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## Carlisle Indian Industrial School

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# CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

*Series Editors*

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*University of New Mexico*

Brenda J. Child  
*University of Minnesota*

Karen Gayton Swisher  
*Haskell Indian Nations University*

John W. Tippeconnic III  
*The Pennsylvania State University*

# CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations

*Edited by Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose*

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS  
LINCOLN AND LONDON

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Set in Huronia by Rachel Gould.

We respectfully dedicate this book to all Carlisle Indian School students, their descendants, communities, and nations, and all indigenous peoples who have been affected by educational campaigns of cultural genocide.

*All royalties from this volume will be paid into the Carlisle Indian School Project Fund (housed at the Community Studies Center, Dickinson College) and will contribute to future Carlisle symposia and other events and projects (such as converting the Carlisle Farmhouse into a heritage center) that increase and disseminate knowledge of Indian boarding schools and preserve the memory of the students who attended Carlisle.*



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Thank you to the Ndé elders who permitted their people’s painful story to be filmed while it was still unfolding, and who then pressed for an event to be held in Carlisle after witnessing the powerful audience response to a screening of their story, *The Lost Ones*, at a Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference. They realized the time was right for these painful issues to be openly discussed and appraised. Thank you to members of the organizing committee, who responded so creatively to this call and who turned an intent into a reality (Jill Ahlberg-Yohe, Christopher Bilodeau, Joyce Bylander, Jacqueline Fear-Segal, Barbara Landis, Sharon O’Brien, Susan Rose, Stephanie Sellers, Dovie Thomason, and Malinda Triller Doran). Without funding, an event like the 2012 symposium cannot happen, so we want to thank the Central Pennsylvania Consortium (Dickinson, Franklin and Marshall, and Gettysburg Colleges) and the Department of American Studies, University of East Anglia, UK, for their generous support. We are very appreciative

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*JF-S and SDR*

# Introduction

JACQUELINE FEAR-SEGAL AND SUSAN D. ROSE

Close to midnight on October 5, 1879, a train drew into the railroad station in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, carrying eighty-two Lakota children from the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Indian Agencies in Dakota Territory. They were the first contingent of students sent to the newly opened Carlisle Indian School to be made the subjects of an educational experiment that would soon be extended to include Native nations across the United States and Canada.

The children had traveled over a thousand miles by river and rail, and this great distance was fundamental to Carlisle's mission. Capt. Richard Henry Pratt, the school's founder and first superintendent, was determined to remove Native children as far as possible from their families and communities, to strip them of all aspects of their traditional cultures, and to instruct them in the language, religion, behavior, and skills of mainstream white society. Pratt's objective was to prepare Native youth for assimilation and American citizenship. He insisted that in schools like Carlisle this transformation could be achieved in a generation. An acting army officer, Pratt had secured government support to establish and run this first federally funded, off-reservation Indian boarding school. Carlisle provided the blueprint for the federal Indian school system that would be organized across the United States, with twenty-four analogous military-style, off-reservation schools and similar boarding institutions on every reservation.

The federal government was entering the final stages of Native dispossession and North American conquest. By the time Carlisle opened its doors in 1879, most of the fighting was over. With Native nations now sequestered on reservations, Pratt and white Christian reformers, who called themselves "Friends of the Indian," presented the policy of education and assimilation as a more enlightened and humane way to solve the nation's intractable "Indian Problem." Yet the purpose of the educa-

tion campaign matched previous policies: dispossessing Native peoples of their lands and extinguishing their existence as distinct groups that threatened the nation-building project of the United States. These destructive objectives were effectively masked for the white public by a long-established American educational rhetoric that linked schooling to both democracy and individual advancement, and by a complementary and unquestioned commitment to the American republican experiment. Pratt's main task, therefore, was to convince white Americans that his mission to transform Native children from "savagery" to "civilization" was both desirable and possible.

For Native communities Pratt's experiment at Carlisle initiated processes of diaspora, dislocation, and rupture deeper and more profound than he envisaged. These processes had many immediate impacts as well as long-term legacies. For all Native nations, physical and spiritual well-being was anchored not just within their communities, but also within the environment and land that surrounded them. When Native children were transported hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of miles to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, they were subjected to a strict "civilizing" program to strip them of their cultures; they were also forced to live in an alien place devoid of vital and familiar cultural, spiritual, and geographical markers as well as the support and succor of kin and community.

Thousands of Native children and youth would follow that first group from Dakota over the next forty years, transported from Indian agencies across the continent on rail networks that built and connected the markets of the United States. The vast majority did not assimilate into mainstream society as Pratt had envisioned but instead returned to their reservation homes, often feeling caught between two cultures. Only 758 of over 10,500 students who were enrolled at Carlisle ever graduated. Some found the school traumatic and begged to go home or ran away; others completed their Carlisle schooling but lived with stress and disturbance upon their return.

A well-known account of the difficulties many returned Carlisle students faced is that of Plenty Horses, who returned to Dakota Territory after attending Carlisle from 1883 to 1888: "There was no chance to get employment, nothing for me to do whereby I could earn my board and clothes, no opportunity to learn more and remain with the whites. It dis-

heartened me and I went back to live as I had before going to school.” Plenty Horses struggled when he returned home, trying to find his place among his people, having been stripped of his native language and cultural traditions. As historian Philip J. Deloria notes, Plenty Horses missed out—as did most of the students—on the essential teachings of his Lakota education that takes place for young people between the ages of fourteen and nineteen.<sup>1</sup> He was acutely aware of the cultural genocide that was being inflicted on his people, and upon return home Plenty Horses grew his hair long, wore traditional dress, and participated in the Ghost Dance.

Plenty Horses was there on the Pine Ridge Reservation when the bodies of Lakota men, women, and children were dug from the snow and buried in a mass grave after the massacre at Wounded Knee. Nine days after this December 29th killing, on January 7, 1891, he joined some other forty warriors who accompanied Sioux leaders to meet with army lieutenant Edward W. Casey for possible negotiations. It was there that Plenty Horses shot and killed Casey. During his trial, he said: “Five years I attended Carlisle and was educated in the ways of the white man. When I returned to my people, I was an outcast among them. I was no longer an Indian. I was not a white man. I was lonely. I shot the lieutenant so I might make a place for myself among my people. I am now one of them. I shall be hung, and the Indians will bury me as a warrior.”<sup>2</sup> In the end Plenty Horses was not convicted of murder and was released. In order to exonerate the soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry who conducted the massacre at Wounded Knee, the lawyers and eventually the judge declared that a state of war had existed.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that all of the students at Carlisle had negative experiences. There is evidence in the accounts of some students and their descendants that they made good use of their Carlisle education. And many former students wrote to Carlisle to ask if their children could be enrolled. It seems too that Pratt was a complex man, able to win the loyalty and lasting support of some students. When he died in 1924, his status as an army officer meant he could be buried in Arlington Cemetery, and the words inscribed on his gravestone indicate that some Carlisle students contributed to it: “Erected in loving memory by his students and other Indians.” Although the stories of Carlisle and its legacies are complex, the sources through which these can be tracked are very one-sided

because the official record was created and preserved by white officials. Some student letters have survived in the Carlisle archive, but very few students left any other written record.<sup>4</sup> Those who did wrote mostly for school publications that were under the scrutiny of white editors. On their return home, many students did not speak about their experiences, but stories that were told and passed down the generations orally often remained closely guarded within the communities; for understandable reasons they are not widely accessible. Yet it is an indisputable fact that the Indian School initiated a large-scale diaspora of Native children, and that the geo-spatial-cultural dislocation they experienced as part of settler colonialism was grounded in a new and foreign place-name that would soon become infamous in all Native communities as a major site of cultural genocide: Carlisle.

For N. Scott Momaday, the Kiowa writer, artist, and Pulitzer Prize winner, the name Carlisle carries a historical significance parallel to Gettysburg and Wounded Knee within America's national memory and history: "Carlisle, in a more subtle and obscure story than that of Gettysburg, is a place-name among place-names on a chronological map that spans time and the continent." It was in recognition of this vital importance of Carlisle in the context of Native and U.S. history that in October 2012 a symposium—"Carlisle PA: Site of Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations"—was organized and held at Dickinson College located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This remarkable event brought some 290 people to Carlisle, over half of whom were Native, representing thirty-six tribal nations.<sup>5</sup> The organizing committee wanted to create a space for descendants, storytellers, poets, musicians, oral historians, and academics to share their knowledge, stories, and perspectives about the history and legacy of Carlisle as the model for off-reservation boarding schools and Indian education. For the first time ever, Native and non-Native scholars, leaders, artists, descendants, teachers, students, and community members gathered together in the town of Carlisle, just two miles from the surviving buildings of the Indian School, to remember, explore, discuss, and evaluate this pioneering and influential institution (1879–1918).

The symposium proved to be much more than an academic conference: it became a gathering. Presentations were multigenre and included poems, memory pieces, academic analyses, stories, prayers, and songs, which

encompassed and expressed multiple perspectives about Carlisle. It was a powerful experience for many; as one participant wrote: “Because of the non-academic, native structure and sessions, mingling stories with poems with videos with papers with the most heart-felt audience response I’ve ever seen, this symposium engaged us all as whole people: mind, heart, and spirit. Several attendees and participants spoke of “healing” as a process that took place during it, and I think that process was connected with the creation of a safe and native ‘space’ that was both physical and emotional.”

This collection stands as the published legacy of the symposium, bringing together a range of work presented by participants that together exemplifies the importance of researching, remembering, discussing, interpreting, and assessing the complex legacies of the Carlisle Indian School within its wider historical context.

### History of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879–1918)

Carlisle is a major site of memory for Native peoples across the nation and in other countries, such as Canada, whose residential schools embraced both its philosophy and curriculum. Although for many, detailed knowledge and memories of Carlisle and their connections to it have been lost or deliberately erased, the name “Carlisle” still resonates in every Native community. During its thirty-nine-year history, over 10,500 students from almost every Native nation in the United States (as well as Puerto Rico) were enrolled at Carlisle. The first were deliberately recruited from tribes regarded by the government as militarily troublesome: Lakotas, Kiowas, Cheyennes. In some cases leaders and parents were persuaded to send their children to Carlisle, thinking it might provide them with a good education and so benefit their people when negotiating with whites. For other children, less choice and more coercion were involved; some were sent to Carlisle as prisoners of war.

Pratt’s goal was to recruit students from every Indian agency, to universalize his experiment, and to facilitate the simultaneous obliteration of all Native cultures; at Carlisle, students were rarely placed with a roommate from the same nation, so they would be forced to speak English. Young people were brought from all over the country: California and the Carolinas, New Mexico and New York, Arizona and Alaska; the nations

sending the highest number of children were the Sioux (Lakotas, Nakotas, and Dakotas) and the Chippewa (Ojibwes). Carlisle students were enrolled initially for a period of three to five years. Most did not return home during that time, and many spent far longer at Carlisle. Pratt's goal was to immerse them in the dominant white Anglo-Saxon mainstream culture. Speaking to a convention of Baptist ministers in 1883, he used the image of baptism to explain his philosophy for transforming Native children so they could be made to emulate white men and women: "In Indian civilization I am a Baptist, because I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked."<sup>6</sup>

The force and suggestion of drowning contained in Pratt's metaphor were not accidental; he believed every necessary measure should be taken to impose "civilization" through total immersion. His slogan was: "To civilize the Indian, get him into civilization. To keep him civilized, let him stay."<sup>7</sup> And this was the rationale for his "Outing" program. Almost all Carlisle students experienced multiple dislocations when, instead of returning home for the summers, they were sent "Out" into local communities to work for white families, typically as farmhands or maids. Some stayed Out much longer and even attended local schools. Yet even after spending many years in the East, most Carlisle students eventually returned home to their reservations. Many were caught between worlds, cultures, and languages. Cut off from the nurture of tradition, family, and community, they experienced a rupture in their affiliations, affections, and identities. For many this began a legacy of trauma and disenfranchisement that would be passed down the generations.

The federal government's support for Carlisle signaled its new and growing involvement in Indian education. Previously, Indian schools had been run by missionaries, with the emphasis on conversion. With Native nations in the West suffering progressive military defeat and their lands now forcibly incorporated within U.S. geographical boundaries, officials in Washington sought an effective way to break the intimate bonds that tied Native children to their communities, cultures, and homelands and to substitute a new loyalty to the American nation.

Prior to founding the Carlisle Indian School, Capt. Richard Henry Pratt had spent three years at Fort Marion, Florida (1875–78) guarding a group

of imprisoned leaders and warriors from defeated tribes in the Southwest: Cheyennes, Kiowas, Comanches, Arapahos, and one Caddo. In a makeshift fortress school many of the young men learned to read and write, leading Pratt to conclude that education could provide the solution to the nation's "Indian problem." After they were released, Pratt took twenty-two of the younger Fort Marion prisoners to Hampton Institute, Virginia, to continue their education. But Hampton had been established as a school for black freedmen, and Pratt was loath to have Indians associated with the racial stigma suffered by African Americans. Besides, he wanted his own school, so he requested permission from the secretary of the interior, Carl Schurz, to found a school exclusively for Indians: "Give me 300 young Indians and a place in one of our best communities and let me prove it is easy to give Indian youth the English language, education, and industries that it is imperative they have in preparation for citizenship. Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania has been abandoned for a number of years. It is in a fine agricultural country and the inhabitants are kindly disposed and long free from the universal border prejudice against Indians."<sup>8</sup>

Federal officials in Washington readily granted permission for the disused barracks to be transferred from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior. The rationale for choosing cultural rather than physical genocide was that it was more humane as well as economically pragmatic. Secretary of the Interior Schurz concluded that it would cost a million dollars to kill an Indian in warfare, whereas it cost only \$1,200 to school an Indian child for eight years. Likewise, a later secretary of the interior, Henry Teller, argued that it would cost \$22 million to wage war against Indians over a ten-year period, but it would cost less than a quarter of that amount to educate thirty thousand children for a year.<sup>9</sup> As David Wallace Adams argued in his classic *Education for Extinction*: "For tribal elders who had witnessed the catastrophic developments of the nineteenth century. . . . There seemed to be no end to the cruelties perpetrated by whites. And after all this, the schools. After all this, the white man had concluded that the only way to save Indians was to destroy them, that the last great Indian war should be waged against children. They were coming for the children."<sup>10</sup>

So in 1879 the Carlisle Barracks was reopened as an Indian School, with 120 federally funded Indian students from the West. This was the

very site where the U.S. Army had trained the U.S. Cavalry (1838–71), which had recently enforced American settlement of the western part of the continent, fought the nations of the Indian students, and seized Native lands, incorporating them into the United States. There was a cruel irony in Pratt's choice of Carlisle as the site for the Indian School, because his reassurance to Carl Schurz at the Department of the Interior that "the inhabitants are kindly disposed and long free from the universal border prejudice against Indians"<sup>11</sup> neglected to mention that Carlisle was historically a key location for launching the Indian wars west of the Susquehanna River.

Established in 1751 at the intersection of Indian trails along Letort Creek, the town of Carlisle became the jumping-off point for traders and settlers heading over the Alleghenies on their way west. And as settler pressure and global conflict between England and France gave birth to the French and Indian War (1754–63), Carlisle became home to an extremely important military post, the Carlisle Barracks established in 1757. After the Revolutionary War, from 1783 to 1837, the town of Carlisle was still significant as the "frontier" gateway to the West.

Later, from 1838 until 1871, the Carlisle Barracks became the U.S. Army Cavalry School used to train officers and soldiers to fight in the Indian-American wars. When fighting moved further across the Plains, General Sherman moved the cavalry school to St. Louis. By 1879 the Carlisle Barracks appeared the perfect location for Pratt's experiment in cultural transformation. Empty, located in a quiet, rural, white community in an area that had thoroughly cleansed itself of original inhabitants a century earlier (for details, see chapter 2),<sup>12</sup> the barracks were only a short railroad ride from government powerbrokers in Washington DC and also close to wealthy eastern donors. In short, the school's eastern location was vital to both its educational philosophy and its visibility. Using the campus as a showcase, Pratt delighted in inviting congressmen and benefactors to Carlisle to witness the students working in classrooms and trade shops and marching in their uniforms on the parade ground to the beat of the school's military band.

From the start he was acutely alert to the promotional powers offered by the new medium of photography, and he worked closely with local photographer John Nicholas Choate to create visual "proof" of his experi-

ment's success. These photographs, when displayed in school publications and sold as boudoir and cabinet cards, meant that thousands of Americans who never set foot in Carlisle became familiar with images of apparently civilized and educated Indian children. From the day the first students were brought in, Pratt made them subjects of the camera's lens, which recorded their arrival in traditional clothing with moccasins and feathers and subsequent transformations into scrubbed, brushed, uniformed Carlisle students. With cropped hair, tidy uniforms, and skin that was photographically enhanced to look whiter, the assumption was that these external changes had been matched by a parallel intellectual and moral transformation. The photographs were used to garner support for the school and substantiate Pratt's claim that "savage" Indians could indeed be "civilized," a radical idea for many Americans just three years after the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

During his time as superintendent (1879–1904) Pratt made the Carlisle campus a stage on which to present Indians living and working in a "contemporary" environment. New and modernized buildings and the installation of a sophisticated heating and lighting system contributed to his strategy of demonstrating to whites that Indians were fully capable of taking their place in modern America. As Deloria notes, the image of the "savage" Indian so prevalently promoted in previous years was replaced with the notion of the less threatening, "docile, pacified Indians" on their way to civilization.<sup>13</sup> Pratt took every opportunity to make strategic public displays of Carlisle students. The Carlisle band played at the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, a contingent of students was sent to march at the Chicago 1893 World's Fair, and individual students whom Pratt regarded as exemplary were given posts where their so-called progress could be observed. A graphic example of this is given by Carlisle student Luther Standing Bear, who recounts how when he was sent to work at Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, he was placed on open display in the store while he was pricing jewelry: "So every day I was locked inside this little glass house, opening the trunks, taking out the jewels and putting price tags on them. How the white folks did crowd around to watch me! They were greatly surprised that John Wanamaker could trust an Indian boy with such valuables."<sup>14</sup>

Pratt's dismissal in 1904 signaled the start of an era when the viability

of the Carlisle experiment would be increasingly brought into question. The expense of running a boarding school located in the East had always been a contentious issue, and it became increasingly controversial. Accompanied by the eugenics movement that promoted the “science” of racial inferiority, there was a growing doubt, even among American reformers, that Indians were capable of taking their place as equal to whites within the nation. Most important of all, the passage of the Dawes Allotment Act in 1887 had guaranteed that the vast Native homelands of the West could gradually and “legally” be transferred into white settler ownership. Native peoples were no longer a threat to nation building. Within a short decade, 1889–96, the West had entered the Union as seven new states: North and South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah. In response to the new situation, the turn of the century ushered in a change of policy in Washington. The goal of rapid assimilation, fiercely championed at Carlisle and closely linked to the perceived need to subjugate Native peoples and possess their lands, was replaced by a national Indian schooling program with a slower pace, more lowly ambitions, and requiring a much smaller budget. Reservation schools, teaching a simple and basic curriculum, were now deemed to be the best way to accommodate Indian “incapacities.” The campaign for Indian citizenship was suspended.

Pratt was unwavering in his views and opinions, which ran contrary to this new course. After his dismissal Carlisle was run by a series of four superintendents—Capt. William A. Mercer (1904–8), Moses Friedman (1908–14), Oscar Lipps (1914–17), and John Francis Jr. (1917–18)—with varying degrees of success. A Senate investigation (1913–14), precipitated by the petitioning efforts of students led by Gus Welch (Anishanaabe), drew public attention to abuses and serious mismanagement at the school as well as the excessive attention and power accorded to the athletes. Carlisle’s philosophy and mission were already being questioned, and the Senate investigation brought its educational procedures and practices into open and public disrepute. Out of favor and in decline, the Carlisle Indian School finally closed its doors in 1918. The War Department immediately reclaimed the Carlisle Barracks for use as a rehabilitation hospital for wounded soldiers from World War I (General Hospital 31). After the war the Carlisle Barracks housed the Medical Field Service School, and

from 1946 until 1951 no fewer than six army schools were briefly located there. In 1951 the War College, the senior educational institution of the U.S. Army, relocated to Carlisle to begin the latest stage of the post's history.

During these years the surviving buildings from the Indian school were put to new and different purposes. As the campus developed, the school cemetery was seen by army officials as an obstruction to its expansion and was removed to a new and smaller plot on the outer perimeter of the post (1927). Just as the buildings and campus of the Carlisle Indian School were being rapidly changed and subsumed by the activities of the army schools, so too the reality of the Indian School faded in local historical memory. On Indian reservations across the United States, however, among Native descendants, families, and communities, the traumatic legacies of Carlisle and the boarding school experiment it spearheaded continued to have an enduring impact whether spoken of or silenced.

Reflecting on the impact of boarding schools, in 2013 attorneys for the Native American Rights Legal Fund wrote:

Cut off from their families and culture, the children were punished for speaking their Native languages, banned from conducting traditional or cultural practices, shorn of traditional clothing and identity of their Native cultures, taught that their cultures and traditions were evil and sinful, and that they should be ashamed of being Native American. Placed often far from home, they were frequently neglected or abused physically, sexually, and psychologically. Generations of these children became the legacy of the federal boarding school policy. They returned to their communities, not as the Christianized farmers that the boarding school policy envisioned, but as deeply scarred humans lacking the skills, community, parenting, extended family, language, and cultural practices of those raised in their cultural context.<sup>15</sup>

When the Carlisle Indian School closed its doors a century ago (1918), the institutions it spawned and its resolve to obliterate Native cultures did not die with it. In the United States, despite a brief period of apparent if romanticized respect shown Native cultures during the 1930s, the post-World War II years witnessed renewed federal determination to terminate tribal sovereignty and assimilate all Indians into the mainstream. In the

face of threats to both community and culture, the boarding school memories of many survivors remained silenced and hidden. However, the late 1960s marked the beginning of a new era of Native cultural and political renaissance and resistance. This was signaled by the political activism first demonstrated at Alcatraz by the Indians of All Tribes (1969) and paralleled in literature by N. Scott Momaday's publication of *House Made of Dawn*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize (1969), and the beginning of what is described as a Native American Renaissance.<sup>16</sup> In Native communities across America, however, it would take time and courage to allow information and stories about Carlisle and its institutional legacy to surface and become acknowledged as part of a shared and painful intertribal and intercultural history. Slowly survivors, descendants, and the wider Native community began openly to address and claim these historical experiences and confront their enduring legacies as well as those responsible for implementing them.

In 2011 a coalition of indigenous groups organized the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) to document "through research and oral history the extensive abuses that go beyond individual casualties to disruption of Indigenous life at every level."<sup>17</sup> In *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz recounts the story that Sun Elk, the first child from the Taos Pueblo to attend the Carlisle Indian School (1883–90), tells about how lessons taught at Carlisle affected him on his return to Taos society:

They told us that Indian ways were bad. They said we must get civilized. I remember that word too. It means 'be like the white man.' I am willing to be like the white man, but I did not believe the Indian ways were wrong. But they kept teaching us for seven years. And the books told how bad the Indians had been to the white men—burning their towns and killing their women and children. But I had seen white men do that to Indians. We all wore white man's clothes and ate white man's food and went to white man's churches and spoke white man's talk. And so after a while we also began to say Indians were bad. We laughed at our own people and their blankets and cooking pots and sacred societies and dances.<sup>18</sup>