often contradictory ways to assimilation. From examining the Winnebago people's responses to assimilation policy, the diverse, contradictory results dismantle dangerous binaries resulting from federal Indian policy.

This research, limited by resources and time, calls for scholars to examine the role of gender in work, culture, and adaptations to provide further context in understanding the responses of Winnebago people to federal policy. Additionally, examining the relationship between the Winnebago and Omaha Nations in regards to assimilation policy could offer further illumination on the Winnebago's responses. Research on the tactics Winnebago people historically used to retain their tribal sovereignty and agency further challenges harmful stereotypes and binaries surrounding Native American nations. Even today, Winnebago leaders continue to protect themselves and future generations through a multitude of projects, such as the Land Buy-Back Program funded by the Cobell lawsuit filed in 1996. Back in 2017, the Winnebago tribal council persuaded tribal members to sell personally owned property back to the nation in hopes of stopping further fractionalization of land. These Winnebago leaders hoped

to consolidate these tracts of land under tribal ownership and benefit the entire community.¹⁸⁹

Through their continued efforts, the Winnebago Nation pursues other projects to promote tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction threatened by assimilation policies. And today, Lance Morgan, CEO of Ho-Chunk Inc., co-established Big Fire Law & Policy Group LLP which focuses “exclusively on tribal issues.”¹⁹⁰ From efforts like these, the Winnebago Nation of Nebraska continues to be an example of political enguienty through the creation of programs and organizations to assert tribal jurisdiction and identity.

¹⁸⁹ Paul Hammel, “Winnebago and Omaha Indian Reservations Want to Buy Back Land from Tribe Members,” *Omaha World-Herald*, January 30, 2017.

¹⁹⁰ David Dreeszen, “Ho-Chunk’s Lance Morgan co-founds new Native law firm,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, April 3, 2019.

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