

**Instrumental Indians:  
John Dewey and the Problem of the Frontier for Democracy  
in Indian Education, 1884-1959**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom and Dad, the first teachers I ever had.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was said that John Dewey once gestured at a clutch of his students and proclaimed, “Let some of these young men explain me: it will make a career for them.”<sup>1</sup> This dissertation-length explanation of Dewey from the perspective of Indigenous history is my attempt to do just that. It has proven to be no small endeavor; in fact, it took me so long to pull it off that I’m not confident I can count myself as among the “young” any longer (and perhaps if you choose to read this lengthy treatment cover-to-cover, neither will you). One thing I have learned along the way is that a dissertation, like any good explanation of a complex subject, is rarely constructed alone. Though I am fortunate that this project has, in fact, played a part in making a career for me, it has been the thoughtful contributions of colleagues, friends, and family to my life over the last six years which have made this inquiry really meaningful.

I am extremely grateful to a number of people for their contributions to, criticism of, and sometimes distraction from, this dissertation. My project began back in 2012, when I was working to complete my final term as a history and philosophy double major as an undergraduate at the University of Oregon. This education was made possible, first and foremost, by my parents’ financial support and personal encouragement. In fact, when I had first come to Eugene from my hometown of Sammamish, Washington, I took an adolescent interest in history derived from my dad with me. It only took two weeks at the university before I declared myself a history major. (Thank you, Mom and Dad.) I became fascinated by how historians had to carefully

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<sup>1</sup> Irwin Edman, *John Dewey, His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York; Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. 1955), 24.

weigh contingency and determinism, events and structures, power and silence, and then present their findings in sophisticated yet engaging narrative form. I marveled at the enterprise of communing with people, places, and times so distant and different from my own; I enjoyed being an empirical investigator in a field in which research was ultimately expressed in stories. I had benefitted from the support of Professors Ian McNeely, Jim Mohr, Alex Dracobly, and, above all, my mentor in the history department, student housing, and in all things academic, Prof. Kevin Hatfield. It was Hatfield's example that compelled me to think seriously about a career in history as a form of anti-colonial praxis. Thank you to the historians who advocated for this understanding of the profession.

As my time at Oregon wore on, I also began taking philosophy courses on a lark. Almost immediately, a new passion was kindled. I was immediately gripped by the depth and vitality of the questions posed and entertained (but rarely answered) by philosophers. I enjoyed the twists and turns in philosophical argument, the sometimes mind-bending insights that were often the bread-and-butter of the field, and the intractable terminus of uncertainty where so many paths of exploration often led. Ethics, epistemology, and the varied conceptions of the self were particularly flooring. Move over history! I quickly cleared a path in my schedule for a second major.

I had the good fortune of studying with a little pocket of philosophers who shared a mutual interest in American pragmatism, and in particular, John Dewey. For example, Prof. Mark Johnson, a philosopher of epistemology, language, and ethics, assigned us Dewey's 1925 *Experience and Nature* (which, perhaps taking the title a bit too literally, I consumed mostly outdoors, surroundings which, I must say, proved conducive for on-boarding the thesis). I found that Dewey's account of experience, not as a layer of mediation that veiled the world to those

that would know it, but rather as an embedded feature of nature churned up through human interaction with it, to be quite compelling. I also took courses with Prof. Stephen Brence, a philosopher of politics, culture, and logic. Brence had us reading Dewey's 1930 *Individualism Old and New* alongside the writings of the Frankfurt School, calling for a reconceptualization of American individuality for a new era of mass association. And then there was Prof. Scott Pratt, a philosopher of race, gender, and education. I left Pratt's class on logic with a new understanding of Dewey's call for an ethos of experimentation in all things and an appreciation of science not as an institution, but as a way of being in the world. I owe these philosophers a large debt of gratitude for their inspired instruction.

My friends, however, probably think a little differently about that. Nearly ten years on, I want to offer a profound apology to the many innocent bystanders who have since suffered through many one-sided conversations about the nature of experience over a shared meal, in a shared office, or accidentally sharing the seat next to me on the airplane. Despite my incessant ramblings, a number of my peers at Oregon have inexplicably remained a stalwart part of my life, both personally and professionally. This includes my good friends Lindsay Mayer, Bri Eamons, Suzie Stadelman, and honorary Oregonian and Dewey enthusiast Tara Keegan. No accounting of my Oregon debts would be complete without mention of the incomparable Shiva Ramachandran, Lilli Tichinin, and Kevin Silagi, three people whom I love and whose friendships (which have spanned hundreds of miles across the West to East Coasts of the North American continent) have meant the world to me. The Silagis remain the closest thing I have to a second family.

Additionally, much of my family in Oregon—both the Villeneuves and the Spragues—have supported me in writing this dissertation. This includes my Papa Bill Sprague, a great

champion of my study of history since middle school; my Aunt Anne, for sharing her genealogical work; and my great auntie Dottie Edy, for telling me all about her childhood in Neche, North Dakota, and my great-grandfather Joseph. I think fondly on my memory of my grandmother, Clara Semolke Villeneuve, who passed during the pandemic of 2020. I am especially grateful for our time together conducting an oral history of our family during her birthday. Thank you to all of my Oregonians who have held me down during the writing of this dissertation.

When I left Oregon in 2012, I applied to PhD programs, but due to the vagaries of the application cycle, I had the uncertain fortune of attending the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences (MAPSS) at the University of Chicago. My time as a graduate student at Chicago proved to be a rewarding, trying, and ultimately galvanizing experience, thanks to the kind advising of Prof. Amy K. D. Lippert and the fellowship of my good friends and trivia partners Madison Lyleroehr and Connor Stangler. While I will be content if I simply make it to the Big Leagues of the profession, I know Connor is well on his way to a hall of fame-worthy career as a historian.

It was during my time in Chicago that I also first (virtually) encountered Phil Deloria. Back in Oregon, Kevin Hatfield had brought Phil to campus and had recommended I watch a livestream of the event. Phil's cheerful countenance on that stage was paired with his damning documentation of the American obsession with the most denigrating representations of Indigenous people throughout history. It took about twenty minutes watching Phil's talk before I decided I wanted to try to study with him. Phil's work was a model of the kind of scholarship I aspired to, but more importantly, a model of the kind of scholar I wanted to be. I will be eternally thankful that Phil decided to roll the dice on my application and agree to advise this wacky

Dewey project and its odd connection to his dad, because it made everything else possible. Bless you for making that bet, Phil. I promise I'll pay it forward.

And so, after writing an application from the basement of Janet and Gordon Pearson's house in Seattle (thank you for putting me up for a spell!), I landed in Ann Arbor and began six years of doctoral training at the University of Michigan. First and foremost, I want to thank every member of the 2015 cohort, including Aiden Osgood, Alex McConnell, Fusheng Luo, Kristin Conner, Matt Hershey, Meenu Deswal, Omri Senderowicz, Roxana Aras, Salem Elzway, Sangita Saha, Sauda Nabukenya, Sikandar Kumar, Tara Weinberg, and Zach Kopin. Elena Rosario and Nicole Navarro were irreplaceable, as they helped me to get my bearings on life in graduate school. Tay, Reagan (and Eleanor) Sims were thoughtful friends throughout, and Tay, I'll collaborate with you and that legendary planner of yours on anything, anytime, anywhere. Hayley Bowman was my favorite gamer, and the murder mystery party we designed for Halloween that sought to expose the horrific murder of Carl Marks will remain a true highlight of my time in Michigan. Hannah Roussel and Emily Lamond have been equally playful, and in the long march of professionalism and serious scholarly posturing of graduate school, the Longsaddle Adventure Company—featuring the variably spelled personages of Kyndara, Mimi, Mariyam, and Kalina and their disruption of the most magically evil academic conference ever convened on this side of Faerun—was a refuge of creativity and silliness that will always hold a special place in my heart.

Of course, I would also like to acknowledge a large number of faculty who worked with me during my time in Ann Arbor, including Profs. Stephen Berrey, Sueann Caulfield, Kathleen Canning, John Carson, Joshua Cole, Matthew Countryman, Will Glover, Farina Mir, Matt Lassiter, and Kate Wroblewski. I especially appreciate Prof. Howie Brick and Perrin Selcer for



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I particularly appreciate the cluster of scholars in Native studies that bridged history and American culture during my time at Michigan, including Profs. Greg Dowd, Tiya Miles, Michael Witgen, Joe Gone, and Bethany Hughes. I am very grateful to anyone and everyone who volunteered to work as a part of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Interdisciplinary Group (NAISIG) and who gathered under its auspices, including a regular cast of characters such as Sophie Hunt, Walker Elliott, Steve Pelletier, Mallory Whiteduck, and Kris Klein Hernandez.

Beyond Ann Arbor, I had the good fortune to encounter some wonderful mentors and colleagues in and adjacent to Native history through conferences and panels, including Profs. K. T. Lomawaima, Matthew T. Gilbert, David W. Adams, Kevin Whalen, and Daniel Perlstein, and my co-panelists, co-authors, and all-around co-conspirators, including Aglėška R. Cohen-Rencountre, Beth Eby, Katie Kelliaa, Preston McBride, Meredith McCoy and Sasha Marie

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Naturally, I am particularly in the debt of those who read my work and offered feedback as it morphed in to various iterations over six years. I would like to thank those members of the Michigan dissertation workshop, including Daniela Sheinin, John Finkelberg, and David Lawrence Hutchinson, whose commitment to improving the quality of life in our departmental community will always inspire me and who will be sorely missed. At Harvard, I benefitted from the thoughtful feedback of the 20th Century United States History Reading Group, which included Arlaine Lazias, Dylan Nelson, Erica Sterling, Jake Anbinder, Jess Carbone, Kristin Oberiano, Lisa McGirr, Liz Cohen, Maddie Williams, Robin McDowell, and Tina Wei. Matthew Spellberg, along with Maggie Spivey-Faulkner, gave me the most loquacious and impossible-to-live-up-to introduction as part of the Native Cultures of the Americas Seminar. A shout out to those who helped me find the materials upon which this work is based, including Connie Foley (Fenton Historical Society), Rose Buchanan (National Archives in Washington, DC), Leo Belleville (National Archives in Chicago), Nicholas Guardiano (Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library), and Cinda Nofziger (Bentley Historical Library). And of course, a special thank you to the members of my committee, Profs. Phil Deloria, Greg Dowd, Elizabeth Anderson, and Henry Cowles, for their excellent blend of benign neglect and insightful on-demand feedback that allowed me to flourish. I apologize that I've repaid your kindness by inflicting this overly long dissertation on you.

Speaking of inflicting myself on important people, I want to acknowledge my closest friends in Michigan whose support enabled me to keep up a steady head of steam on this project over the last three years, especially during the worst of COVID-19. To everyone who made my

Golden Birthday so memorable with brilliant photos, silly signs, and socially distant games, I salute you. I will forever be grateful to the gaggle of friendly faces in this cavalcade, including Bri Gauger and Brett Smith, Sev Scott, Meg Showalter, and Liz Ratzloff and her wonderful union, GEO. The sociologists who managed to fade seamlessly into this crew, Luis Flores, Gio Román-Torres, and Erin Ice (and honorary sociologist Sebi Schoneich) helped me stay grounded during a difficult time. Alicia Maans was a wonderful eleventh-hour addition to this troupe. I want to thank you all for getting me through the last year. Your smiling faces kept me going, even under all those face masks.

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Finally, some of my most important relationships that offered a foundation for success in graduate school predate the intellectual trajectory of my project altogether. I have been fortunate to have wonderful friends from as early as Christa McAuliffe Elementary School and Eastlake High School, such as Jessie Cao, Nikki Trabue, and CJ and Shelby Best, whose homes have been welcome ports in the storm during the last six years (a particularly tempestuous stretch of U.S. history from 2016 to 2020). I am so appreciative of the almost daily fellowship of The Grateful Thread, a virtual lifeboat crewed by Justin Lewis and James Rosenzweig, who have both suffered unhinged rants, puns of the lowest caliber, and less-than-voluntary exercises in paleography at my hands. As an academic librarian, James has found so many important primary sources for this dissertation that he probably merits not only a co-author credit but an honorary degree, and Justin has been helpful in his own ways (which, like God, can be rather mysterious, but generally involves WRITING IN ALL CAPS).

In the end, I return to where this all began: my family. To them I want to say that as much as I joked about self-obsolence over the last few years, I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't think it mattered. "Intelligent understanding of past history is to some extent a lever for moving the present into a certain kind of future," John Dewey wrote in *Logic: A Theory of Inquiry*. "Men are engaged neither in mechanical transposition of the conditions they have inherited, nor yet in simply preparing for something to come after. They have their own problems to solve; their own adaptations to make." It is my aspiration that whatever career I may make of this history business, it will ultimately be in the service of leveraging a better future for our family and the communities in which we are woven. To my Villeneuve family, from Albert, born in 1851, to Everly, born in 2021, and everyone in between, including Jordan, Colleen, Grant, Andrew, Valerie, Kim and Tim Villeneuve, *miigwetch*.

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## NOTE ON LANGUAGE

I employ a number of terms in this dissertation as if on a spectrum of proximity from imagined Indians to actual American Indian people. On one end of the spectrum is the term *Indian*, which I principally use when I mean to invoke how people in the United States imaginatively rendered American Indian people as racialized Others through what I call a frontier discourse. As the term “Indian” can also refer to a political consciousness (a subjectivity that was forming amongst American Indian people from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, during the period which this dissertation covers), I use the term *Native* as a sort of interstitial moniker, sometimes invoked by non-Natives but increasingly used by American Indians, when I mean to refer to this growing political and cultural realization. Finally, following Eva Garroutte’s concept of radical indigeneity, I use the term *Indigenous* to describe ways of being which American Indian people construct from their own cultural and political identities.

When hailing actual Native nations—such as Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadomi—I rely wherever possible on spellings that are distinct from their more common names (e.g., Chippewa, Ottawa, Pottawatomie), reserving these latter terms for the occasions when they were described by non-Natives, including in treaties. Acknowledging that race is a socially contingent formation that requires ideological maintenance (often through the appropriation of “Indian”), I capitalize the term *White*. Otherwise, I use the term *Euro-American* when referring to non-Native people who have settled on Indigenous land and whose descendants constitute the polity that their ancestors first erected upon that land, the United States of America.

## ABSTRACT

Since the historiographical innovations of the New Indian History of the 1990s, a variety of biographers, educators, and philosophers have increasingly observed that John Dewey's pragmatism—a method he called experimentalism—shares many resonances with Indigenous thought. Some of these interpretations not only posit a convergence, but frame pragmatism itself as a product of intellectual exchanges between Euro-Americans and Indigenous people. Relying principally on philosophical analysis, this genealogy accounts for its reputation as a distinctly American philosophy.

Contrary to this body of scholarship, this dissertation is an intellectual history that examines the philosophy of John Dewey through the lens of Indigenous history. It reconstructs the *fin-de-siècle* popular culture of the Great Lakes to argue that in the formative years of his career, Dewey became immersed in a frontier discourse, a discursive formation constituted by a vocabulary of savagery, the ideology of the vanishing Indian, and Frederick J. Turner's frontier thesis. This frontier discourse represented Indigenous people as savage foils and background actors in the history of the development of democracy in the United States. Long after he moved to New York, Dewey found great utility in Indians rendered through this frontier discourse to refine core concepts of his method of experimentalism that will be familiar to Dewey scholars, including pedagogical play, experimental intelligence, and problematic situations. Consequently, Indians became both *instrumental* and *instrumentalized* in Dewey's philosophy, a pattern where the pragmatist invoked Indians as important evidence for his philosophy rather than as a

contemporary constituency who might have benefited from its application in their ongoing struggle for self-determination in education.

This dissertation concludes that rather than promote self-determination in education for Indigenous people, Dewey's philosophy, especially in the hands of Euro-American educators during his own lifetime, functioned instead as an accessory to the anti-democratic schooling imposed on the education of hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children from the Great Lakes to Hawai'i. "Instrumental Indians" consequently offers a cautionary tale about the method by which treatments of Dewey's experimentalism and Indigenous thought are rendered; portrays Indigenous intellectuals such as Andrew J. Blackbird and Charles A. Eastman as befitting consideration as experimentalists in their own right; and ultimately disrupts commonly held ideas about the democratic quality of schooling by centering Indigenous people in the history of ideas about education and its relationship to democracy in United States.

## INTRODUCTION:

### Convergence

On October 31, 1900, a man named Francis A. Hart wrote a letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs William A. Jones in Washington, DC. “I have been requested to write to you relative to some children who are at the Indian School at Morris Minnesota,” Hart’s letter begins. “They are the children of Albert Villeneuve ... of Nече, North Dakota. Their names are Joseph, Mary, and Henry Villeneuve.” Hart testified in his letter that Albert and another concerned parent had visited the school and now “demanded that their children be returned home.” When Albert “Corbett” Villeneuve’s request had been denied by the school’s superintendent, he had come to Hart to get him to pen a letter to Washington, DC. Hart made it clear to Commissioner Jones that Villeneuve meant business: “I expect to meet our U.S. senator this week and get him interested in the matter. Let me hear from you at once.”<sup>1</sup>

Albert “Corbett” Villeneuve was my great-great-grandfather, and his son who attended the Morris Indian School was my great-grandfather, Joseph Villeneuve. Corbett’s father, Francois Villeneuve, was born in 1813. He had worked as a French-Canadian middleman, laborer, and freeman for the Hudson Bay Company by 1833. In the 1830s he married Helene Vallee, a *Métis* woman living near Winnipeg. For decades the Villeneuves lived between Winnipeg and Pembina, where they had made a living as part of the Red River cart trade. Their son Albert “Corbett” was born 1851. Not long after, the family was caught up in the Red River

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<sup>1</sup> Francis A. Hart to William A. Jones, October 31, 1900 (5434); Box 1851, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1881-1907, Record Group 75; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.





Figure I.1. Joseph and Mary Villeneuve with their younger children, North Dakota, ca. 1943, author's collection. Seated, left to right: Joseph, Dottie, Eunice, Mary. Standing, Donna, Eugene, and Patrick.

resistance in 1869, and many of the Villeneuves fled the Canadian incursion in the region and took their chances on the U.S. side of the border. With the ties of kinship, friendship, and trade among what is today the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, the Villeneuves eventually settled in Neche, North Dakota. In 1878, Corbett married Alphonsine “Elsie” LaFramboise, of Anishinaabe/ Assiniboine descent, who also lived in Neche. Corbett and Elsie had several children together, children who would soon face a new and unexpected threat from the U.S. government. It came in the cut of a school uniform.

In the summer of 1900, William A. Johnson, superintendent at the Morris school, arrived in Neche. Johnson worked to convince Corbett and Elsie Villeneuve to send their children to the Morris Indian Industrial School in Morris, Minnesota. The Morris school had begun as a parochial school located at the Sacred Heart Mission in 1887. Founded by the Sisters of Mercy led by Mary Joseph Lynch, the school at Morris was a Catholic institution that blended theological instruction and vocational education for its Native wards. Under the banner of the so-

called “Peace Policy,” the U.S. federal government in the 1870s began to contract with the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions to carry out a program of Indian schooling on its behalf. By the end of the decade, however, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas J. Morgan pushed hard for nonsectarian, centralized, and professionalized Indian schools.<sup>2</sup> These priorities led the federal government to end its contract with the Catholic mission at Morris in 1896. Morgan offered to purchase the school from the Catholic mission outright and integrate it into the government’s growing system of off-reservation industrial boarding schools. The Catholic mission accepted the terms of the deal, and Morris became a federal Indian school.<sup>3</sup>

Corbett (along with some of his relatives) ultimately decided to send his three children, Joseph, Mary, and Henry, to the Morris school. Corbett signed a contract on July 17th that committed their children to a term of three years at Morris. The contract reads: “This is to certify that I have placed my three children Henry, age 9, Mary, age 12, Joseph, age 14, Villeneuve, in charge of W. H. Johnson, Supt., of the Indian School at Morris, Minnesota, for a term of three years, at the expiration of their term they will be sent home at government expense. X mark, Corbet [*sic*] Villeneuve.”<sup>4</sup> At age fourteen, Joseph found himself, along with his younger sister Mary and brother Henry, enrolled along with two hundred Anishinaabe and *Métis* students under Johnson’s supervision.<sup>5</sup> These students were accompanied by a small number of Indigenous

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<sup>2</sup> On Morgan’s perceived anti-Catholicism, see Burton Smith, “Anti-Catholicism, Indian Education and Thomas Jefferson Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” *Canadian Journal of History* 23, no. 2 (August 1988): 213-33.

<sup>3</sup> Wilbert H. Ahern, “Indian Education and Bureaucracy: The School at Morris, 1887-1909,” *Minnesota History* 49, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 82-98.

<sup>4</sup> Superintendent William H. Johnson to Office of Indian Affairs, November 1900.

<sup>5</sup> For this reason, of the twenty-six schools that composed this system, it was Morris that arguably most resembles the residential schools of Canada. The year 1887 was not only the year of the General Allotment Act, but was the height of the Catholic Church and its role in Indian education in the United States. “The Roman Catholic church educated more Indian students than any other denomination,” notes Ahern. Ahren, “Indian Education and Bureaucracy,” 84.

adults who worked at the school as groundskeepers and assistants. Whatever happened, Corbett was determined to keep an eye out for his children's welfare at Morris.<sup>6</sup>

At first, Johnson's tenure as superintendent appeared to inaugurate a welcome new era of federal investment in Indigenous lives.<sup>7</sup> But soon, it became clear to families like the Villeneuves that in federal hands, Morris had become a vehicle for the incorporation of Indigenous children into a political economic order on terms not at all to their advantage. By 1900, an education at Morris was rapidly transforming into what Alice Littlefield has called "proletarianization," a racialized form of vocational education and citizenship training intended to "fit" Indian children into a subservient position in the United States' wider political economic and social order. According to historian Wilbert H. Ahern, these curricular reforms at Morris were the result of Johnson's application of curriculum associated with "the recommended course of study promulgated by Estelle Reel, the new federal superintendent of Indian schools."<sup>8</sup> Reel's 1901 *Uniform Curriculum* codified the "half-and-half" curriculum, whereby students would spend half the day in the classroom learning English and half the day in the school's workshops, kitchens, laundries, and fields receiving vocational instruction. This half-and-half curriculum would prepare Indian children such as Joseph, Mary, and Henry Villeneuve for the life of domestic workers or agricultural laborers as envisioned under the General Allotment Act of 1887. In this way, the Morris school and the system of other off-reservation industrial Indian schools of which it was a part were simply an extension of federal Indian policy of assimilation and incorporation.

After just three months, Corbett Villeneuve concluded that this was not what he and Elsie had in mind for their children. After Corbett's relative personally visited the school in the middle

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 91.

of October, Corbett resolved to get his children out. Hart's October 31st letter on their behalf documented Corbett's objection. Because Morris operated on the half-and-half curriculum, Corbett complained that his children only "get two or three days school in the week and are not getting the education that they can receive at home, their [*sic*] being a day school at Neche all the time which they can attend."<sup>9</sup> Corbett explicitly rejected the "half-and-half" curriculum of the industrial Indian school and asserted what he imagined was his right to choose where his children went to school.

Ten days after Hart dispatched Corbett's objections to Washington, DC, another letter was received by the office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. This one was from Superintendent Johnson. Johnson wrote about "Albert Villeneuve, [who] is known as and is called Corbet Villeneuve," assuring the commissioner of his personal familiarity with my great-great-grandfather. He guaranteed the commissioner that he had informed Villeneuve that "the children go to school ½ days as is usual in Indian schools." As a result, Johnson saw no reason to allow Joseph, Mary, or Henry Villeneuve to leave Morris. Besides, Johnson argued that Corbett's objection was a moot point; the contract that Corbett had signed gave Johnson near impunity to make decisions about the education of the Villeneuve children. As proof, Johnson reproduced Villeneuve's contract in his letter to the Office of Indian Affairs. Johnson was convinced that even if he lacked the ongoing consent of Corbett to enroll his children at Morris, then at least he had the legal power to overrule him. "I refused to let them go," Johnson reported matter-of-factly. Johnson concluded his letter to the commissioner by writing: "I recommend that the children remain at the school till their term expires, believing it to be for the best interest of

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<sup>9</sup> Francis A. Hart to William A. Jones, October 31, 1900.

children and parents.”<sup>10</sup> Extending his paternalism over father and children alike, Johnson considered the matter closed.

Outraged, Corbett decided to take matters into his own hands. With the unflagging conviction that his status as a father was more than sufficient to rebut Johnson’s authority, Corbett wrote a letter of his own directly to the commissioner to demand that his decision to remove the children from the federal school be respected.<sup>11</sup> Renouncing the contracts he had signed in July, Corbett made it clear that his decision to sign in the first place had been “strictly under the recommendations of Mr. Johnson.” As Johnson had betrayed his confidence, Corbett now saw no reason his children should be required to honor the terms that the superintendent had violated. “We have visited the school and are altogether dissatisfied of the schooling and treatment they receive,” Corbett and his relative Joseph LaFramboise recounted from their firsthand experience of their children’s education. “We do not want to give any more reasons, nor want to make any more complains [*sic*]; but we want to have our children sent back at once,” they concluded.<sup>12</sup> In his view, Corbett’s prerogative as a father was more than sufficient grounds for exercising authority over his children’s schooling.

The Villeneuves were hardly alone in their outrage. Corbett and his relations were among a growing legion of Indigenous people demanding their children back from Morris and out from under the clutches of Superintendent Johnson. Many other Indigenous parents at Turtle Mountain and beyond balked at Johnson’s tendency to keep children at Morris over the summer for fear that Morris would lose their enrollment—and, by extension, their labor (which kept the school’s

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<sup>10</sup> William H. Johnson to William A. Jones, November 10, 1900 (55929); Box 1851; Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1881-1907, Record Group 75; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>11</sup> The letter is signed by Corbett and Joseph LaFramboise. It is unclear who wrote it.

<sup>12</sup> Corbett Villeneuve and Joseph LaFramboise to William A. Jones, December 2, 1900 (59626), Box 1858; Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1881-1907, Record Group 75; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

fields, kitchens, and workshops productive).<sup>13</sup> Individual parents wrote letters to the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington, DC; petitions against Johnson were circulated by tribal leaders at Mille Lacs and White Earth reservations. When rumors spread that Johnson had sexually assaulted several students, his refusals to relinquish students became nothing short of a community emergency.<sup>14</sup>

While his father's letter-writing campaign was unfolding, young Joseph Villeneuve decided that he had enough. While it remains unclear exactly what happened, there is an oral history in my family that suggests Joseph took flight from Morris. Evidently, Joseph had found the school's half-and-half curriculum and the school discipline degrading, and he was resolved to be free of it. My grandmother Clara informed me that one day Joseph simply walked away from the school, determined to return home. Somewhere between Morris and Neche, he hired himself out as a laborer to a White farmer. This arrangement would have offered Joseph a measure of sanctuary from agents of the school or local police who might have been dispatched to search for him, as was routinely the practice at federal Indian schools. However, Joseph's new employer was apparently just as harsh and belittling as the instructors at Morris had been, and he quickly left there too. How Joseph got home, or if he was forced to return to Morris, remains unknown to me as of the time of this writing. Whether or not running away from Morris was an equally viable option for his younger siblings, Mary and Henry, is also unclear. Nevertheless, my great-grandfather's story suggests that resistance to Johnson's administration at Morris was not advanced solely by Indigenous parents, but also by Indigenous children themselves.

The experience of Corbett and Joseph Villeneuve with the Morris Indian Industrial School is just one small fragment of a much longer history of Indigenous people who lived the

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<sup>13</sup> Ahern, "Indian Education and Bureaucracy," 93.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

dilemma between schooling imposed on them by the U.S. federal government and their own self-determination. Schooling “for” rather than “by” Indigenous people has been a hallmark of Indigenous experience since the earliest days of European colonization. Over the course of nearly five hundred years, the nature of schooling in Indigenous lives has changed dramatically. From 1879 to 1975, the federal government relied on its own system of schools “for” Indian people to achieve a number of policy goals, often placing schools in the vanguard of government efforts to address “the Indian problem.” Since the 1980s, historians have documented how the history of U.S. Indian schooling includes coerced enrollment, corporal punishment, and systematic bioneglect, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Indigenous children across North America, Hawai’i, and Alaska. As a major leader in this historiography, K. Tsianina Lomawaima emphasizes how federal Indian schooling was a vehicle for cultural erasure: “The goal of Indian education has been total transformation, obedience, and assimilation into colonial culture.”<sup>15</sup> In a groundbreaking article in the 1980s, David W. Adams argued that under the veneer of assimilation as a form of racial uplift, Indian schooling by the federal government was not just congruent with, but was an extension of, federal policies of land dispossession. “The schoolbook would save the Indian from extinction,” Adams writes. “But even then—and this was always clearly understood—they must continue to give up the land. Such was the deep meaning of Indian education.”<sup>16</sup> Schools were not only the conduit for federal policies of Native erasure; they were the policy of erasure. Altogether, this had increasingly led scholars to understand the Indian school system as a federal project to affect Indigenous genocide.

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<sup>15</sup> K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “American Indian Education: *by* Indians versus *for* Indians,” in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 422-40.

<sup>16</sup> David W. Adams, “Fundamental Considerations: The Deep Meaning of Native American Schooling, 1880-1900,” *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 1 (Feb. 1988): 1-28.

“Indigenous boarding schools, by disrupting lines of cultural transmission ... sought to disrupt the interactions that make group life possible, thus making group claims to territory impossible,” writes Andrew Woolford. “Genocide, when it targets the cultural bonds of the group, disrupts such interaction.”<sup>17</sup> Indian schools show how the imperatives to incorporate Indigenous political subjects, seize Indigenous land, and unravel Indigenous cultural continuity distorted schooling into a premier tool for Indigenous erasure.

To this trenchant cataloging, I would add another lens: Indian schooling was also fundamentally anti-democratic. By this I mean that schooling “for” Indigenous people, as manifest in a school system designed, funded, and operated almost exclusively by non-Native people, was rarely conducive to Indigenous self-determination in education. To label something undemocratic already described as genocidal may seem odd; indeed, the suspension of democratic self-determination in education seems like an obviously necessary but insufficient component in a campaign of genocide carried out through schools. Moreover, criticizing Indian schooling as anti-democratic may feel like taking one’s foot off the gas pedal when it comes to driving forward the documentation of the harm on Indigenous lives wrought by the history of imposed schooling.

However, I think democracy rendered as self-determination is an important lens for interpreting the history of Indian schools, as it strikes at the heart of many commonly held ideas about the relationship between schooling and democracy in the United States. Ask Americans today where decisions about public schooling are made, and they will most likely answer at the most local level of government, the school district. Those districts are governed by a school board, whose membership is determined by a local electorate. And those boards answer to state,

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).



not federal government. Staffing, curriculum, and administration are supposed to flow not from the top down, but from the bottom up. If families find public schooling objectionable, then there is always private school for those who can afford it. Consequently, the democratic quality of education is often conflated with local control over schools. Though historians of education have complicated this configuration as more myth than reality, the fact of the matter is that it remains a useful fiction, because for nearly two hundred years, schools in Indigenous communities have been a major exception.

The essential characteristic of Indian schooling in U.S. history has been the suspension of the principle of local control. From 1819 to 1889, the federal government contracted with a number of church groups to operate a network of boarding schools targeting Indigenous children on its behalf. The federal government also operated small day schools on reservations, largely after 1850. After 1879, the federal government developed its own boarding schools, off-reservation industrial schools, which enrolled several generations of Native students. This system was in operation until 1966, when the Rough Rock Demonstration School in the Diné nation heralded a new paradigm in Indian Country, where tribal governments contracted with the federal government to design and operate their own schools. While a number of schools operated by Indigenous people ran parallel to this system, the vast majority of Indigenous students attended either state public schools or federal Indian schools. By 1975, American Indian activism compelled the federal government to finally respect the initiative and capacity of tribal nations to operate their own schools using federal resources, marking an important change in Indian schooling “for” Indians “by” Indians. As a result of nearly a century of the former at the expense

of the latter, the experience of schooling for many hundreds of thousands of Indigenous families has been profoundly anti-democratic.<sup>18</sup>

To emphasize Native efforts to assert self-determination in schooling as a matter of democracy in education, I build off K. T. Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty's analysis of Indian schooling. In their book, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, Lomawaima and McCarty diagnose that "'Indian schools reveal the cancer at the heart of the American educational system. No wonder, then, that focusing on American Indian education—the enterprise charged with remaking and standardizing Indigenous people as 'Americans'—forces us all to confront the fault lines in the topography of the American democracy."<sup>19</sup> In other words, Indigenous history can highlight the efforts of Native people to shape their education not only as a reaction to imposed schooling, but also as a proactive effort to create democracy in education.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, framing the Indigenous pursuit of self-determination in education as a struggle for democracy can lead to histories of Indigenous survivance, not just in the field of Indigenous education history, but in the wider scholarly analysis of democracy and education

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<sup>18</sup> Emphasizing how federal Indian schooling was anti-democratic helps to change registers from anti-democratic aspects of education *in* schooling to the denial of democratic self-determination *through* schooling itself. On the historiography of Indian schooling relevant to this conception of democracy, see David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995); Michael L. Coleman, *American Indian Children at School, 1850-1930* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993); Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Margaret Connell-Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination Since 1928*, 3rd ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc, eds., *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006); Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *Schools, Race, and the Struggle for Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Materialism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 169-70.

<sup>20</sup> Indigenous philosophers have advanced many Indigenous theorizations of democracy. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, "Democratizing in indigenous terms is a process of extending participation outwards though reinstating indigenous principles of collectivity and public debate" (Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 156).

writ large.<sup>21</sup> Rather than allow Indigenous families and their struggle for self-determination to be pushed to the margins of scholarly attention or popular memory by dint of an exceptional federal school system, framing Indigenous agency as a part of a wider struggle for democracy in education puts Indigenous people at the center of the debates of democracy and education in American history. In this light, Indigenous resistance to federal schools could be understood as an Indigenous reconstruction of the democratic principle of local control. After all, what could be more democratic than trying to assert one's self-determination in schooling?

To place the anti-democratic history of Indian schooling directly in the purview of American education histories writ large, I needed a theorist who might first help me make sense of the relationship between schooling and democracy. This led me towards the philosophy of John Dewey.

John Dewey is an enticing figure to illuminate the anti-democratic nature of Indian schooling. He is arguably America's most prominent philosopher of education and democracy. Born in 1859, Dewey wrote a prolific number of works defining the relationship between education and democracy. Regarded as one of the few system builders in American philosophy, Dewey has an enormous corpus, spanning thirty-seven volumes of books and articles that engaged with political philosophy, psychology, ethics, history, aesthetics, epistemology, and education. Dewey's philosophy of education includes a number of works, from his first foray in "Some Remarks on the Psychology of Number" (1895), to "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897), *The School and Society* (1899), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), and *Schools of To-Morrow* (1915), to his crowning achievement in *Democracy and Education* (1916) and his final major

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<sup>21</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Norman: Bison Books, 1994), 1-44.

statement, *Education and Experience* (1938). These works make up what I call Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy.

In these works, Dewey effectively dismantled the philosophical underpinnings of an older, classical pedagogy of transactional learning and reconstructed it with a new alternative, what he called experimentalism. Dewey's signal contribution to education and political theory was that his ideas about schooling and democracy began in his epistemology of experience. Dewey's philosophy of education was therefore a part of what Robert Westbrook calls the pragmatist's "war on epistemology," namely his unrelenting critique of the dualisms between thought and action that constituted much of Dewey's unity of experience.<sup>22</sup> For these reasons, Dewey has become well known in the United States as a progenitor of child-centered pedagogy focused on the growth of individual learners. This sentiment was captured in his exhortation to teachers, administrators, and policymakers to "cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life and make of it the full meaning of the present life."<sup>23</sup> This is often reduced to the Deweyan mantra: "Education is not preparation for life. It is life itself."

In their book *Power and Place*, Indigenous scholars Vine Deloria Jr. and David Wildcat enumerate a host of factors in American education that are inimical to Indigenous pedagogies. Many of the factors Deloria and Wildcat illuminate were also subject to Dewey's critique. For example, following Alfred North Whitehead, Deloria and Wildcat critique what they call the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (which Dewey himself sized up as "the philosopher's fallacy"), the scientific positivism that underlay Western epistemology stretching back to Greek metaphysics (which Dewey condemned as the misbegotten "quest for certainty") and academic disciplines as artificial constructs that prevent holistic inquiry (which Dewey expressed

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<sup>22</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 173.

<sup>23</sup> John Dewey, "Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal" (1893), *Early Works*, 4:51.

sympathy for as early as his 1900 “Some Stages of Logical Thought”).<sup>24</sup> Wildcat went so far as to conclude that “the hope for American Indian education lies ... in the active reconstruction of Indigenous metaphysical systems, which, I believe, result in experiential systems of learning.”<sup>25</sup>

This is a key point: boarding schooling was harmful to Indigenous children like my great-grandfather Joseph not only because it was a form of family separation, but because its curriculum was antithetical to Native epistemologies, ways of knowing, and experience. In Deloria and Wildcat’s view, part of the trauma of federal Indian schooling stemmed from a curriculum that was not just unrelated to Indigenous experience, but actively hostile to it. “If we consider the matter carefully, we shall discover that the problem is ... that Western people have stepped out of the mainstream of our species’ traditional way of recording and remembering experiences.”<sup>26</sup> Federal schools and their assimilation curriculum therefore embody the potential harm that could be wrought when such schooling was hostile to Indigenous society.<sup>27</sup>

But perhaps Dewey’s most radical idea was that schools themselves ought to be the fundamental building block for democracy. Schools did not just prepare students for democracy; they should rather be organized as democratic communities themselves. This was a new expression of the principle of local control. A Deweyan conception of local control meant treating schools as the center of democratic culture. This meant the schools ought to be an extension of the local communities of which they were a part. The democratic principle of local control would be realized not through the apparatus of governance such as school districts, but in making schools answerable to immediate community problems. In this organization as a

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Fallace, “John Dewey’s Vision(s) for Interdisciplinary Social Studies,” *Social Studies Research and Practice* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 177-89.

<sup>25</sup> Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2001), 10.

<sup>26</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (1979; repr. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2012), 279.

<sup>27</sup> Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1985* (New York: Longman Inc., 1986).

democratic community, teachers, parents, and students would collaborate to shape the priorities of the school. In turn, the school would become a place for community problem-solving, a resource for adult education and community workers, and, above all, a meeting place that would ground a community in place. In this fashion, Dewey offered a new, more radical vision of this older ideal of local control, which seemed to me to be potentially amenable to Indigenous self-determination in schooling.<sup>28</sup> This reconstruction of the principle of local control based on his philosophy of experience is what makes him appear to be a theorist amenable with Indigenous critique.

For this reason, I envisioned Dewey's philosophy as a means to depict my own family's story as a form of Indigenous struggle for democracy in education. The more I read, the more I was convinced that Dewey might be able to demonstrate the ways in which my family, like so many Indigenous families, had experienced schooling at the hands of the federal government as one of the most profoundly anti-democratic impositions in their lives. I cherish those letters from Corbett to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; they are the receipts of democratic self-determination in education that originated in Indian Country. I am proud of my ancestors for taking on Johnson and Commissioner Jones. It seems to me that theirs is a story about a struggle for democracy in education that is rarely a part of wider considerations of schooling in the United States. If read through Dewey's philosophy with an eye to its convergences with Deloria

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<sup>28</sup> For much of his career, Dewey saw schools as the preeminent social institutions to affect democratization. "Dewey imagined schools at the vanguard of promoting democratic culture of associated life. Classrooms in a democracy had to be not only communities of inquiry but *democratic* communities of inquiry," described Westbrook. By 1938, however, Dewey finally admitted that schools were just one of many institutional levels for social reconstruction. "It is unrealistic, in my opinion to suppose that the schools can be a *main* agency in producing the intellectual and moral changes ... which are necessary for the creation of a new social order." Seemingly talking to his earlier self, Dewey concluded that "any such view ignored the constant operation of powerful forces outside the school which shape mind and character. It ignores the fact that school education is but one educational agency out of many." In 1938, Dewey capped off his synthesis of education and democracy with the publication *Education and Experience*. It completed his reconstruction of local control, which had its origins in his 1895 publication on *Some Remarks on the Psychology of Number* forty-three years earlier. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 172; John Dewey, "Education and Social Change" (1937), *Later Works*, 11:415.

and Wildcat, Corbett's resistance might be reframed not only as a struggle *against* anti-democratic schooling, but *for* democracy in Indigenous education. I thought it was inevitable that I would find a Deweyan critique of Indian schooling, and so I set out to find it.

Reader, I am here to tell you that I am still looking for it. I scoured Dewey's entire corpus, and I could not find the condemnation of Indian schools that I had imagined. Over the course of a score of books, almost seventy years as one of America's leading philosophers, and nearly half a century as a public intellectual, Dewey never explicitly mentioned—let alone critiqued—the federal government's Indian schools. This was a school system that was composed of twenty-six off-reservation industrial boarding schools that enrolled over 10,000 children a year, not to mention 154 reservation day schools and scores of reservation boarding schools that enrolled over 20,000 additional students annually. This system reached its heyday from the 1880s to 1930s, almost exactly corresponding with the height of Dewey's career. During all the numerous debates over school centralization and professionalization of which he took part, Dewey never stopped to consider the one school system actually run by the federal government.<sup>29</sup>

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn once wrote that “American society is engaged in a ‘secret war’ against native peoples in the United States, and its major weapon in that war is Education.”<sup>30</sup> Taking its cues from Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, this dissertation attempts to further expose the “secret war” against Native people through education by taking aim at one of the most well known figures in the history of education in the United States, John Dewey. My purpose is to show how Dewey's philosophy formed a major part of historical and contemporary

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<sup>29</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 151.

understandings of education's relationship to democracy, and how his pragmatism was constructed in such a way that not only failed to critique that educational war, but actually made him complicit in its destructive effect in Indigenous lives. My argument in this dissertation is simple: whereas Scott Pratt argues "that in several important cases, European American thinkers were in a position to learn [from Indigenous] commitments and incorporate them into their thinking," John Dewey was not one of them. I argue that of the Big Three philosophers of pragmatism, Dewey was ideally positioned to learn from Indigenous people, principally in the Great Lakes, as a matter of personal experience.<sup>31</sup> Instead, Dewey saw Indigenous people as Indians refracted through a frontier discourse. Furthermore, I found that Dewey instrumentalized Indians in the pursuit of defining his own philosophy of experience, thus rendering them as evidence, rather than a contemporary constituency who might benefit from its application. As it turns out, John Dewey was conscripted in this "secret war," but not on the side philosophers and educators may expect.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Scott L. Pratt, "Philosophy in the 'Middle Ground: A Reply to My Critics,'" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 594.

<sup>32</sup> Dewey generally appears in system-level studies of Indian education in general, such as in the work of Margaret Connell-Szasz, David Wallace Adams, and Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder. Connell-Szasz emphasizes that scholars of American Indian history should care about Dewey because he "was the type of thinker whose ideas provide the impetus for movements ... among these were [W. Carson] Ryan and [Willard] Beatty, who saw their potential for the field of Indian education." Reyner and Eder focus on Dewey in much the same way, noting his influence on administrators in the federal Indian education system: "[W. Carson] Ryan and [Henry Roe] Cloud were influenced by the teachings of John Dewey and other progressive educators, and they documented the lack of correlation between the curriculum of Indian schools and realities of Indian life." Of these three surveys, Adams goes the furthest to connect Dewey's influence on Indian education to Dewey's own thinking about Indians: "John Dewey, educational progressivism's chief theorist, may also have given Indian educators cause to doubt the practice of abruptly separating a child from his native roots. It is important to emphasize, however, that neither [George Stanley] Hall nor Dewey were willing to acknowledge the equality of native culture." As Adams concludes, "Dewey ... fully subscribed to the idea of social evolution, including the distinction between savagism and civilization." Connell-Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 53; Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 221; Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 314.



## Historiography on John Dewey and American Indians

Some Indigenous scholars have attempted to integrate Dewey into Indigenous education history and pedagogy. One of the earliest such attempts was made by Rebecca Robbin's 1983 article in the *Journal of American Indian Education* descriptively titled "John Dewey and American Indians: A Brief Discussion of How It Would Work." In particular, Robbins saw some potential in matching Dewey's critique of vocational education to the curriculum of Indian boarding schools.<sup>33</sup> Not long after, Indigenous theorist Sandy Grande cited Dewey in her *Red Pedagogy* as a foundational figure to Indigenous critical pedagogy itself: "Critical pedagogy is that discourse that emerged when 'critical theory encountered education' ... traced back to the works of Paulo Freire, John Dewey, and other social reconstructionists writing in the post-Depression years."<sup>34</sup> This work has been followed more recently by an article by Thomas Alexander, which compares Deweyan "environmentalism" to Pueblo creation stories and their qualities of "emergence."<sup>35</sup> Wildcat wrote approvingly that pragmatists such as "John Dewey place[d] the problem of human consciousnesses and spirit back into the debate between idealist and realist metaphysics" in a way that was complementary to Indigenous thought.<sup>36</sup>

More often, however, reading Dewey in the context of Indigenous education has been pursued by non-Native scholars. For example, in a 2010 article highlighting the importance of place-based education, Jon Reyhner cites Dewey and *How We Think* as an inspiration for a culturally responsive curriculum for contemporary Indigenous schools. "John Dewey called on teachers to engage their students in 'constructive occupations' or 'projects' that engage students'

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<sup>33</sup> Rebecca Robbins, "John Dewey's Philosophy and American Indians: A Brief Discussion of How it Could Work," *Journal of American Indian Education* 22, no. 3 (May 1983): 1-9.

<sup>34</sup> Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*, Tenth Anniversary ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 24.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Alexander, "The Fourth World of American Philosophy: The Philosophical Significance of Native American Culture," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 32, no. 3 (1996): 375-402.

<sup>36</sup> Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 31.

interest,” Reyhner observes. “Whether it is getting students to study issues related to oil, salmon, Indian gaming or some other locally relevant issue, there are many ways that creative teachers can put before their students a cornucopia of issues for their students to pick projects from that can get them reading and writing and learning more about science, mathematics, history, economics, the arts and other subjects.”<sup>37</sup> In a 2015 special issue of *Educational Perspectives*, on Dewey’s influence in Hawai’i, Alfred L. Castle asserts that Dewey’s philosophy is similar to Native Hawaiian pedagogy. Castle goes so far as to enumerate five areas where “Dewey’s ideas about progressive education seemed to mirror traditional Hawaiian ways of learning and teaching.” This includes an emphasis on the importance of experience, knowledge-making in the interaction between students and their environment, and a pedagogy of “learning by doing” that emphasizes individual learners and their place in social relationships.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Scott Pratt concludes in *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (2001) that “Dewey’s work brings together ... the intersection of Native and European American thought.”<sup>39</sup> Dewey’s philosophy is therefore regarded as particularly useful for informing an anti-colonial praxis amenable to contemporary Indigenous pedagogy.

Perhaps no other scholar has argued as thoughtfully or persuasively about John Dewey, pragmatism, and Indigenous people than Scott Pratt. Pratt offers a historical account of pragmatism that tracks what he calls “the possibility that Native thought significantly influences the development of American philosophy.” Pratt’s inquiry is fundamentally a historical question: If pragmatism is perhaps *the* distinctly American philosophy, especially vis-a-vis European

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<sup>37</sup> Jon Reyhner, “Placed-Based Education,” *NABE News*, June/July 2010, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Alfred L. Castle, “John Dewey and the Beginnings of Progressive Early Education in Hawai’i,” *Educational Perspectives* 47, no. 1 and 2 (2015): 23-27.

<sup>39</sup> Scott Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 286.

philosophical traditions, where did its distinctive qualities come from? How did it come to this distinction?

While some scholars offered Euro-American–centric origin stories for pragmatism, Pratt looks to interactions with Indigenous people. Pratt argues that pragmatism’s origins lay in philosophical ideas that were exchanged as a part of the cultural interactions between Indigenous people and Euro-Americans in the span of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.<sup>40</sup> In particular, Pratt identifies four characteristics of pragmatism that he argues make it distinct from European or “colonial” philosophy, which he traces to Indigenous ideas that were exchanged with Euro-Americans. Those four commitments are the “principles of interaction, pluralism, community, and growth.”<sup>41</sup> This led Pratt to call pragmatism an “indigenous attitude” counterpoised by a “colonial attitude.” Whereas the “colonial attitude” of European philosophy was predicated on fixed categories, the pursuit of objective knowledge, and often stark dualisms between mind and body, the “indigenous attitude” emphasized “things will be what they are in interaction.”<sup>42</sup> According to Pratt, unlike European philosophy and its “colonial attitude,” the Indigenous attitudes shared by Indigenous people and American pragmatists were united in their commitment to a philosophy of experience that insisted

that things will be known only in their interactions and that things will not exist in any significant way outside interaction. Consonant with the commitment to interaction is an expectation that the world is plural both ontologically and epistemically. In rejecting a single ontology of spirit or matter or substance or God, the indigenous attitude is the expectation that the world will produce a diversity of knowledges and that diverse methodologies—and so diverse interactions—will ground diverse ontologies. While the

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<sup>40</sup> Pratt built out his argument on the foundation of what has been called the “Indian thesis” articulated by John C. Mohawk and Donald A. Grinde, which suggests (again, persuasively, in my mind) the influence of Haudenosaunee political and cultural thought on a particular cohort of Euro-Americans who eventually framed the U.S. Constitution. Ultimately, Pratt expands upon this narrow consideration of Indigenous influence on the constitution to the foundations of pragmatism. Pratt, “Philosophy in the ‘Middle Ground,’” 593.

<sup>41</sup> Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 20-37.

<sup>42</sup> Pratt, “Philosophy in the ‘Middle Ground,’” 596.

colonial attitude tends to emphasize the autonomous individual, the principle of interaction leads the indigenous attitude to include the expectation that individuals will always be framed by communities and their associated knowledges and ontologies. The result is necessarily the rejection of a single standard of progress in favor of “local” standards of growth.<sup>43</sup>

In Pratt’s view, Indigenous thought has not so much *converged* with pragmatism as it has been there at the start, an essential *origin* upon which pragmatism was built from the ground up. He explains: “The central argument of *Native Pragmatism* is that American philosophy, particularly classical pragmatism, is the product of a cultural and intellectual context influenced in significant ways by Native American thought.” Pratt goes on to suggest that the Indigenous influence on pragmatism is evidenced “by the basic argument that some of the central commitments of the classical pragmatism of Peirce, James, and Dewey are prefigured in the traditions and practices of Native people in the Northeast.”<sup>44</sup> Pratt concludes that the influence of Native people on Euro-Americans cultivated the seedbed for the commitments for pragmatism, a genealogy that is not only compelling philosophy, but groundbreaking history—a history that leads directly to Dewey.

### **The Indians in Dewey’s Philosophy**

Dewey certainly did treat Indigenous people directly in his philosophy. The essay “Anthropology and Law” (1893), his co-authored book *Ethics* (1908), and his foreword to Paul Radin’s *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (1927) are the three published writings where Dewey most explicitly treats Indigenous people. In these works, as well as scattered references in his other works and correspondence, Dewey explicitly writes about North American Indian people using then-contemporary demonyms which included the Chippewa, Navajo, Zuni, Pueblo,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 593.

Iroquois, and Sioux people. In a variety of contexts, Dewey mentions Navajo weaving, Sioux child-rearing, Zuni pottery, Iroquois longhouses, and Chippewa stories. These instances are eclipsed, however, by a far greater number of Dewey's invocations of American Indian people as "savages."

If one looks more closely at Dewey's writings, it is not difficult to catch glimpses of the naturalism that served as its foundation. Consistent with his naturalism is Dewey's reliance on late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century cultural anthropology. Embedded in those fields was a vocabulary of savagery to describe Indigenous people. It is therefore no surprise that Dewey borrowed from this vocabulary—namely, Dewey's invocations of Indians-as-savages in works such as, but not limited to, *The School and Society*, "The Place of Manual Training in Elementary Course of Study," *How We Think*, *Schools of To-Morrow*, *Democracy and Education*, "Racial Prejudice and Friction," *Human Nature and Conduct*, "Mexico's Education Renaissance," *Art as Experience*, and even his syllabi. In these works, Dewey depicts American Indian people as savage, savages, or living in a state of savagery. In fact, Thomas Fallace has suggested that perhaps more than any other Euro-American thinker, it was Dewey who tried to make sense of consequences of evolution in education. "Were the child-like races supposed to mature phylogenetically over time as their collective biological make-up developed, or was a proper education supposed to mature each individual ontologically? The educator who engaged these issues most directly was John Dewey."<sup>45</sup>

Because experience plays such an important role in Dewey's philosophy, many scholars have the impression that this led him to take an interest in Indigenous people that was at least humanizing, if not sympathetic. According to Robert Westbrook's characterization, "The fears of

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas D. Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education, 1880-1929* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015), 47.

primitive man—the source of superstition, magic, and religion—were not subjective feelings projected on the world but a very realistic response to a fearful environment, an uncertain, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and hazardous world of disease, famine, crop failure, death, defeat in battle, and other dangers.”<sup>46</sup> In Westbrook’s estimation, Dewey took seriously “savage” experience. The fear, anxiety, or uncertainty that a “savage” might feel in the face of, say, a predator or a lightning storm was not artificial, but rather the real quality of the world. “Man fears because he exists in a fearful, an awful world. The *world* is precarious and perilous,” Dewey writes.<sup>47</sup> Such an attitude did not lead to Dewey’s dismissal of “savage” psychology, but rather the contrary: an intense historical interest. And therein lay a problem for Indigenous people in the United States during Dewey’s own day.

The problem posed by Dewey’s particular interest in Indigenous people is hinted at on the very first page of *Democracy and Education*. That book begins with an accounting of the difference between education and schooling. According to Dewey, the school had been an outgrowth of the evolutionary history of humankind and human social development. “The general principle of evolution—development from undifferentiated toward the formation of distinct organs on the principle of divisions of labor—stand out clearly in a survey of educational history,” he writes. The social function of education in “savage” communities was to maintain community life over multiple generations. If subsequent generations had to start over without any learning from their predecessors, culture would be limited by a succession of single human lifespans. “The function of education, since anything which might pass by that name was found among savage tribes, has been social,” Dewey concludes.<sup>48</sup> “Savage groups mainly rely

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<sup>46</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 328.

<sup>47</sup> John Dewey, “Experience and Nature” (1925), *Later Works*, 1:42-44.

<sup>48</sup> John Dewey, “School as Social Centre” (1902), *Middle Works*, 2:80.

for instilling needed dispositions in the young upon the same sort of association which keeps adults loyal to their group,” Dewey opines. “They have no special devices, material, or institutions for teaching save in connection with initiation ceremonies by which the youth are inducted into full social membership. For the most part, they depend upon children learning the customs of the adults, acquiring their emotional set and stock of ideas, by sharing in what the elders are doing.”<sup>49</sup> In *How We Think*, Dewey later adds that “were it not for this process by which the achievements of one generation form the stimuli that direct the activities of the next, the story of civilization would be writ in water, and each generation would have laboriously to make for itself, if it could, its way out of savagery.”<sup>50</sup>

Dewey emphasizes a distinction between savagery and civilization as a means to illustrate the difference between education and schooling. When humans first engaged in a pattern of social reproduction that Dewey calls education, there was not yet any technology of learning called schooling. “At the outset there was no school as a separate institution,” Dewey notes. In savage life, there was no need for schools: “The educative processes were carried on in the ordinary play of family and community life.”<sup>51</sup> People taught their children to reproduce effective practices in the course of everyday life—such as how to hunt for food, which plants were useful, and what dangers to avoid while traversing the landscape. But as people emerged from savage life and developed more sophisticated societies, the need for a more deliberate and intentional means to educate young people arose. “As the ends to be reached by education became more numerous and remote, and the means employed more specialized, it was necessary,

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<sup>49</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Middle Works*, 9:10-11.

<sup>50</sup> John Dewey, *How We Think* (1933), *Later Works*, 8:283.

<sup>51</sup> Dewey, “School as Social Centre,” 81.

however, for society to develop a distinct institution.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, humanity invented schools, a particular organization for learning, and the unhelpful distinction between “formal” and “informal” instruction was born. While Dewey would spend his career trying to knock down the artificial walls between learning in and outside the classroom, in trafficking in portrayals of contemporary American Indian people as living in a primitive sociocultural and psychological condition, Dewey’s writings read less as an expression of an anti-colonial attitude and more as a permission structure for anti-democratic schooling.

This is because Dewey’s historical account of the invention of schooling in civilized societies unto itself would be one thing, but it was not crafted in isolation from powerful ideas about Indigenous people circulating in the United States at the time of his writing. Many Euro-Americans in 1916 still believed that contemporary Indigenous people across the United States remained in a state of savagery. As a result, such Indians-as-savages were thought to still exist in the present, saddled with the corollary sociocultural deficiencies associated with primitive life. Dewey was no exception. As he planned to launch his Laboratory School in 1896, Dewey wrote to his teachers that their curriculum ought to harness a “child’s interest in ways of present living leading him back to social groups organized in that way—hunting & fishing to the Indians—building houses to way [*sic*] other people have lived.” Dewey concluded that “this is geography as well as history, because practically all stages of civilization are now [original emphasis] represented somewhere on earth’s surface.”<sup>53</sup> Dewey therefore gave voice to the idea that Indian people continued to exist in a sociocultural condition which many other Euro-American educators actively believed invited imposed federal schooling upon them. On Dewey’s view,

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> John Dewey to Clara Mitchell, November 20, 1895, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey, 1871-1952*, ed. Larry A. Hickman, vol. 1, 1871-1918, 4th ed. (Carbondale, IL: Center for Dewey Studies, 2008).



schooling was something that happened to Indian people, not something contemporary Indian people did themselves.

To understand how Dewey's philosophy could function as an accessory to anti-democratic schooling, I argue that we must return to Pratt's argument in *Native Pragmatism*. In Pratt's view, the Native roots of pragmatism were seeded in what he has called a "middle ground." Pratt drew on the middle ground thesis, which comes from Richard White's groundbreaking 1991 book of the same name. White argued that for over a hundred years between 1600 and 1800, the Great Lakes world of the *pays 'den haut* was a territory of Indigenous communities fractured by expansion, colonialism, and relocation. This geopolitical landscape saw a succession of European interlopers—the French, the English, the Americans—each try and fail to project military, trade, and diplomatic power into the region. Neither Native nations nor Euro-American colonial powers were entirely successfully in dictating the terms of encounters between Indigenous people and Euro-Americans, which meant that these actors met in various figurative "middle grounds," where accommodation, negotiation, and borrowing were required to make political, economic, and social ends meet.<sup>54</sup>

As a history, *Native Pragmatism* tracks White's argument in some respects. For example, Pratt principally locates his history between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Crucially, Pratt relies on White's theorization of the middle ground as a place of exchange, namely for ideas. As Pratt notes, "For White, the central defining aspect of the middle ground was the willingness of those who created it to justify their own actions in terms of what they perceived their partner's cultural premises."<sup>55</sup> While he acknowledges that White focuses on "what is now

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<sup>54</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Richard White, *Middle Ground*, 52, cited in Pratt, "Philosophy in the 'Middle Ground,'" 604.

Wisconsin, Northern Illinois, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan,” Pratt considers the Haudenosaunee (in principally New York and Pennsylvania), Narragansett (in Massachusetts), and Penobscot (in Maine). On Pratt’s telling, the intellectual history of the middle ground was less rooted in the Great Lakes but was a feature of much of the Eastern seaboard.

Since the publication of *Native Pragmatism* twenty years ago, the theoretical groundwork employed in most Great Lakes history has shifted in ways that dramatically challenge the way we ought to think about Dewey’s relationship to Indigenous people. First, historians have since argued that the middle ground really was rooted in the Great Lakes and not the Eastern seaboard or even the Ohio River valley.<sup>56</sup> The dynamics that led to the formation of the middle ground were rooted in kinship relations unique to people of the Three Fires Confederacy in Michigan, nations such as the Menominee, Ho-Chunk, and Oneida of Wisconsin, and the Anishinaabe people of Minnesota and beyond, who navigated successive waves of wars, economic coercion, assimilation, and relocation in the Great Lakes. In other words, the middle ground was not simply a metaphor, but was rooted in actual ground (or, more often, water) of the Great Lakes, not the Eastern seaboard.

Second, as Michael Witgen has since argued in *Infinity of Nations*, the middle ground may not have been so middling after all. Witgen concludes that Native political and cultural power culminated in nothing short of Euro-American recognition of what he calls a “Native New World.” Whereas Pratt’s account of the Native roots of pragmatism centered on a Native demand for a middle ground as a meeting place with Euro-Americans, Witgen’s history suggests that Native demands in the Great Lakes region may have gone quite beyond a middle ground to a

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<sup>56</sup> White’s middle ground was distinct from what other scholars such as Michael A. McDonnell have dubbed “the payoff system,” whereby Indigenous nations (such as in Pratt’s history) also played Euro-American interests off one another to force Euro-Americans to deal more equitably with them in the course of diplomatic relations.

place of Native assertion. Michigan's boundaries are themselves the result of fourteen treaties made with Indigenous nations. In fact, after Michigan became a state in 1837, four treaties were signed with the federal government that further adjudicated Indigenous territory, rights, and status. Michigan's timber, fishing, and mining industries are inextricably linked to Indigenous land, and Indigenous people continue to hunt, fish, and work in their accustomed places. Today, Michigan's Indigenous population consists of nearly 100,000 people, making it one of the largest Native American populations in the nation and the largest Native population east of the Mississippi.<sup>57</sup>

And third, even if the middle ground dynamic that facilitated a Native influence on pragmatism occurred beyond the Great Lakes, it did not endure. While the actors in Pratt's story may very well have engaged with Indigenous people and Native thought on a cultural meeting ground, by the time Dewey arrived on the scene in 1880, that plane had been dramatically inverted by United States' settler colonialism. Fundamentally, settler colonialism is a pattern of Euro-American colonialism that is premised on the permanent settlement of territory rather than the colonial expropriation of Indigenous labor. Settler colonialism in the Great Lakes is best understood not as an event, but an ongoing process that has vampirically drawn political, economic, and cultural power from Indigenous nations to non-Native structures. In what would become the state of Michigan, the U.S. government was eventually able to dictate terms to Indigenous people due in part to its overwhelming settlement of White settlers on the land, which resulted in both increased demand and leverage for policies such as Indian removal, assimilation, and treaty-making, all of which thoroughly advantaged settlers over Indigenous people. What

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<sup>57</sup> "2009-2013 American Indian and Alaska Native State Populations," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed May 29, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/tribal/tribes-organizations-health/tribes/state-population.html>.

ended the middle ground and the Native New World alike is the eventual asymmetry of power between Native people and the United States and Canada facilitated by settler colonialism.

Substituting the middle ground in Pratt's genealogy of pragmatism with settler colonialism reveals not only Dewey's curious relationship to Indigenous people, but pragmatism's more complicated place in an American culture conditioned by the settler colonial logic of the elimination of the Native. Due to the influence of Native people on the Euro-American forerunners to pragmatism, and its profound distinctions from continental philosophy, Pratt calls pragmatism itself "an indigenous attitude." The hallmark of such an attitude, Pratt argues, is a resistance to "dominant attitudes inherited from the European philosophical tradition." In contrast to European philosophy, pragmatism may have been "Indigenous" to the United States, but in Dewey's hands, it fell quite short of an "indigenous attitude." This is because the colonial power in the Great Lakes was not a European one, but was instead the United States of America. As we shall see, the resulting applications of John Dewey to Indian Country may have been "Indigenous," but it was far from anti-colonial. In fact, in the hands of non-Native educators, Dewey's ideas perpetuated, rather than curbed, anti-democratic education in Indigenous lives.

This brings me to the fundamental question of this dissertation. How did Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy *actually* affect Indigenous people in his own lifetime? Indigenous people in Dewey's own day were in urgent need of a philosophical articulation of education that could render imposed schooling by the federal government as not only anti-democratic, but genocidal, meant to disintegrate Native polities, communities, families, cultures, and land. My family, like so many other Native families, experienced that anti-democratic education as part of the larger function of the genocidal erasure of Native culture through federal

schooling. As perhaps the leading philosopher of education during the boarding school era, the most egregiously anti-democratic episode in Indian schooling, it behooves us to look more closely at Dewey's relationship to it. It is not that Dewey's ideas were irrelevant to Corbett or Joseph's predicament; it is precisely because they were so vital, so relevant, and so applicable. But I cannot make Dewey speak where he was himself silent.<sup>58</sup>

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In this dissertation, I analyze Dewey's texts, the circumstances of his writings, and the wider intellectual circles, institutions, and movements of which he was a part during his career from 1880 to 1950 from the perspective of Indigenous history. This analysis is divided across three contemporaneous elements that unfold in three sections. In the first part, I track Dewey's representations of Indigenous people and how they fit into his philosophy of experience. In the second part of this analysis, I follow how many of Dewey's ideas shaped Indian educators and their policies. Finally, in the third element, I identify a number of Indigenous contemporaries to Dewey who might have been potential interlocutors save for his inability or unwillingness to recognize them as philosophers. Crucial to all three elements of this analysis is my conceptualization of the Great Lakes frontier discourse.

### **The Frontier Discourse**

Throughout this dissertation, I employ the discursive formation that overwhelmingly appears in Dewey's scholarship: the frontier. I argue that Dewey wrote about Indigenous people rendered through what I call the frontier discourse. The frontier discourse was a hybrid of popular and scientific discourses that functioned in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as part of the settler colonial logic of the Native erasure. To further

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<sup>58</sup> Pratt, "Philosophy in the 'Middle Ground,'" 602.

conceptualize the frontier discourse, I draw on the foundational theorizations of discourse from Michel Foucault. As Stuart Hall has characterized, Foucault established how a discourse functions as a cultural system of representation. Discourse sets boundaries around ideas about people, places, and things by representing them in certain ways. The suite of representations bundled within a given discursive formation has an afterlife that lingers in wider cultural imaginary. In so doing, discursive representations construct ideas that offer scripts for behavior, set expectations, and warp experience. Underscoring these formations is power—the hegemonic power to represent all manner of things, to make knowledge claims, and to ultimately regulate behavior.<sup>59</sup> The frontier proved to be one such discourse. As the nineteenth century waned, ideas about the frontier appeared more frequently not only in American popular culture but in scholarly domains as well, such as history, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. The constituent images of the frontier—namely, representations of Indians and pioneers—gained their meaning from the discursive formation in which they were a part.

In regards to American Indian history, few have more comprehensively explored the conjoined concepts of discourse and frontier than Richard Slotkin. Across a trilogy of books beginning in the early 1970s, Slotkin explores the cultural history of United States’ frontier imagination. While Slotkin employs the concept of myths, archetypes, and legends as the units of his analysis, he is fundamentally interested in the power of language, principally metaphor. Slotkin freely admits that his was a discursive project. “Such metaphors are not merely ornamental,” he writes. “They invoke a tradition of discourse that has historical roots and

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<sup>59</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), cited in Stephanie Taylor, Simeon Yates, and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (London: Sage, 2001); see also Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology...,” *Moment Journal*, 1, no. 1 (2014): 9-36.

referents, and carries with it a heavy and persistent ideological charge.”<sup>60</sup> The frontier discourse offers an explanation of the historical development of the United States, especially its political culture, to many subsequent generations of Americans.<sup>61</sup> I seek to place Dewey into this same context.<sup>62</sup>

I enumerate three components of the frontier discourse. The first component is a vocabulary of savagery. This vocabulary supplied Dewey with the categories of savagery and civilization. Many Euro-American educators wrote, spoke, and taught using this vocabulary in very different ways, including religious reformers, army officers, federal educators, and philosophers of education. The second component is the ideology of the vanishing Indian, or what Brian Dippie calls the “vanishing American.” Whether it was racial essentialists or anti-modern primitivists, social scientists or historians, benevolent reformers or government bureaucrats, many Euro-Americans during the *fin-de-siècle* period could agree that Indians were disappearing, rapidly vanishing before modernity, fated to disappear forever. Though the cause

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 18. See also Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973); Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

<sup>61</sup> On the history of images and representations of American Indians authored by non-Natives, see Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). See Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), on the ideological freighted nature of the expectations of Indigenous people produced by such images for both Natives and non-Natives alike.

<sup>62</sup> “Myth is acquired and preserved as part of our language,” Slotkin writes. “We observe its operation in the quality of historical (or pseudo-historical) resonance that attaches to terms like ‘Frontier.’ ... These terms appear to be historical references, but in fact they are metaphors.” In this view, a discourse is a symbolic system of language populated by metaphors that have shaped American memory of the past. Discourses are composed of “major tropes, symbolism, and structuring principles.” While I lean on Slotkin’s focus on metaphors, I dispense with Slotkin’s terminology of myth and elect instead to substitute discourse itself as the unit of analysis. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 23, 522.

attributed to this disappearance was a matter of some debate, the Euro-American consensus was that Indians were becoming extinct as a contemporaneous category of people.<sup>63</sup>

The third component of the frontier discourse was the idea of the frontier itself. For much of the period prior to the 1890s, the frontier as an idea had been a physical boundary line that separated the polity of the United States from the wilderness beyond. That boundary line became something more when Frederick Jackson Turner launched his frontier thesis of U.S. history in 1893.<sup>64</sup> In light of the closure of the frontier as it was announced by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1890, Turner sought to make sense of the United States through the settlement and closure of the frontier. In his recent account *The End of the Myth*, Greg Grandin writes that “in the last decade of the 1800s, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner emancipated the concept ‘frontier,’ unhitching it from its more mundane, earthbound meanings—used to indicate a national border or a military front—and letting it float free as an abstraction.”<sup>65</sup> The resulting frontier thesis became not only a historical explanation for the development of the United States, but a prognosis for the future—one that did not seem to have a place for Indigenous people.

Taken together, these three components—the vocabulary of savagery, the ideology of the vanishing Indian, and the frontier thesis—cut across scholarly disciplines, spanned various mediums in popular culture, and conditioned Americans to imagine Indigenous people as part of a dyad at the center of the drama of American history: pioneers and Indians. While this pairing is often remembered as a product of depictions of the U.S. settlement of the Far West beginning in

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<sup>63</sup> “In the contemporary USA, blood quantum regulations, which exclude Indians with non-Indian ancestry from tribal reckoning, constitute a post-frontier analogue to the Vanishing Indian.” Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (New York: Verso, 2016), 4.

<sup>64</sup> Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019), 122; Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 129-44. See also Frederick J. Turner’s Johns Hopkins dissertation about the development of the state of Wisconsin, “The Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin” (PhD diss, Johns Hopkins University, 1891).

<sup>65</sup> Grandin, *The End of the Myth*, 113.



the middle of the nineteenth century, I argue that this preoccupation with the frontier began much earlier in the Great Lakes.

In her pathbreaking book *The Legacy of Conquest*, Patricia Limerick catalogues the various weaknesses in the frontier thesis, noting that Turner's account occluded more than it revealed. "It required that the observer stand in the East and look to the West," Limerick writes.<sup>66</sup> In particular, Limerick identifies where, exactly, one had to be standing in order for the frontier thesis to appear most plausible. She emphasizes that Turner was born in Portage, Wisconsin and began his career as a historian at the University of Wisconsin. This led Limerick to wryly note that Turner's frontier thesis seemed like a poor fit for the actual conditions of the settlement of the West: "Deserts, mountains, mines, towns, cities, railroads, territorial government, and the institutions of commerce and finance never found much of a home in his model." Limerick concludes that Turner seemed to have "agrarian settlement and folk democracy in the comparatively well watered Midwest."<sup>67</sup> Limerick's observation is suggestive: whether Turner was conscious of it or not, his frontier thesis reflected Turner's position as a Euro-American born, raised, and researching in the Great Lakes.

I believe that it is not coincidental that both Turner and Dewey began their academic careers in the Great Lakes.<sup>68</sup> In arguably no other region in the United States did Euro-Americans consolidate their historical memory of their state's politics made out of the settlement of time more quickly than in the Great Lakes. From the Northwest Land Ordinance in 1787 to the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and beyond, the frontier remained a useful metaphor as "a

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<sup>66</sup> Patricia N. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 27.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>68</sup> James J. Buss, *Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

colonial agrarian society was successfully adapted to the cultural needs of an emerging industrial republic.”<sup>69</sup> According to James Joseph Buss, the Great Lakes frontier discourse was particularly intense, popularized by pioneer societies, log-cabin clubs, settler meet-ups, and picnics, parades, and pageants that celebrated the founding of towns, counties, and states in the region. The land organized by the Northwest Ordinance became fixed in American memory as the country’s “first frontier.” As Buss argues, these late nineteenth and early twentieth century cultural productions depicting the settlement of the region marked a “moment of Native dispossession and victimless settlement—what I refer to as the clearing of the middle ground” and “became the region’s creation story.”<sup>70</sup> The logic of Native elimination is baked into this regional creation story and its popular culture. I follow in Buss’ wake to argue that the constitutive elements of the frontier discourse circulated forms of such materials as letters, paintings, newspaper articles, expositions, parades, pageants, pioneer society picnics, and historical performances which structured the experience of scholars like Turner and Dewey. In so doing, the frontier discourse pushed Indigenous people into the background of the history of the Great Lakes and into the forefront of the imagination of thinkers like Dewey.

### **Instrumental Indians**

Buss argues that instead of the western’s image of the cowboy, in Euro-American memory of the Great Lakes, it was the pioneers and Indians who seemed to go hand in hand. In the Great Lakes, the “vanished Indian and the stalwart pioneer” captured the region’s Euro-American historical memory. In “promotional materials to travel journals, individuals from a variety of backgrounds presented the lower Great Lakes as a territory ripe for settlement yet

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<sup>69</sup> Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, xvi.

<sup>70</sup> Buss, *Winning the West With Words*, 6-10.

destined to endure clashes between civilization and savagery,” Buss writes.<sup>71</sup> Because of this immersion in the Great Lakes frontier discourse, Indians proved extremely useful to Dewey. I argue that during his entire career, Dewey frequently invoked the Indians in one of two patterns, which I call backgrounding and foiling.

Inspired by Jean O’Brien’s book *Firsting and Lasting*, backgrounding and foiling are alternating patterns in which Dewey invoked Indians.<sup>72</sup> On the one hand, Dewey frequently assigns Indians to a premodern past. This has the effect of relegating Indigenous people to the background in Dewey’s historical understanding of the United States. I dub this *backgrounding*. In consequence, backgrounding makes Indigenous people all but invisible to Dewey as a contemporary community very much invested in ideas about democracy and education. On the other hand, Dewey invokes Indians as embodiments of a more rudimentary “savage” psychology of accommodation to the environment, which he frequently compares and contrasts to a “civilized” psychology of control over the environment. By depicting Indians-as-savages as people stuck in a primitive psychological gear, he is able to foil them with civilized pioneers. I call this *foiling*. Taken together, Dewey’s habitual backgrounding and foiling of Indian people is what I call the Instrumental Indian in Dewey’s philosophy.

The Instrumental Indian captures two meanings of the word “instrumental.” First, it describes the pattern by which North American Indigenous people appear in Dewey’s writings as evidence for his philosophy, not as a potential constituency who might benefit from that philosophy. Second, Instrumental Indians appear in critical moments as Dewey attempts to define his experimentalism. In this fashion, I suggest that not only were American Indian people

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

frequently *instrumentalized* (e.g., reduced to a kind of heuristic device or construct with which to think) by Dewey, they were also simultaneously *instrumental* (e.g., requisite, vital, or necessary) to Dewey's articulation of his method of experimentalism. I conclude that his Instrumental Indians were not marginal, but rather central, to his entire method of experimentalism.

Dewey's Instrumental Indians were a result of his immersion in the frontier discourse. In particular, I argue that Dewey's Instrumental Indians form a pattern that most resembles how Indigenous people appear in Frederick J. Turner's frontier thesis. In my argument, I am inspired by James A. Good, Jim Garrison, and Louis Menand, who have written about Dewey's Hegelian influences.<sup>73</sup> Dewey admits that Hegel left a "permanent deposit" upon his philosophy. This led Menand to describe Dewey's experimentalism as "biologized Hegel."<sup>74</sup> With the many Instrumental Indians in Dewey's writings in mind, I seek to supplement this reading from the perspective of Indigenous studies. If Dewey biologized G. W. Hegel, then he experimentalized Frederick J. Turner.

Turner's frontier thesis offered Dewey a vocabulary of savagery rooted not just in history, but in American history.<sup>75</sup> Dewey's pragmatism was forged during the same period when the frontier was deemed closed and a new suite of meanings about the frontier came into Americans' imagination. In the late nineteenth century, the vocabulary of savagery was back in a

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<sup>73</sup> James A. Good, *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The 'Permanent Hegelian Deposit' in the Philosophy of John Dewey* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006); Jim Garrison, "The 'Permanent Deposit' of Hegelian Thought in Dewey's Theory of Inquiry," *Educational Theory* 56, no. 1 (February 2006): 1-37. See also James A. Good, "Dewey's 'Permanent Hegelian Deposit': A Reply to Hickman and Alexander," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 44, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 577-602.

<sup>74</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 328-329.

<sup>75</sup> The vocabulary of savagery also offered a solution to various crises of modernity associated with the closing of the frontier. What Matthew Frye Jacobsen has called the "barbarian virtues" were the "savage virtues" of Gail Bederman and Phil Deloria's *Playing Indian*. Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

moment when the frontier was a boundary between psychology, culture, nationality, and modernity on the American frontier. By 1893, Turner crafted his frontier thesis as a spatial metaphor for differences between Indians and Euro-Americans upon much older precedents.<sup>76</sup> Long before Turner, however, the frontier offered Euro-Americans a paradigm “to understand cultural and racial difference and the ways in which they understood empire and colony.” Deloria notes that constructions constituting this frontier paradigm could include “race, faith, economy, gender, and geographical expansion.” Regardless, the frontier offered a spatial grounding for a binary of savage and civilization, which proved to be the hinge for “the relation between a spatialized sense of racial and cultural difference.”<sup>77</sup> In effect, the frontier thesis wrote racialized difference upon the landscape itself.<sup>78</sup> “Turner saw American history in spatial terms, a moving boundary between European civilization and Indian savagery.” Consequently, the frontier has been a metaphor so capacious that it could—and did—contain many elements of race, racism, and racial recapitulation. Indeed, insofar as the frontier has been depicted as a distinction between “notions of savagery and civilization,” it has been particularly freighted with drawing racial lines between Whites and Indians.<sup>79</sup>

As a discursive formation, the frontier discourse functions within settler colonial theory as part of the logic of Native elimination. As scholars who have applied settler colonial theory in U.S. history have argued, the integrity of the settler colonial polity relies on the ongoing logic of Native elimination to suppress the political distinction of Indigenous people. Native sovereignty is especially problematic in nations that claim a democratic identity, as the settler colonial policy

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<sup>76</sup> Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 6-12.

<sup>77</sup> Philip J. Deloria, “Historiography,” in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 8-10.

<sup>78</sup> On the frontier’s conflation of space and time, see Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 47-57.

<sup>79</sup> Philip J. Deloria, “Historiography,” 10.

itself represents an obstacle to self-determination of Native communities. As Patrick Wolfe describes, “The logic of Native elimination is often expressed in genocidal violence, assimilatory school, or just as often enacted through cultural productions which variously depict Indigenous people as disappearing, reduced to a racial or ethnic status, or consenting to their own colonization.”<sup>80</sup> Indigenous political distinction is ultimately a threat to the foundation of the settler polity, which relies on rationalizing the elimination, assimilation, or subordination of Indigenous peoples that it has come to territorially envelop. For this reason, in the United States, the logic of Native elimination was interpolated with ideas about the frontier.

The logic of Native elimination suffuses the processes of settler colonialism. In his book *Benevolent Experiment*, Andrew Woolford “conceptualize[s] settler colonial practices of assimilative education as a series of nets that operates at macro-, meso-, and microsocietal levels.”<sup>81</sup> In three registers, Woolford accounts for macrosocietal formations such as law, culture, and science; in my case, I add philosophy. This is followed by the meso-social scale, composed by institutions such as government bureaus, civil service departments, and schools themselves. At the finest register, the microsocial level, can be found individuals such as teachers, assistants, matrons and disciplinarians, and superintendents. Together, the political, economic, and cultural practices represented at each scale together form what Woolford deems a “settler colonial mesh” that has variously loosened or tightened its grip on Native peoples and their agency and

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<sup>80</sup> “With the demise of the frontier, elimination turned inwards,” Wolfe writes. “Assimilation—the non-homicidal, or not necessarily homicidal, dissolution of Native difference into the settler mainstream—is a characteristically post-frontier attempt to eliminate the obstruction presented by the persistence of Native sovereignties along with their attendant territorial counterclaim.” Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 399; Wolfe, *Traces of History*, 15. On an antecedent conceptualization of the colonial logic of assimilation antecedent to Wolfe’s settler colonialism, see Robert K. Thomas, “Colonialism: Classic and Internal,” *New University Thought* 4, no. 3-4 (1969): 37-45.

<sup>81</sup> Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment*, 3-5.

resistance.<sup>82</sup> I position the frontier discourse within Woolford's theory of the settler colonial mesh as a macrosocial formation. Insofar as Dewey drew upon the frontier discourse, he brewed the logic of Native erasure into his pragmatism. The outcome is clear: while representations of Indian people are, in fact, central to Dewey's philosophy, actual Indigenous contemporaries are not. Dewey's reliance on Instrumental Indians effectively made his philosophy (especially his reconstruction of local control) not only of marginal utility to actual Indigenous people, but an accessory to the ideas driving the federal government's anti-democratic schooling of Indians.

### **Reading's Dewey's Vocabulary of Savagery**

Any intellectual history about John Dewey and Indigenous people ought to begin by accounting for what the man wrote about Indians. How might one go about trying to find such elusive Indians? Scour the thicket of Dewey's many footnotes looking for clues, or resort to a methodology of reading Dewey's works against the grain? I argue that there is no need for such scholarly woodcraft. Instead, Dewey's Indians are hidden in plain sight. To spot them, we need only do a little bit of decoding of the term that Dewey most often used to refer to American Indians, that of the "savage."

This brings us to the first element of the frontier discourse, the vocabulary of savagery. There is no doubt that Dewey used the terms "savage," "savages," and "savagery." In fact, such references are legion. For example, Dewey first used the term "savage" in a book-length publication in his 1887 *Psychology*, where he found referencing what he attributed as "savage" psychology to be a useful way to illustrate apperception. In his first use of the term, Dewey

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<sup>82</sup> Coincidentally, Slotkin uses a metaphor of his own to explain the structure of the frontier discourse that fits nicely with Woolford's model of a settler colonial mesh. "The original mythology is a kind of net in which new materials will be caught; but when a fish comes along too big for the net to comprehend, the net must either stretch or break, be cast aside or repaired anew. The myths we inherit carry the marks of past reworking, and beneath their smooth surface they conceal the scares of the conflicts and ambivalences that attend their making." Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 23.

conflated “savage” peoples with hogs. “Former acquirements serve as the means of giving significance to the new,” Dewey wrote in Ann Arbor. “The same object may awaken only a look of stolid surprise in the savage, or the comprehension of a new law of the action of bodies. The hog reads into the apple simply that it is good to eat; Sir Isaac Newton that it exemplifies the law of all falling bodies.”<sup>83</sup>

While the intervening years chastened him somewhat, Dewey continued to use this vocabulary of savagery as late as his final book-length project. In his 1949 *Knowing and the Known*, Dewey contemplated how people could define the ineffable as a function of logic, using an imagined “savage hunter pointing with hand for benefit of comrade towards sign of motion in brush” or perhaps even “a tropic savage as guest in the arctic watching Eskimo’s finger pointed towards never-before-seen snow” as examples in action.<sup>84</sup> These examples bookend nearly sixty-two years of this vocabulary in the pragmatist’s writings. The more interesting question is not whether Dewey used these terms—he most certainly did—but rather why these terms are so ubiquitous in Dewey’s writing. What is their origin? What explains the centrality, longevity, and sometimes contradictory use of the vocabulary of savagery in Dewey’s philosophy? And what was the consequence?

To perform this decoding of Dewey’s vocabulary of savagery, we must first account for the larger structure in which scholars believe Dewey used the vocabulary of savagery in the first place. Thomas Fallace has persuasively argued that Dewey came to use the vocabulary of savagery as a feature of racial recapitulation theory, a discourse born from social science. Racial recapitulation theory, a late nineteenth-century scientific discourse, portrayed many non-White people as savages whose historical development was defined by linear historicism and genetic

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<sup>83</sup> John Dewey, *Psychology* (1887), *Early Works*, 2:126.

<sup>84</sup> John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (1949), *Later Works*, 16:183.



psychology. “Dewey accepted the language ideas of his peers and collaborators,” Fallace writes. Like Euro-American scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, Dewey “viewed culture as something that social groups either had or did not, or had to different degrees. In this sense, the term savage was racially coded to mean undeveloped, dark-skinned, child-like, non-Christian.”<sup>85</sup> In this way, the vocabulary of savagery was applicable to both Black and Indigenous people.<sup>86</sup> Fear-Segal argues that while “the major focus of this discourse was always African Americans, but in scientific inquiry as much as popular thought, America’s nonwhite people could not be considered separately and judgments about African Americans influenced opinions of Native Americans.”<sup>87</sup> She concludes that “Americans progressively included and enmeshed Indians in discourses and practices derived from the nation’s racial past and lexicon.”<sup>88</sup> In this, Fallace suggests Dewey was no different than his Euro-American peers: “I assume that Dewey employed the term savage because he knew it had meaning for his contemporaries and that, unless he explicitly states otherwise, Dewey accepted the use of the term by his contemporaries, colleagues, and collaborators.”<sup>89</sup>

The limit of the racial interpretation of Dewey’s relationship to Indigenous education and democracy is exemplified by a debate between Thomas Fallace and Kimberly Richards.

Fallace’s 2011 monograph *Dewey and the Problem of Race* treats Dewey’s relationship to

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<sup>85</sup> Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education*, 7. For a wider view of theories of racial hierarchy, see George W. Stocking Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1991). On the bearing of this debate on Indian education, see Jacqueline Fear-Segal, “White Theories: Can the Indian be Educated?” in *White Man’s Club*, 31-47.

<sup>86</sup> For most racial recapitulation theorists, the vocabulary of savagery was fungible. Savagery was a category that included just about everyone who wasn’t a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Whereas Indians were savages, sometimes Black people were regarded as barbarians; sometimes, it was the other way around. Whatever the case, White Euro-Americans were always associated with civilization, portrayed as the highest form of human development. On the varieties of schemes for racial hierarchy by theorists of racial recapitulation, see Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education*, 83-102.

<sup>87</sup> Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 32.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race: An Intellectual History, 1895-1922* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011), 5.

Indigenous people in this frame. Fallace shows us how Dewey could, on the one hand, use the vocabulary of savagery while disavowing racial essentialism.<sup>90</sup> For many individual White Euro-American people, their privileged position within the scheme of racial recapitulation “at the end of history” echoed their sense of cultural chauvinism and ethnocentrism. “Like his intellectual contemporaries, Dewey believed that all of the societies of the world, past and present, could be placed on a single continuum of sociological progress.”<sup>91</sup> Fallace argues that Dewey’s employment of racial recapitulation amounted to cultural chauvinism. Fallace concludes, “Ethnocentrism was built right into Dewey’s early pedagogy and philosophy; it was part of its weight-bearing structure.”<sup>92</sup> Because Fallace holds that Dewey embraced racial recapitulation out of his commitment not to racism but to historicism, he concludes that Dewey’s depiction of Indians-as-savages was a passing trend in Dewey’s work. In particular, Fallace argues that Dewey rejected racial recapitulation in *Human Nature and Conduct* and in a 1921 lecture to the Chinese Social and Political Science Association titled “Racial Prejudice and Friction.” In so doing, Fallace suggests Dewey made his philosophy more friendly to Black and Indigenous people.

Fallace never lets Dewey off the hook for the coercive potential in anti-democratic education. “Dewey never outlined what to do when one group did not want to partake in associated living or did not want to be developed in accordance with Dewey’s educational scheme,” he states. Fallace calls this the difference between “voluntary association” and “forced assimilation.”<sup>93</sup> Interpreting Dewey’s invocations of Indians-as-savages as a function of his use

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<sup>90</sup> The interfacing of the vocabulary of savagery with linear historicism has been best mapped in federal Indian education policy by Frederick E. Hoxie, “Redefining Indian Education: Thomas J. Morgan’s Program in Disarray,” *Arizona and the West* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 5-18.

<sup>91</sup> Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education*, 47-53.

<sup>92</sup> Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

of racial recapitulation, however, Fallace does not consider Dewey's broader immersion and investment in the frontier discourse that similarly conflated Indian people as savage foils to civilized pioneers. Nor does Fallace's intellectual history treat the consequences of Dewey's ideas when actively applied by federal Indian educators in their system of imposed schooling. He does not include a historical treatment of the federal project of Indian schooling and how it represented more than paternalism on the basis of race, but rather an outright assault on Indigenous sovereignty. A reader is therefore left without an appreciation for the context in which Dewey's philosophy was institutionalized, particularly in federal government's anti-democratic schooling, and how Indigenous people responded to these Deweyan-inspired impositions. Fallace's analysis is limited by its racial interpretation, which largely excludes the political dimensions of Native elimination stemming not merely from the racism of Euro-Americans, but from the larger political and cultural processes of settler colonialism.

For this reason, Kimberly Richards in her 2017 dissertation offers a trenchant critique of Fallace's account of Dewey's development from the perspective of Indigenous studies. Fallace emphasizes how the early 1920s was a crucial period for Dewey, as he rejected racial recapitulation theory in favor of a burgeoning cultural pluralism. In time, this cultural pluralism would develop into multiculturalism. In her own analysis of the latter essay, Richards presciently grasped the nub of the problem. First, just because Dewey was a racial historicist and not a racial essentialist did not mean his philosophy was therefore anti-colonial. "While he may not have been a proponent of scientific racism i.e. or eugenics, he thought in terms of the prevailing evolutionary paradigm at the time that 'civilization' was a better state than 'savagery,'" Richards

observes.<sup>94</sup> Second, Dewey's solution for the racism confronting immigrants or African Americans or Asian people was to reduce individual prejudice of White people against non-White people through public schooling. As Richards notes, this solution was just another problem for Indian people. Assimilation or integration might be a means to serve the cultural conservation of immigrant ethnicities; for Indigenous people, assimilation and incorporation meant the end to their political status and the domestication of Indigenous cultures, as described by Lomawaima and McCarty. Richards rightly concludes that Dewey "understood the psychological processes of dominance, exploitation and even racism to a certain degree, but was unable to recognize its roots in imperialism, colonialism, and even his own ethnocentrism."<sup>95</sup> In this fashion, Richards's analysis matches my own account of Dewey's vocabulary of savagery, and my conclusion that his cultural pluralism and reconstruction of local control fell flat in Indian Country.

However, Richards' analysis of the place of Indigenous people in Dewey's philosophy is hardly comprehensive. Richards uses only two of Dewey's writings, his 1916 *Democracy and Education* and his 1921 "Race Prejudice and Friction," upon which to base her critique. This creates a problem when it comes to other assertions, such as that Dewey failed to question nationalism or even capitalism, both of which are in part byproducts of colonialism."<sup>96</sup> As a careful reader of Dewey's other works such as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1919), *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), and *Individualism Old and New* (1930) can appreciate, Dewey's critique of both nationalism and capitalism is often sharp and unsparing, and his vision of critical democracy is markedly different than the racial chauvinism espoused by contemporary Indian

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<sup>94</sup> Kimberly R. Richards, "Ancillary Citizenship and Stratified Assimilation: How American Indian Education Was Developed to Force American Indians into the United States Economy as Reserve Laborers" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017), 87, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9g60b9bp>.

<sup>95</sup> Richards, "Ancillary Citizenship and stratified Assimilation," 92.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

educators like Estelle Reel or Francis Leupp. In other words, while Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy failed to address the struggles of Indian people against anti-democratic schooling, a close reading of his philosophy cannot be read to support a White nationalist state. At the same time, this interpretation overlooks Dewey's career-spanning invocation of Indians-as-savages as a critical feature of the articulation of his experimentalism. A more comprehensive reading of Dewey's invocations of Indians is merited, not simply because Dewey's philosophy was dismissive of Indians (it was) but because it so often relied upon them.

### **Centering Indians in Education and Democracy**

I offer an alternative reading of Dewey. I argue that Dewey's many enduring references to savagery are better understood not only as a product of his racial recapitulation, but rather also as evidence of the depth of Dewey's immersion in the frontier discourse. This is not the typical methodological approach to reading Dewey's corpus. To be sure, when Dewey embraced racial recapitulation theory as a useful part of his naturalistic method, he inherited a category of "savage" which could range from African Americans and Africans to Aboriginal people of Australia and North American Indigenous people. However, due to his immersion in Michigan's frontier discourse, I argue that "savagery" was a category that Dewey most frequently populated with American Indians. From the perspective of critical Indigenous studies, instead of mere ethnocentrism, Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy functioned as a part of the logic of Native erasure, which fueled imposed schooling on American Indian people in his own lifetime. I contend that when Dewey wrote about savage peoples, he mostly had American Indians in mind.

When we read "Indians" back into Dewey's "savages," we can see Dewey's philosophy in a new light. Such an approach organizes what might otherwise appear as scattershot references

to Indians-as-savages in Dewey's corpus into a calculated engagement with (mostly imagined) Indian people as rendered through Dewey's own experience with the frontier discourse. This is one way to leapfrog a scholarly preoccupation with Dewey and race and arrive at a more compelling structural interpretation of Dewey's life and philosophy in U.S. history as a part of settler colonialism. As a result, when Dewey finally abandoned racial recapitulation in the 1920s in favor of cultural pluralism, he still retained the frontier discourse and carried it forward into the 1930s and beyond. This affected the continued instrumentalization of Indian people in his work; even as he increasingly rejected racial recapitulation and embraced cultural pluralism in the 1920s, Instrumental Indians continue to appear in Dewey's philosophy. While Dewey was increasingly motivated to speak out on matters of Black civil rights, he was silent on Indigenous politics, much of which (rather ironically) was focused on curbing anti-democratic schooling. At best, Dewey implied the inclusion of Indians in his burgeoning cultural pluralism as an ethnic group, rather than develop a critique of imposed schooling by the government on the basis of Indigenous sovereignty.

Because the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous nations offers a viable legal foundation upon which the principle of local control might be reconfigured, the anti-democratic nature of imposed schooling in Indian communities is uniquely anti-democratic. "The history of Native education well illustrates the cost of repressive, standardizing schooling that abrogates the rights of local choice and control," observe Lomawaima and McCarty.<sup>97</sup> In order for school choice to be a robust criterion for democracy in Indian Country, the democratic principle of local control must also be an extension of tribal sovereignty. Such an Indigenous critique of anti-democratic schooling would not settle on a liberal pluralism or multiculturalism for inclusion; rather, it

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<sup>97</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 5.

would also include provisions for Indigenous community control over schools on the basis of sovereignty. Lomawaima and McCarty conclude that this is the lesson in democracy from a century of Native American education: “Native experience and perspectives—both resistance to imposed education and the creation of alternative models—reveal liberating power of choice and the importance of self-determination for communities who make up a nation unified by critical democratic ideals, rather than by linguistic or cultural homogeneity.”<sup>98</sup> Democracy in Indian education must be self-determination in schooling.

As I will argue, as Dewey’s entire method of experimentalism was shaped by the frontier discourse, Indians became an instrumental part of Dewey’s pragmatism, where Indigenous people were rendered not as the ends of such a philosophy, but rather as its means. As a consequence, the reconstruction of the democratic principle of local control that Dewey had in mind and the self-determination of schooling as a manifestation of Indigenous sovereignty were ultimately two incompatible syntheses between education and democracy.<sup>99</sup>

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## Chapter Overview

This dissertation charts an Indigenous-inflected genealogy of Dewey’s life and works. As a result, this dissertation does not dwell in the typical haunts of Dewey scholarship. Instead, this dissertation takes readers on a new path—one we might call an Indigenous trace—through

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> In his book *Empire of the People*, Adam Dahl argues that “native dispossession and settler colonialism did not simply shape American institutional and social development, but that they infused into and constituted the basic conceptual logics of democratic theory.” While Dahl’s argument is based around the framers of the Northwest Land Ordinance of 1787, I extend Dahl’s analysis into the eighteenth century via the frontier discourse, where it ensnared Dewey. See Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2018), 16. On Native scholarship on Indigenous democratic traditions and its occasional overlap with that of the United States, see José Barreiro, *Indian Roots of American Democracy* (Ithaca: Akwe:Kon Press, 1992); John C. Mohawk and Oren R. Lyons, *Exiled in the Land of the Free: Democracy, Indian Nations, and the U.S. Constitution* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 1992); Bruce E. Johansen, ed., *Debating Democracy: Native American Legacy of Freedom* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 1998).

Dewey's corpus. To follow an Indigenous trace through Dewey's life and career, we set out on the equivalent of an intellectual road trip, where we will encounter places, people, and pedagogies where few studies of Dewey have gone before. Such a route positions this dissertation as an Indigenous intellectual history of America's most prominent philosopher and his defining contributions to American pragmatism in the shadow of settler colonialism.<sup>100</sup>

### *Part I: The Great Lakes Frontier Discourse*

We begin our narrative trek in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1884, where we join a young John Dewey as he began his first job as a philosopher at the University of Michigan. In chapter one, *Immersion*, I examine the first ten years of Dewey's career as a philosopher. While many philosophical treatments of Dewey's career tend to analyze his later career and his mature articulations of experimentalism, I argue that these early years proved to be the most formative on Dewey's attitude about Indigenous people. In that decade, Dewey moved to Michigan, wrote his first monograph, met his wife Alice Chipman, and began an ambitious research agenda that would soon lead him to his preeminent position leading the "new education." All the while, Dewey was surrounded by the Great Lakes frontier discourse. The first chapter reconstructs Ann Arbor, Michigan, following how the frontier discourse structured representations of Indians in newspapers, advertisements, and entertainments where Dewey would have encountered them as the part of the warp and woof of everyday life. This frontier discourse represented Michigan's Indian people as savages who were rapidly disappearing as the frontier line passed over the Great

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<sup>100</sup> While I spend a considerable time following Instrumental Indians through Dewey's work, I do so in the spirit of Lomawaima and McCarty, who describe their efforts to "search for the footprints of Native presence in a century of American Indian education." They call the impressions left by Indigenous people on federal Indian education footprints and tracks, inspired by the Hopi concept of the markers upon a sacred landscape. Though this dissertation often centers on Dewey's writing itself, there are many Indigenous people in the wings, as contemporaries, potential interlocutors, or themselves engaged in their own articulations of a synthesis of education and democracy for Indian Country. Wherever possible, I try to surface these Indigenous people. See Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 12-13.



Lakes and into the Far West. Despite his changing philosophical investments, his early depictions of Indigenous people during this period formed a pattern that would endure throughout his life. In Michigan, Dewey became irrevocably immersed in the frontier discourse.

It was during this decade that Dewey also began a relationship with his wife's grandfather, Frederick Riggs. Riggs was an early pioneer to Michigan. He followed in his father Jeremiah's footsteps from New York to Michigan territory in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Somewhere in this time, Riggs was alleged to have been adopted by a "Chippewa" tribe. A number of biographers and philosophers have latched on to this detail to suggest Dewey was inclined to view Indigenous people favorably. While this detail has proven irresistible to Dewey scholars, it largely overlooks Riggs' own career, in which he was personally affecting settler colonialism in Michigan. Riggs worked with his father as a federal Indian farmer near Saginaw, likely amongst the Indigenous people that now make up the Saginaw Chippewa and Little Traverse, Black River, and Swan Creek nations. As a part of the federal government's Civilization Act in 1919, Indian farmers attempted to enjoin Native people to take up land in fee simple and make it productive in the image of a yeoman farmer as a strategy to facilitate U.S. expansion. I argue that Dewey's personal relationship with Riggs was an important input that shaped his attitudes about Indians and pioneers, but not in the way the current scholarship suggests. I conclude that through his relationship with Riggs, Dewey encountered the frontier discourse firsthand as the personification of the Michigan pioneer. Riggs became another brick in the wall in his own experience which separated Dewey from Indigenous interlocutors.

In chapter two, *Divergence*, we stay in Michigan but change registers, giving up the frontier discourse's imagined Indians to track that which it occluded: Michigan's actual Indigenous people and their struggle for education and democracy. I catalog the various

jurisdictions, institutions, and organizations that constituted an anti-democratic mesh that enveloped Indigenous education in Michigan. When Dewey lived in Michigan, Indian education was suspended between three jurisdictions of schooling: private and missionary schools, where religious uplift made Indigenous children candidates who were often recruited by Euro-American educators; public schools, where Indians were an afterthought and often faced intense racism and hostility from Euro-Americans; and the federal government's day, reservation boarding schools, and as of 1893, an off-reservation school at Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

In this chapter, I also consider Andrew J. Blackbird's challenge to this frontier synthesis of education and democracy. Blackbird was an Anishinaabe and Odawa man from Little Traverse, Michigan. He was an eloquent writer, capable historian, and political advocate who spoke to the destructive nature of imposed schooling in Michigan. Blackbird, who became an important community leader, historian, and public speaker during the decade Dewey was in Michigan, would have been an ideal interlocutor for a young Dewey to take Indigenous people into consideration in his emerging interest in education and democracy. I argue that Blackbird embodied many of Dewey's experimental values, and in many ways, far surpassed Dewey's own commitment to a philosophy of action in social problems. I conclude that Dewey's failure to take seriously Indigenous interlocutors such as Blackbird represents an early and irrevocable divergence between Dewey's interests and the contemporary crisis of education and democracy in Native communities.

In chapter three, Dewey leaves Ann Arbor, Michigan, for Chicago, Illinois. His 1894 move to the University of Chicago is typically narrated by historians, philosophers, and biographers as a moment when Dewey shed his early religious and idealist predilections and embraced a new iteration of his pragmatism that became known as an important part of the

“Chicago school.” In my view, I regard Dewey’s move to Chicago less as a leap into an urban lifeworld and rather a move that only consolidated his immersion in the frontier discourse of the Great Lakes. In fact, I argue that it was in Chicago that Dewey began to channel the frontier discourse in his own pedagogy.

In this chapter, I excavate the many references and representations of Indians-as-savages that Dewey made central to the curriculum of his famous Laboratory School. While scholars have scrutinized the Laboratory School and argued that it often peddled racial stereotypes in its history curriculum, I interpret Dewey’s invocations of Indians-as-savages at the Laboratory School not through a racial lens, but through the frontier discourse. The frontier discourse provided a useful historical framework for Dewey’s functional psychology embedded in the history of the United States. Consequently, I argue that Dewey’s history curriculum at the Laboratory School—which attempted to have its students reenact savage life through a firsthand reconstruction of primitive experience—is better understood in the context of the wider nineteenth century phenomenon of Playing Indian. Though scholars such as Phil Deloria have chronicled playing Indian as a sort of performance originally pioneered through White appropriation of the representation of Indian people in political organizations, social clubs, and visual performances, I argue that Dewey’s Laboratory School history curriculum is a peculiar kind of pedagogical Playing Indian that I dub Replaying Indian. This feature of the Laboratory School might be relegated to the status of a footnote of the wider phenomenon of Playing Indian, if not for the non-Native educators in the federal Indian School Service who were directly inspired by Dewey’s innovative school.

## *Part II: Instrumentalizing Indians*

In the second part of this dissertation, I chronicle how Dewey's experimentalism became increasingly refined by way of his instrumentalization of American Indian people. I organize Dewey's many invocations of Indians during this period into two clusters, where they constituted two components of his philosophy of experimentalism: the concept of experimental intelligence and the theorization of problematic situations. I argue that Dewey mobilized Indians in relationship to these concepts in order to articulate his experimentalism to himself and to his readers. Using Indians in his philosophy in this fashion constitutes Dewey's strategic employment of Instrumental Indians.

In chapter four, *Intelligence*, I explore Dewey's invocations of Indians primarily through foiling Indians-as-savages against pioneers. Across many different books and essays regarding psychology, ethics, and history, Dewey invokes Indians as representing a sociocultural and psychological deficiency attributable not to racial essentialism, but to two contrasting mental attitudes regarding the imagined wilderness conditions of the frontier. For Dewey, Indian culture represented the forces of habit upon the mind, resulting in a psychology of accommodation to the environment. On the other hand, pioneers as they were represented in the frontier discourse suggest the opposite of the psychology of accommodation. As a result, American Indians became a particularly useful instrument to refine his theorization of experimental intelligence.

In this chapter, I specifically treat the single citation of an Indigenous contemporary in Dewey's corpus, that of Charles A. Eastman's 1902 *Indian Boyhood*. Eastman was a crucial figure in early twentieth century Indigenous intellectual history. A Dakota man who had been raised in a hunting village, Eastman published his autobiographical account of his childhood in *Indian Boyhood*. As Eastman's book was serialized through *St. Nicholas Magazine*, a publication

marketed for young readers, it was intended by its author to be a part of his large cultural politics of elevating the dignity of Dakota lifeways in the eyes of non-Natives. As David Martinez and others have argued, Eastman is perhaps better understood not simply as an author, but as a Dakota philosopher; many important ideas about Dakota education are discussed in Eastman's book. Dewey's citation of Eastman is therefore a significant moment that might represent Dewey's first consideration of an Indigenous interlocutor.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, I conclude that Dewey failed to grasp the full extent of Eastman's cultural politics. Moreover, by citing Eastman's *Indian Boyhood*, Dewey cast the Dakota philosopher as the epitome of his Instrumental Indian. Dewey's instrumentalization of Eastman's experience for the purposes of defining his own project represents a missed opportunity for the development of American pragmatism to incorporate Indigenous ideas. In fact, I consider elements of Eastman's philosophy to be more pragmatic than Dewey's own work. Had Dewey paid closer attention, he might have learned a great deal that might have refined his own account of experience, let alone disabused him of the frontier discourse.

In chapter five, *Settlements*, we begin by following Dewey's career out of the Great Lakes to New York City. Dewey became a major figure amongst a circle of New York progressives who clustered around settlement organizations like New York's People's Institute. The institute was a nationally leading progressive organization run by mostly upper- and middle-class reformers, activists, and social workers. It was through this interest in such settlements that Dewey began to develop a theory of pluralism. In conjunction with the People's Institute, Dewey became a fierce critic of the melting pot metaphor. As David Tyack observes, in an address to the National Education Association, "John Dewey attacked this frenzy for conformity in 1916 when he said that 'such terms as Irish-American or Hebrew-American or German-American are

false terms because they seem to assume something which is already in existence called American, to which the other factor may be externally hitcht [sic] on. The fact is, the genuine American, the typical American, is himself a hyphenated character.”<sup>101</sup> By 1915, Dewey was not only a member of the People’s Institute advisory board, but he also advised it on the establishment of its own school, known as the Training School for Community Workers. Intended as a means to train a national cohort of community workers that could realize cultural pluralism for immigrants, the Training School was led by one of the People’s Institute’s promising up-and-comers, a man named John Collier.

Collier became a close student of Dewey; his school was thoroughly identified with Dewey, in both its curriculum and its administration. As Collier’s biographer, Lawrence Kelly, notes, the Training School “offered a flexible two-semester curriculum that reflected the influence of John Dewey, a renowned philosopher and progressive educator who taught at Columbia University and directed the Training School’s educational committee.”<sup>102</sup> More specifically, Kelly writes that “John Dewey and William H. Fitzpatrick of Columbia University Teacher’s College, served as educational advisors.”<sup>103</sup> From the standpoint of Indigenous history, Collier’s engagement with Dewey at the People’s Institute was a portentous encounter, as Collier would go on to become one of the most important figures in the shaping of all of twentieth century federal Indian policy. I conclude that Dewey’s work at Collier’s Training School suggests the extent to which Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy was defined mostly in service to the progressive outposts of an urban frontier, the settlement house. The Hull House

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<sup>101</sup> David Tyack, *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 76.

<sup>102</sup> Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), 20.

<sup>103</sup> Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 60.

and People's Institute offered an institutional model and theory of pluralism that would prove to be a poor model for Indigenous self-determination in schooling. In this way, Dewey's reconstruction of local control in schooling was shaped in the image of the settlement houses and the settlers they served.

In chapter six, *Refractions*, we confront the fracturing of Dewey's New York circle of progressives over World War I and its implications on Native people's place in Dewey's cultural pluralism. In most intellectual histories, World War I represents a fracturing of New York progressives into two camps, one associated with anti-war idealists Randolph Bourne and Waldo Frank and the other associated with pro-war pragmatists such as John Dewey and John Collier. From the perspective of Indigenous studies, however, this split is not as total as it first appears. I argue that in the wake of World War I, the differences between the pro-war and anti-war wings of the progressives who made up the settlement house movement paled in comparison to their ongoing commitments to a cultural pluralism that did little to take Indigenous political distinction seriously. In particular, I analyze the idealist critique of Dewey's pragmatism as advanced by Waldo Frank, a leading member of the group emerging as the Young Americans. The Young Americans were a cohort of Euro-American authors, writers, and literary critics who began taking a keen interest in Indians. "After World War I, progressive education and other social reform movements gained momentum as the Western world became disillusioned with industrialized, urbanized, 'civilized' society," notes Lomawaima and McCarty. "Social critics turned their attention to the rural and the natural world, and to American Indian societies, as sources of inspiration."<sup>104</sup> This led Frank to enlist Indians in his statement of anti-modern primitivism, *Our America*, written in 1919 as an attack on Dewey's pragmatism.

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<sup>104</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 64.

While Frank's condemnation of Dewey's vulgar instrumentalism was ultimately a straw man argument, he managed to surface Dewey's debt to the frontier discourse.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, Frank did the one thing Dewey never could: he condemned the anti-democratic nature of federal schooling in Indigenous lives. Frank's condemnation proved to be little more than anti-modern primitivist ethno-romanticism; his idealism offered no viable alternative for a reconstruction of local control. Into this gap stepped John Collier. I conclude that Collier's plan to use federal schools to promote the cultural conservation of Indigenous people without devolving actual control over those schools to tribal governments represents a middle position between Frank's anti-modern primitivism and Dewey's pragmatism. Collier's marriage of Frank's anti-modern primitivism with Dewey's experimentalism may have led to critiques of federal Indian schools, but it did not lead to a reconstruction of local control in Indian schooling during his tenure as commissioner of Indian Affairs.

### *Part III: Indigenous Education and Democracy*

In this final section, I demonstrate how Dewey's philosophy shaped the education of Indigenous people. In chapter seven, *Frontier*, I show how beginning in the early 1920s, Dewey and a cohort of intellectuals, educators, and commentators explicitly embraced the frontier thesis as a diagnostic for democracy. As a result of the closing of the frontier, Dewey and these "frontier progressives" became increasingly concerned that the material conditions that had served as a national "problematic situation" were gone. For his part, Dewey embraced the frontier thesis to map his conceptualization of problematic situations onto U.S. history. Pioneers had cultivated intelligence (and a unique American democratic culture) through their active

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<sup>105</sup> On understanding the frequent (and misleading) charges of "instrumentalism" made by such critics of Dewey, see Steven Fesmire, *Dewey* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 208-17.



settlement of the imagined wilderness. Dewey's frontier analysis led him back to the very edges of the Great Lakes' frontier discourse, to Muncie, Indiana, as he became particularly inspired by Robert and Helen Lynd's landmark sociological and anthropological study of *Middletown*. In their analysis, the community of Muncie, Indiana, embodied the crisis of facing U.S. democracy as a nation because both city and country were understood as products of the settlement of the frontier. Because Dewey used much of Middletown to inspire his political philosophy in *Individualism Old and New*, I argue that represents the culmination of his divergent trajectory from Indigenous concerns over education and democracy. I argue that in Dewey's embrace of the frontier as a diagnostic for democracy in the 1930s, he thoroughly backgrounded Indian people, which rendered his reconstruction of local control inert for contemporary Indigenous people. Thus, the stage was set for the maladaptation of Dewey's philosophy to Indian Country in the 1930s.

Dewey's philosophy was most systemically applied to Indian schooling during John Collier's tenure as Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945. In chapter eight, Trust, I document how Collier assembled a brain trust of progressive educators in the Office of Indian Affairs who were explicitly inspired by Dewey to reshape federal Indian schooling. In this chapter, I follow the tenure of Collier and his brain trust, composed of W. Carson Ryan, Moisés Sáenz, Willard Beatty, and Pedro T. Orata. Through a number of reforms, including an experimental school at Little Wound Day School on the Oglala Sioux reservation of Pine Ridge, the Deweyan brain trust attempted to translate Dewey's reconstruction of local control to Indian Country. Their efforts to use Dewey's philosophy to promote the "self-governance" of tribal nations fell well short of devolving federal control of schools to tribal control. I argue that the Deweyan brain trust did not simply misunderstand Dewey's ideas, but when actually applied to

Indigenous people, Dewey's philosophy could really have no other outcome: it was the logical conclusion of the application of a philosophy that had been defined through Instrumental Indians.

In chapter nine, *Aloha*, we reach the end of the Indigenous trace in a place seemingly very far removed from the Great Lakes: the islands of Hawai'i. Education historians have increasingly noted Dewey's popularity amongst *haole* educators in Hawai'i from the 1890s to the 1950s. Few have considered Native Hawaiian sovereignty as a part of this calculus. In this chapter, I interrogate the three principal translators of Dewey to Hawai'i. The first of Dewey's translators was the family of missionaries-cum-corporate oligarchs: Samuel Northrup Castle and Mary Tenney Castle and their children Helen, Henry, and Harriet. The Castles proved to be major philanthropic figures in Hawai'i's burgeoning settlement house and kindergarten movement. Together, the Castles enjoined the Deweys to visit Hawai'i just several years after their father's company, Castle & Cooke, had helped to affect a coup against Queen Lili'uokalani. In fact, Castle wealth, derived in part from Native Hawaiian plantation laborers, directly subsidized Dewey's Laboratory School. The second translator of Dewey to Hawai'i came on the heels of the Castles in the form of Henry S. Townsend, the leading progressive educator in the island. Townsend found Dewey's philosophy an ideal resource for his effort to employ schooling in service of White racial management of Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and other Polynesian laborers in Hawai'i. In fact, Townsend was a former administrator at the Kamehameha School for Native Hawaiian children, where he arranged for Dewey to visit in 1899.

By the 1950s, Dewey became an important figure in the growing American-led campaign for statehood. To evidence Hawai'i's sociocultural compatibility to the mainland, American statehood advocates such as Benjamin O. Wist promoted the ways in which progressive

educators had succeeded in making Hawai'i schools in Dewey's image. This argument gained a great deal of traction, especially as Cold War anxieties invested new ideological value in schools that seemed to promote American democracy against communism. Dewey's philosophy itself became a substitute for the frontier synthesis of education and democracy embodied in the Northwest Ordinance, a crucial roadmap for incorporating territory not as colonies, but as democratic states. I argue that advocates of statehood effectively made Dewey a stand-in for the Northwest Ordinance in the unincorporated territory of Hawai'i. It was there that the frontier discourse came full circle: what the Northwest Ordinance began in Michigan, Dewey's philosophy inadvertently finished in Hawai'i.

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What is the "cash value" of taking this Indigenous trace through Dewey's corpus? Most immediately, it is an opportune way to travel through the overlapping intellectual histories of education, pragmatism, and democracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century while centering Indigenous people in these histories. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that Dewey's experimentalism—an important pillar of pragmatism—was crafted while enmeshed in a cultural lifeworld cramped by settler colonialism. Over the course of his career, Dewey relied on the frontier discourse as both history and method. Dewey's experimentalism was fashioned not out of cultural exchange with Native people, but out of the intellectual raw materials supplied by the logic of Native erasure. Dewey's instrumentalization of Indigenous people did not just leave a mere stain on his historical legacy or produce a textual dilemma for Dewey scholars to unravel like a philosophical riddle. Instead, it had a direct impact on Indigenous people subjected to imposed schooling in his own lifetime. Dewey's philosophy was directly invoked by non-Native educators engaged in federally imposed schooling. Between 1884 and 1951, Dewey's inability and unwillingness to treat contemporary Indigenous people as a potential constituency for his

reconstruction of local control made this philosophy little more than an accessory to the project of anti-democratic schooling for Indigenous people.

From the point of view of Indigenous history, traversing this terrain is an imperative prerequisite before we can read Dewey's philosophy as a potential resource in the anti-colonial program of Indigenous critical pedagogy. To evaluate the anti-colonial potential of Dewey's philosophy, we must first grapple with this history. Dewey's reliance on Instrumental Indians degrades his philosophy's anti-colonial potential. While Dewey's philosophy may yet be reconstructed as an instrument against the ongoing processes of settler colonialism, that project will require some work. For it to be accomplished, however, Dewey scholars need to better understand how the philosopher's life and thought parallel, intersect, and sometimes overlap with the anti-democratic history of Indian education. Before Dewey's philosophy can be read as anti-colonial, it must first be de-colonized.

## CHAPTER 1:

### **Immersion: Frederick Riggs and Michigan's Frontier Discourse, 1884-1984**

In 1884, a twenty-four-year-old John Dewey arrived in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A newly minted PhD from Johns Hopkins University, he was there to begin his first job as instructor of philosophy at the University of Michigan. It was an exciting time for Dewey, the town, and the university. James Burrill Angell, an acquaintance of Dewey's family from his childhood in Vermont, was president of the university. By 1884, Angell had been on the job for thirteen years, a tenure that had led the institution in its transformation into a large state research university. Under Angell's watch, the university embraced modern social and scientific methodology; the seminar was imported from Germany; high school diplomas rather than entrance exams became the qualification for admission; religious services on campus became optional; and women were finally admitted in 1870, a reform that would bring Dewey's soon-to-be wife Harriet Alice Chipman to campus.<sup>1</sup> When Dewey arrived, the population of the town of Ann Arbor stood around 10,000 people, 2,000 of whom were students at the university, an enrollment that made the school one of the largest in the country at the time.<sup>2</sup>

It was fitting that the school should have this modern reputation, for the state it served was itself undergoing a dramatic transformation. An older Michigan economy based on resource extraction like fishing, timber, and mining was beginning to transition in the late nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Williams, *Thought and Action: John Dewey at the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor: Bentley Historical Library, 1998), 6.

<sup>2</sup> University Hall was supplemented by another building constructed in 1920 known as Angell Hall to commemorate Angell's tenure at the University. Williams, *Thought and Action*, 3-4.

century to industrialized manufacturing. By the 1880s, many Euro-American Michiganders felt that their state had come a long way from its wilderness origins. Sarah Lieb's 1889 *History of Michigan* narrated the transition from territory to statehood, when the new state's "five thousand people found themselves poor, and therefore discontented. What little progress had been made tilling the land had been interrupted by lack of laborers; there were no roads to travel upon, and the Indians were not any too friendly."<sup>3</sup> Lieb's story wove a narrative where through the industry of its pioneers, the wilderness of Michigan's "Black Swamp" had been transformed from a backwoods territory into a modern industrial democracy.<sup>4</sup> As the Secretary of State boasted in 1893, "Michigan began where other older states stopped. She has not stopped and has seldom even called a halt in her steady march to the front ranks of civilization."<sup>5</sup> Even the university where Dewey began his career was eager to claim this mantle of civilization. The emergence of the university as a symbol of civilization was celebrated in the stanza of an 1893 poem, "Where, only five decades ago/ The woodmen's axe was heard/ Thy University now shows/ Its glories to world."<sup>6</sup>

By the time Dewey arrived in Ann Arbor, the cultural, political, and economic forces of settler colonialism had conspired to marginalize Indigenous people's interests in the state. Though many of the Indigenous people of Michigan—Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadomi nations—had avoided outright removal through savvy negotiations with the federal government, by the 1880s much of their land had been allotted and defrauded. Their tribal nations had been

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Leib, *History of Michigan* (Detroit: Belford, Clarke, Co, 1889), 148, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>4</sup> The impression that Michigan was, for all its material development, still something of a frontier remained as late as 1966, when John Axelson depicted the time that Dewey would spend in Ann Arbor as "a decade of ferment" for the young philosopher in large part due to the fact that "when Dewey entered the University ... Michigan was a vigorous state in the pioneering stages." John Axelson, "John Dewey: 1884-1894: Decade of Ferment for Young Michigan Teacher," *Michigan Educational Journal* (May 1, 1966), 14.

<sup>5</sup> John W. Jochim, ed. *Michigan and Its Resources* (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., 1893), 10, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>6</sup> Jochim, *Michigan and Its Resources*, 10.



Figure 1.1. John Dewey, studio portrait, ca. 1884, John Dewey papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

dissolved through treaties that sought to erase their sovereignty; they were relegated to labor either at the margins of the state's extractive market economy in lumber, mining, and fishing or in other low-paying, low-security work; and they were rendered invisible under a mountain of novels, histories, and media produced by Euro-Americans that portrayed them as a vanishing people so as to expunge White Michiganders of any responsibility for it.<sup>7</sup>

Dewey, like so many other Michiganders, obscured this history of the enduring presence of Indigenous people by accepting a frontier story of Michigan's settlement as a civilization wrought from wilderness. In the pages of over a decade of books, articles, and essays imagined and published during his time in Michigan, Dewey never made more than one passing reference to the state's Indigenous people. Despite the fact that Dewey was living in the state with the third largest Indigenous population in the union (7,240 Indian inhabitants according to the 1884 census, a total almost certainly underreporting *Métis* people), a state where Indian men over

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<sup>7</sup> In 1887, Bela Hubbard wrote in her pioneer memoir a quintessential settler colonial narrative as described by Jean O'Brien in *Firsting and Lasting*. As Bela Hubbard wrote without irony, "However just may be the complaints of injustice done to the aboriginal tribes of America, in the bargains so often made with them for the purchase of the lands held or claimed as theirs, it is gratifying to record, that no stigma attaches to any transactions of this nature within the limits of Michigan." Bela Hubbard, *Memorials of a Half-Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1997), 180.

twenty-one years of age had been enfranchised for over thirty years, and in a city where representations of Indigenous people flooded the streets of Ann Arbor's newspapers, playbills, and advertisements, Dewey's philosophy in Michigan and beyond takes little to no interest in incorporating Indigenous people as a political constituency in modern democratic life.<sup>8</sup>

One possible explanation for the absence of Indigenous people in Dewey's early thought was his philosophical debt to George Frederick Wilhelm Hegel.<sup>9</sup> For his part, Hegel imagined North America as the latest stage set for the unfolding of the universal history.<sup>10</sup> When Hegel wrote in *Philosophy of History* that "America is therefore the land of the future ... a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumber-room of old Europe," he imagined North America as a place devoid of any Indigenous sovereignties.<sup>11</sup> Hegel was hardly the only scholar guilty of this erasure. The author of an 1881 history asserted that Michigan State stood in stark contrast to the "histories of European countries cobwebbed with intrigue, blackened with iniquity and saturated with blood. What a standing, practical reproof Michigan is to all

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<sup>8</sup> "Rank of Michigan Among the States," *Census of the State of Michigan, 1884* (Lansing: Thorp & Godfrey, 1886).

<sup>9</sup> Even as he relied on Hegel as he did in 1888, many scholars of Dewey's life and philosophy agree that during Dewey's time in Michigan, he began to formulate his own version of Hegel's thinking, electing to take from his body of work his appreciation for the historical nature of the world, while dispensing with the spirit of history as its metaphysical motor. On the trajectory of Dewey's Hegelianism, see Jim Garrison, "The 'Permanent Deposit' of Hegelian Thought in Dewey's Theory of Inquiry," *Educational Theory*, 56, no. 1 (2006): 1-37; Thomas Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race: An Intellectual History, 1895-1922* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011); Kieran Egan, *Getting it Wrong from the Beginning: Our Progressivist Inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). In a March 5, 1939, letter to Frank Manny, Dewey explained the origins of his own Hegelianism. "Dr. [W. T.] Harris had nothing to do with my Hegelianism—it came through George S. Morris who taught half a year at Johns Hopkins each year I was studying for my PhD. He was an ardent Hegelian, which he got in Germany as a reaction from a rather skeptical British empiricism." John Dewey to Frank Manny, March 5, 1939, John Dewey Special Correspondence Vol. 2, The John Dewey Photography Series, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars such as Susan Buck-Morss have illustrated how Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic was informed through his keen interest in the representations of the enslaved Black people and the Haitian revolution that he read in Europe's newspapers. I borrow from this interpretative strategy to explain the historical influences on the construction of philosophy to argue that Dewey was similarly creating his experimentalism using Instrumental Indians drawn from popular culture of the Great Lakes. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> George W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 86, cited in Dahl, *Empire of the People*, 108.



Europe!”<sup>12</sup> In this way, it could be argued that this American exceptionalism in Hegel’s philosophy may have bled into Dewey’s early political philosophy. As Adam Dahl characterizes, “Hegel casts colonization not as the conquest and displacement of Indigenous populations, but as the settlement of empty space.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, Hegel’s account of American history rested upon the erasure of Indigenous sovereignties in a way that was not uncommon for many eighteenth-century Americans, many of whom were quite happy to see themselves reflected in the progression of civilization, Dewey included. Hegel’s lasting influence on Dewey may have extended his blindness towards Indigenous people.

While the influence of Hegel’s philosophy on Dewey is a tempting explanation for the absence of Indigenous people in Dewey’s early political philosophy, there is another overlooked alternative. As it turns out, Ann Arbor from 1884 to 1894 was a place thick with representations of Michigan’s Indigenous people. These cultural productions were produced mainly by Euro-Americans, were intended for consumption by Euro-American audiences, and could be found embedded in Ann Arbor’s popular cultural productions like newspapers, advertisements, and entertainments. I call this the frontier discourse, which depicted Indigenous people through a vocabulary of savagery, paired with the ideology of Indian vanishing, and which was grounded in ideas about the frontier.

While Dewey lived in Ann Arbor from 1884 to 1894, this frontier discourse was particularly intense in Michigan.<sup>14</sup> Situated at the macro level of the settler colonial mesh, the

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<sup>12</sup> Chapman & Company, *History of Michigan* (Chicago: Chapman & Co., 1881), Microfilm No. 219, Hatcher Graduate Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>13</sup> Dahl, *Empire of the People*, 113.

<sup>14</sup> In my conception of the frontier discourse, I rely on Purvis and Hunt, “Discourse, Ideology,” 473-99; Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (1973), *The Fatal Environment* (1994), and *Gunfighter Nation* (1992); and O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*. On the history of the frontier imaginary in American Indian historiography, see Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* and *Playing Indian*; Robert Berkhofer, *White Man’s Indian*; Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*; Roger A. Hall, *Performing the Frontier, 1870-1906* (New York:

frontier discourse was a set of tropes, motifs, and representations embedded and disseminated in cultural productions that cast Michigan as a frontier place where the inhabitants of the bleeding edge of civilization met those of the wilderness. Encoded in Michigan's frontier discourse was an assumed binary between the Indigenous people and Euro-Americans of the frontier space, where Indigenous people were coded as wild, primitive, and backwards. This was in juxtaposition with Euro-American patterns of life that were coded as rational, sophisticated, and civilized, or what I call the vocabulary of savagery. The frontier was the place where these spatial and cultural boundaries were drawn. As Phil Deloria has written, this frontier discourse "insisted on a frontier dividing line between American territory and Indian territory, and it focused human imaginative energy on that particular line of difference, fixing Indians as savage Others."<sup>15</sup> In turn, this discursive world helped to set the limits of Indian people's participation in not only Michigan's democratic life but that of the entire United States. Consequently, this frontier discourse created a thick cultural stock of representations that cast Indigenous people at the turn of the century as little more than a vanishing people, little more than a "problem" to be solved.<sup>16</sup>

The ideological function of this late nineteenth-century discourse in Michigan is crucial to understand while parsing Dewey's philosophy. Though Dewey himself may not have been prejudiced against Indian people, he could be blinded by Michigan's frontier discourse to their role in the formation of democratic life and their role as an active constituency within the politics

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Cambridge University Press, 2001); Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); James Joseph Buss, *Winning the West With Words*.

<sup>15</sup> Phil Deloria, "From Nation to Neighborhood," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 351.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Woolford, "Framing the Indian as a Problem," in *This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 47-96.

of Michigan State. The influence of the newspapers, advertisements, novels, histories, and entertainments which surrounded Dewey every day for nearly ten years in Ann Arbor better explains the absence of Indian people from Dewey's thinking about democracy than echoes of Hegel. Dewey's formative decade in Michigan and the state's frontier discourse is therefore a critical influence on his philosophy and its corollary absence of Indian people.

This chapter will argue that when it came to the ways Dewey's philosophical career would take shape, Michigan mattered. In particular, I will focus on two factors that shaped Dewey's exposure to the frontier discourse and its representations of Indigenous people while he lived and worked in Michigan. First, the representations of Indian people found in newspapers, plays, and entertainments in Ann Arbor exposed Dewey to imagined Indian people and immersed him in a Great Lakes frontier discourse that he was never quite able to shake. Second, the influences of his Michigan-born wife, Alice Harriet Chipman, and his own relationship to her grandfather, Frederick Riggs, left a lasting impression on Dewey about the nature of Michigan's imagined frontier history and Indigenous people's place within the state's—and ultimately America's—democracy.

### **Dewey's Decade in Michigan, 1884-1894**

In the literature on Dewey's life, career, and corpus, Michigan is typically a minor part of a larger story. Narratively, the decade that Dewey spent in Michigan is depicted as akin to a prologue, a starting-off point, a place where ideas that would ripen and bear fruit in Chicago and New York were just being planted as seeds. Brian Williams, who has written perhaps the most detailed and compelling argument about the importance of Dewey's time in Michigan to the overall formation of his philosophy, cedes the ground of true definition to Chicago and New York in the final sentence of his essay: "Michigan provided the opportunity and environment for

Dewey to cultivate his ideas that later grew to maturity in Chicago.<sup>17</sup> “Indeed, turn-of-the-century Chicago’s bustling urban, industrial, and immigrant world is typically the environment that most scholars believe nurtured the contours of Dewey’s pragmatism.<sup>18</sup> However, it is my contention that Dewey’s time in Michigan was more formative on his thinking than a mere intellectual brush-clearing; instead, Michigan is where Dewey’s concept of modern democracy—and Indigenous people’s place within it—was forged. While it is not my purpose to present a full biography of Dewey’s activities at the University of Michigan, a sketch of his time and accomplishments in Ann Arbor is useful not only to situate the development of Dewey’s career, but to place that development in the context of the lifeworld of Michigan in the late nineteenth century.

Scholars of Dewey typically emphasize three important moments in Dewey’s time in Michigan that would shape his life’s work. First, during his decade in Ann Arbor, Dewey began to shed the religious philosophy of intuitionism. In the place of his religiosity, he began to fashion a new philosophy based on empirical psychology, catalyzed by his 1887 monograph *Psychology* and William James’ *Principles of Psychology* in 1890. Scholars have also called this phase of Dewey’s work the beginning of his kind of Neo-Hegelianism, where Dewey abandoned the overtly metaphysical machinations of the German philosopher and substituted evolutionary biology in its place. While Dewey was not shy about the role of Hegel in his work, describing Hegel’s influence as “leaving a permanent deposit” on his philosophy, it is clear that by the time he left Ann Arbor, Dewey had reconstructed Hegel for his own purposes.<sup>19</sup> Dewey himself titled his own intellectual autobiography “From Absolutism to Experimentalism,” which neatly

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<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Thought and Action*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 58.

captures an arc begun at Michigan. This was the first step on a path that would eventually lead to Dewey's own brand of pragmatism.

Second, Dewey was exposed to a more politically engaged set of concerns about philosophy as a result of his personal and professional network in Ann Arbor. Not only did he produce some important works at the University of Michigan that scholars have suggested worked as a foundation for much of Dewey's later thought, but his relationships brought new concerns into Dewey's purview. For example, Dewey's publication of *Ethics of Democracy* in 1888 helped form Dewey's subsequent engagement with the effects of industrialism and alienation on democratic life, themes that would be taken up in later works, including his 1916 masterpiece, *Democracy and Education*. Additionally, inspecting Michigan public schools as part of the university's Bureau of Education Services led to Dewey's early acquaintance with pedagogy and set the groundwork for Dewey's foray into the philosophy of education.<sup>20</sup>

Dewey openly acknowledged Michigan's influence on his life and work. It was no coincidence that his relationships and the projects pursued with his colleagues at Michigan would become the basis for the "Chicago school." Some years later, after Dewey and his Chicago cohort had taken the world of education, psychology, and philosophy by storm, William James wrote and congratulated Dewey on his innovations. Dewey wrote back, "We have all been at work at it for about twelve years. Lloyd and Mead were at it in Ann Arbor ten years ago."<sup>21</sup> In matters of education, Dewey also marked his interest in schools as antecedent to the famous Laboratory School in Chicago. "It was in Ann Arbor that I began my teaching activities," Dewey wrote in an October 26, 1929 letter to James Edmonson, the dean of the School of Education at

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<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Thought and Action*, 15-19.

<sup>21</sup> John Dewey to Williams James, March 1903, in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935), 2:517-19.

Michigan. He reminisced that “it was there that my serious interest in education was aroused.” Waxing nostalgic, he also wrote: “In addition to this I formed there some of the closest friendships of my life.”<sup>22</sup>

The making of one of those close relationships is the third major event that took place in Michigan that would forever change Dewey’s intellectual trajectory: when he met and married Harriet Alice Chipman. When Dewey arrived in Ann Arbor, he lived in a boarding house that was shared by several other members of the university community, including Chipman. Born in Fenton, Michigan, just forty miles north on September 7, 1858, Chipman was one of two daughters of Gordon O. Chipman and Lucy Riggs. Lucy died in 1860, and Gordon passed a year later from tuberculosis. Orphaned, Alice Chipman’s grandparents Frederick and Evaline Riggs raised her and her sister. The new family was close, and Alice was encouraged to pursue an education by the insistent and charismatic Frederick. Chipman graduated from Fenton High School in 1875 and went on to the Baptist Seminary there to learn and teach music. She came to Ann Arbor a decade after the first woman enrolled at the university. She began her studies as a nondegree student in 1880, but enrolled as an undergraduate in philosophy in 1882. Though she was an undergraduate at the time, she was nearly the same age as Dewey when they met.<sup>23</sup>

Already a student in the philosophy department when Dewey arrived, Alice and the new professor struck up a friendship. She soon enrolled in several of Dewey’s classes, and as an active member of the Michigan Philosophical Society (she once presented a paper titled “Pantheism and Modern Science”), she had no shortage of face-time with the young philosopher. The two began courting each other, exchanging letters, and found quickly themselves infatuated.

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<sup>22</sup> James B. Edmonson from John Dewey, October 26, 1929, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey, 1871-1952*, ed. Larry A. Hickman, vol. 2, 1919-1939, 3rd ed. (Carbondale, IL: Center for Dewey Studies, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 80-83.

They shared a common set of interests, especially promoting the cause of women in the university and the discipline of philosophy. In 1885, when male students secured a gender exclusive reading room in University Hall, Chipman and some of her friends reportedly marched to the building, found an empty dressing room, and converted it into their own reading room for women. Later, she helped found a sorority on campus, a chapter of the New York quasi-secret society Sorosis, of which Dewey became an honorary “Sorosis brother.” They also were active members of the Samovar club, a salon they helped to found dedicated to the discussion of Russian literature.<sup>24</sup> In June of 1886, Dewey was promoted to the rank of assistant professor, and this promotion—in conjunction with Chipman’s graduation that same month—cleared the way for Dewey to propose marriage. Chipman happily agreed, and the two were married on July 28, 1886, in the Fenton home of her grandparents, Frederick and Evaline Riggs.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of Dewey’s marriage to Chipman, he had a partner not only for his personal matters, but for intellectual matters as well. In her biography of her father, Jane Dewey credits her mother’s influence as a profound force in shaping Dewey’s philosophy, writing: “She was undoubtedly largely responsible for the early widening of Dewey’s philosophical interests from the commentative and classical to the field of contemporary life.” Dewey himself admitted Chipman’s influence on him: in a letter during their courtship, he wrote that his relationship with her had altered “my old doing and my old thinking.”<sup>26</sup> This has led scholars such as Alan Ryan to conclude that “she did him and intellectual life in the United States a great favor by making

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<sup>24</sup> Linda Robinson Walker, “John Dewey at Michigan: The First Ann Arbor Period,” *Michigan Today* (Fall 1997), 18.

<sup>25</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 80-81; Walker, “John Dewey at Michigan,” 3.

<sup>26</sup> Walker, “John Dewey at Michigan,” 18.

him focus on the unsatisfactory, unjust, and thoroughly disorganized here and now, rather than the realm of the ideal.”<sup>27</sup>

To summarize, most biographers identify the influence of Michigan on Dewey’s philosophy in three major ways. Though he abandoned his religious intuitionism and German idealism, he retained some allegiance to Hegel’s brand of historicism that would color Dewey’s lifelong interest in evolution, sociology, and history. Meanwhile, Dewey’s professional relationships in Ann Arbor both instilled and reinforced his philosophical interests in political economy, schooling, and the media, themes that would come to define much of Dewey’s later work. Finally, Dewey met, courted, and married Harriet Alice Chipman, an original thinker and scholar in her own right who introduced and solidified a new philosophical agenda for her partner.<sup>28</sup> It was in Michigan that James Campbell asserts Dewey began to think about institutions as broad categories of human life such as “government, business, art, religion, language, family life, property, legal forms, churches and schools, academies of art and science.”<sup>29</sup> This is an especially important attitude to consider in light of Michigan’s settler democratic institutions—government, laws, and media that functioned in a settler-colonial mesh of native elimination to marginalize Indigenous voices—because Dewey imagined that in a democracy, the role of social institutions was “to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class or economic status.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 82. For historical and philosophical treatments of Alice as a scholar in her own right, see Irene Hall, “The Unsung Partner: The Educational Work and Philosophy of Alice Chipman Dewey” (EdD diss., Harvard University, 2005); Jerry Aldridge and Jeroen Staring, “The Life and Works of Alice Chipman Dewey from 1909-1919,” *Case Studies Journal*, 10 (2014), 91-97.

<sup>28</sup> On Alice and John’s relationship, see Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 53-55; Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 34-38; Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 91-99.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in James Campbell, *Understanding Dewey* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 185.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



But overlooked in the biographical treatments of this part of Dewey's life and career is that much of Dewey's intellectual formation was informed both directly and indirectly—and sometimes even intimately—by representations of Michigan's Indigenous people that were authored predominantly by non-Native people. Framed by a deeper appreciation for Michigan's Indigenous history, I wish to offer an alternative set of Michigan influences on Dewey's philosophy than those commonly emphasized by Dewey scholars. The cultural conditions, economic possibilities, and political processes affecting Indian people living in Michigan during this period impacted the conditions of possibility with which Dewey could imagine, let alone interact, with Indigenous people.

First, while he lived and worked in Michigan, Dewey began to think seriously about American democracy, citizenship, and nationhood (themes we will explore in the second chapter) through a national discourse commonly described as Manifest Destiny, the “closing” of the frontier, and Indian vanishing. This limited the stockpile of ideas, concepts, and narratives from which Dewey could create his own account of American history and its significance in his broader philosophy. Second, it was in this period that Dewey first became familiar with the work of historian Frederick Jackson Turner and his frontier thesis. Turner's story of the significance of the frontier in forming the conditions for American democracy offered Dewey a historical account of Dewey's own philosophical interests; as a result, Turner's thesis visibly structured Dewey's thought as late as the early 1930s. Third, Dewey also directly experienced these representations of Indians and the frontier through a third factor: an intense regional iteration of these national ideas that took shape in the popular culture of Ann Arbor. Circulated through local newspapers and advertisements, and embodied by cigar-store Indians and people in costume, the Great Lakes frontier discourse framed Michigan as a particularly intense front in the U.S.

campaign of frontier expansion. The intense circulation of these representations of Indian popular culture helped to make the national frontier discourse a product of Dewey's everyday life in Ann Arbor.

The fourth and perhaps most important experiential factor was Dewey's personal relationship with his surrogate father-in-law, Alice Chipman's grandfather, Frederick Riggs. As an early pioneer to Michigan and a late prospector in Colorado, Riggs' life on the frontier offered Dewey a firsthand account of Turner's thesis and a personal embodiment of the prevalent frontier discourse of the late nineteenth century. Frederick Riggs is the central figure in the formation of Dewey's account of the frontier because Riggs' own life offered Dewey a place of overlap between the discursive and the experiential in American history.

Taken together, it was in Ann Arbor that Dewey encountered these imagined Indians as refracted through Ann Arbor and Michigan's frontier discourse on a daily basis. Through histories, advertisements, and entertainment, Indigenous people in Michigan were routinely depicted as primitive savages—not as anthropological subjects, but as part of the popular culture that suffused Dewey's everyday experience in Ann Arbor.

This is a departure from previous studies of Dewey's philosophy, which have interpreted Dewey's invocations of Indians, "savages," or primitive people through his use of racial recapitulation theory. I will argue that Dewey's enduring use of the category of "savagery" is better understood as a byproduct of his immersion in a frontier discourse that encompassed racial recapitulation theory itself. Interpreting Dewey's use of the category of "savagery" from the perspective of critical Indigenous studies suggests how racial recapitulation should not be considered solely as a product of the older notions of the Great Chain of Being, or nineteenth-century race science, but rather as part of a constellation of ideas about North American

Indigenous people held by Euro-Americans that were already set in motion through popular culture by the time Dewey arrived in Michigan. As historians such as Robert Berkhofer Jr., Brian Dippie, Jean O'Brien, Lucy Maddox, Phil Deloria, and others have shown, images of Indians were hardly confined to scientific or philosophic discourse, but instead spilled into every nook and cranny of American life through popular culture. Popular culture could—and did—spread the constituent ideas of racial recapitulation theory as well.<sup>31</sup>

These representations of Indian people, however, did not themselves amount to racial recapitulation as a theory. By the time racial recapitulation had coalesced into a coherent albeit unruly and uneven scientific discourse in the late nineteenth century, the frontier discourse had already been hard at work suffusing popular culture with images of Indians depicted by the vocabulary of savagery and the ideology of the vanishing Indian. I argue that Dewey's intellectual trajectory regarding Indians is better understood not as a decades-long engagement with and eventual jettisoning of racial recapitulation in favor of cultural pluralism, but rather as a career-spanning entanglement with the frontier discourse. In this fashion, popular culture in Ann Arbor, the state of Michigan, and the Great Lakes region profoundly constrained Dewey's experience of Indigenous people.

#### **Ann Arbor's Imagined Indians, 1884-1894**

As Dewey made himself a home in Ann Arbor in 1884, he would have encountered a cultural landscape more densely populated by representations of Indian people authored by Euro-Americans than actual Indian people themselves. These representations of Indians were patterned by what James Buss calls a "regional creation myth," which adhered to a narrative that an

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<sup>31</sup> For some examples of the nexus between popular culture, the frontier discourse, and racial hierarchies during this period, see Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 88-94; Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 301-24.

uninhabited wilderness of the Great Lakes had been explored by French *voyageurs*, conquered by English soldiers in the so-called “French and Indian War,” and finally settled by American pioneers. Across the region, much energy was invested in this collective memory during the turn of the century. For example, in 1876, Michigan celebrated the state’s part in the U.S. centennial. In Dexter, Michigan, just several miles west of Ann Arbor, a parade was thrown that featured “a Pioneer Cabin,” which was described as providing spectators with “a not exaggerated picture of the home of the old settlers, with the good wife busy at her spinning wheel, while the crouching Indian clinging behind his gun, was suggestive of the dangers to which the pioneers were exposed.”<sup>32</sup> In 1903, the city of Chicago, Illinois, celebrated its centennial with a brochure called *The Indian Encampment*. Its authors looked back on the city’s past and lamented that the frontier had passed over Chicago and into the West, which seemed to spell the doom of the Pottawatomie Indians who had once called the urban landscape their home. “Chicago to-day bids them hail, and hopes that the day long may be deferred before the other and final word, farewell, must be spoken.”<sup>33</sup> In 1916, a group of Indians gathered in Bloomington, Indiana, to mark the occasion of statehood as a part of “Admission Day.” These Indians, however, were really White men with long hair who had taken off their shirts and covered their skin in red paint, followed by a contingent of women leading a wagon.<sup>34</sup>

Such events consolidated the impression that the Great Lakes had, at least at one point, been the bleeding edge of America’s frontier.<sup>35</sup> “These pageants, parades, and other forms of

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen Bromley McCracken, *Michigan and the Centennial; Being a Memorial Record Appropriate to the Centennial Year* (Detroit: Michigan State Centennial Board of Managers, 1876), 125.

<sup>33</sup> Edward B. Clark, *Indian Encampment, Chicago Centennial of 1903: In Honor of the City’s Centennial Anniversary* (Chicago: Chicago Centennial Committee, 1903), cited in John Low, *Imprints: The Pokagon Potawatomi Indians and the City of Chicago* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2016), 256.

<sup>34</sup> Buss, *Winning the West with Words*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> See also Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory: The Disavowal of Indigeneity and the Politics of Race in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

civic celebration,” argues Buss, “highlighted the rise of state institutions and valorized the role of early Americans in establishing ‘civilized’ governments in the West.”<sup>36</sup> Events like this “shared a common scene of erasure,” writes Buss, “whereby Native Americans symbolically or physically exited the stage.” The resulting Euro-American memory of the settlement of the Great Lakes frontier was one without violence of Indigenous dispossession; instead, these events proffered the innocent idea that where there was once nothing but wilderness, there was now civilization. Despite the fact that Michigan was still home to thousands of Indigenous people and that “their very presence undermines the validity of the region’s creation story,” the frontier discourse proved all the more durable for it.<sup>37</sup>

The newspaper was one important medium where these representations were both forged and disseminated. By the 1880s, there were approximately 275 newspapers in Michigan, seven of which were located in Ann Arbor.<sup>38</sup> The city’s newspapers were an important link in a chain of increasingly voluminous published works that constituted much of late nineteenth-century Americans’ view of public life.<sup>39</sup> Firmly aligned with the Democratic party, the *Michigan Argus* (published as the *Ann Arbor Argus* during the time Dewey lived there) was the longest running newspaper in the city at the time.<sup>40</sup> Whether Dewey was a subscriber or regular reader of the *Argus* is unknown. However, given the paper’s longevity, established circulation, and reputation

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<sup>36</sup> Buss, *Winning the West with Words*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Louis W. Doll, *Newspapers of Ann Arbor* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959), 164; Chapman & Company, *History of Michigan*, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> The newspaper was owned by a series of editors of this political persuasion from 1854 to 1905. While Dewey was living in Ann Arbor, the *Ann Arbor Argus* was owned by John N. Bailey until 1886, when it was sold to S. W. Beakes and Curtis. Beakes updated the layout of the paper, adding uniform columns, headlines, and first page news articles, and established the paper as the leading Democratic weekly. In 1894, the paper became a semi-weekly issued on Tuesday and Friday. Doll, *Newspapers of Ann Arbor*, 68-74.

in Democratic-leaning Ann Arbor, it is likely Dewey scanned its headlines or opened its pages on occasion.<sup>41</sup>

When the residents of Ann Arbor sat down with a Michigan newspaper like the *Argus*, they were confronted with news, editorials, jokes, and advertisements that regularly invoked Indian people, both real and imagined. In communities like Ann Arbor, where Indigenous people had been largely dispossessed of their land, publications like the *Argus* served as the primary vehicle by which Dewey and most Euro-American Michiganders of the period most experienced their Indian neighbors. In this sense, Indian people were hardly invisible in Euro-American life in Michigan; they could be on virtually every page. Readers of the *Argus* were kept up to date about federal Indian policy, news of the waning days of the Great Plains Wars, reviews of books about Indian people, schemes to allot Indian land for White settlement, and the death of Sitting Bull and the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890.<sup>42</sup> But the most frequent invocation of Indian people came not so much in the headlines themselves, but in three other patterns of content in the newspaper: first, the depiction of Indian people as a vanishing race used as a motif in countless news stories and advertisements; second, Indian people as the punch lines of Euro-American jokes; and third, an entire genre of news regarding uncovered Indian graves across Michigan.

First, Indian people in Michigan were routinely described by the *Argus* and other Michigan newspapers as a disintegrating community and a vanishing race. In 1885, an Indian

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<sup>41</sup> Whether or not Dewey knew much of the *Argus*, the paper's editors surely knew of him. They mentioned his comings and goings across the state, and in 1892 his prospective newspaper *Thought News* was subjected to the editor's acerbic wit: "*Thought News*, the new publication promised to be issued in this city last month, has evidently perished of inanition. It would proven a heavy tax on the brains and purses of the backers." By the time Dewey took the job in Chicago, the writers at the *Argus* noted his stature and regarded his departure from Michigan as a loss to the community, writing that "Dewey is one of the foremost of America's educators." *Ann Arbor Argus*, April 3, 1894, 3, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>42</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, August 10, 1888, 6, America's Historical Newspapers; "The Indians in the Bad Lands," *Ann Arbor Argus*, December 5, 1890; "Shut Your Mouth," *Ann Arbor Argus*, December 15, 1893; "Who Got the Boodle?" *Ann Arbor Argus*, June 7, 1889.

agent in Michigan wrote to the Women's National Indian Association to provide an overview of the welfare of the state's Indigenous citizens. Portions of that letter were published in the *Lake County Star*, where it was reported that there were "about 6,000 in the state; of these perhaps 2,000 are full blood. They are very poor, and are diminishing in numbers."<sup>43</sup> The agent undoubtedly captured the sentiment of many Euro-American Michiganders when he wrote that the state's Indian people "are slowly vanishing like the wild game, and it is but a question of time when they will all be gone. Wronged for a century, cheated in a thousand ways by the whites, the Indian 'must go.'"<sup>44</sup> In 1895, *The Detroit Evening News* ran a story about the Pottawatomie of Michigan, describing their community with the headline "Were Once Powerful," pitying the fact that "their deaths annually outnumber the births." The *Evening News* noted that while many of the Pottawatomie had been displaced to Kansas, those who remained in Michigan had "since eked out a precarious existence, building cabins away from the roads and managing to supply to the necessities of life by cutting wood and occasionally working as laborers."<sup>45</sup> In February of 1888, the *Argus* informed its readers that Michigan remained a hardscrabble home to 7,000 Indian people. "A few of 'em till the soil for a livelihood," the paper explained; "some of the squaws make bead work and baskets."<sup>46</sup> The effect of these stories was a consignment of American Indians to the past, an important element of the frontier discourse.

This theme was not confined to news items; it also appeared in advertisements. For example, various county pioneer societies gathered in the late nineteenth century, where they cemented the frontier discourse in their memory of Michigan's founding. Such gatherings were covered by the local papers, such as the one held in Ingham in May of 1889, which featured the

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<sup>43</sup> *The Lake County Star*, March 19, 1885, Newspapers.com.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> "Were Once Powerful," *Detroit Evening News*, July 22, 1895, Library of Congress.

<sup>46</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, February 24, 1888, 7, America's Historical Newspapers.

governor of Michigan and his “reminiscences of ye olden days of the log cabin, the black bear, and the firewater loving Indian.”<sup>47</sup> It was no accident that “ye olden days” could be summoned into the minds of *Argus* reader by invoking log cabins, black bears, and drunk Indians, for these associations were actively forged in the newspaper itself. In an October 1888 advertisement to *Argus* readers for Warner’s Log Cabin Sasaparilla, the company declared that “log cabins do not appeal strongly to modern notions of social life; they have had their day.” Yet Warner’s firm used the log cabin as their logo and brand as visual shorthand for natural remedies.<sup>48</sup> Their ad in the *Argus* carried on for many lines, offering a succinct summary of the frontier discourse: “Our rugged ancestors, who pierced the wilderness, built their uncouth but comfortable Log Cabins and started clearings in the woods, which in time became the broad, fertile fields of the modern farmer.” The advertisement cheered this advancement towards civilization, but bemoaned that remedies with natural potency associated with Indian medicine had since been lost: “The savage is emphatically the child of nature. When the Indian receives an injury, he does not seek a cure in mineral poisons.” Fortunately, by depicting Michigan’s Indians and their expert woodcraft as disappearing with the closing of the frontier, Warner’s Log Cabin brand positioned its remedies as the next best thing.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, May 10, 1889, 5, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>48</sup> Log cabins were shorthand for pioneer nostalgia as early as the 1880s. Chapman & Company’s *History of Michigan* concludes by imagining a White family in Michigan, now living in the city, returning to a log cabin in the outskirts of town: “Why do tears start and fill their eyes? Why do lips quiver? There are many who know why, but who that has not learned in the school of experience the full meaning of all these symbols of trials and privation, of loneliness and danger, can comprehend the story that they tell to the pioneer? Within this chinked and mud-daubed cabin, we read the first pages of our history.... The cabin and the palace, standing side by side in vivid contrast, tell the story of the people’s progress. They are a history and prophecy in one.” Chapman & Company, *History of Michigan*, 112.

<sup>49</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, October 19, 1888, 2. For more on patent Indian medicines and the cultural appeal of concoctions that promised to increase one’s manliness or virility through approximating Indian “barbarian virtues,” see John Rosenberg, “Barbarian Virtues in a Bottle: Patent Indian Medicines and the Commodification of Primitivism in the United States, 1870-1900,” *Gender & History* 24, no. 2 (August 2012): 368-88.



Not to be outdone, Jas. S. Kirk and Co. in Chicago advertised their soap products to White Ann Arborites in the *Argus* using a play on words: “An Indian Outbreak,” the ad begins, “is a dreadful thing—undoubtedly caused by the irritating effects of dirt.” Such advertisements performed major ideological heavy lifting: this ad cribbed from a prevailing facet of the frontier discourse that Indian people belonged to a race capable of extreme violence at the drop of a hat; Indian “break outs” here are analogized to the virulence of a skin rash.<sup>50</sup> It implies that Indian people were dirty, filthy, and polluted and that their struggle against American settler colonialism was the inevitable outcome of their squalor, consigned to the dirt of impoverished agencies and reservations. By aligning racial purity with Whiteness and pollution to Indian people, hygienic conceptions of racial difference become an important element of the frontier discourse. “Outbreaks and crime generally are never possible among people who are addicted to the use of Kirk’s American Family Soap,” the advertisement proudly claimed.<sup>51</sup> Playing on White expectations of Indian people as but one valence removed from bestial savagery, the soap company concluded its pitch by assuring readers that the product “is the greater soother of angry passions—the promoter of health and good feeling.” In this way, Kirk and Co.’s advertising made an implicit connection between hygiene and racial fitness—an association that rendered Indigenous efforts to defend the integrity of their homelands as little more than a means to hawk soap to White consumers.<sup>52</sup>

These advertisements were not the only way newspapers like the *Argus* reduced Indian people’s struggles against the settler colonial mesh to the tier of the trivial. The *Argus* regularly

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<sup>50</sup> On the imagined quality of Indian violence through “outbreak,” see Philip J. Deloria, “Violence: The Killings at Lightning Creek,” in *Unexpected Indians*, 15-31; Deloria, “From Nation to Neighborhood,” 356-61.

<sup>51</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, January 20, 1893, America’s Historical Newspapers.

featured jokes about and at the expense of Indian people. In the newspapers Dewey read during his time in Ann Arbor, Indian people were most commonly invoked as fodder for the humor of White readers. For example, in August of 1889 readers were invited to chuckle along at items such as “when an Indian catches cold on the war path, he has the war-whooping cough.”<sup>53</sup> Or, “It is said that when an Indian dies his surviving relatives pay all his debts. We are acquainted with a man whom we heartily wish would turn Indian and die.”<sup>54</sup> Some of the levity was combined with possibly real events: “An East Saginaw Indian got himself full of booze, tumbled into a blaze and burned off both feet. He still lives as a monument of Indian endurance.”<sup>55</sup>

Other jokes required more fluency with the frontier discourse that imagined Indians as primitive holdovers from a bygone era. In November of 1889, the *Argus* imagined a couple musing about Indigenous people prior to White settlement in North America. “It seems queer that the Indians should have been familiar with the file and the saw before the arrival of the whites,” the husband pontificates to his wife. “‘Were they?’ she asks in surprise. ‘Yes, my dear; the Indian file and the Chickasaw.’”<sup>56</sup> These jokes only worked if the ideological set up had already been affected by the reader’s exposure to the notion of Indian primitiveness. When the Alpha Sigma chapter of the nearby town of Manchester debated the question “Resolved, that the Indian has received more cruel treatment from the hands of the White man, than the negro,” the *Argus* made light of the fact that the assembled White men had concluded that Black Americans had had it worse: “Of course he has. Time and time again have the whites furnished the Indian with whisky and scalps. Whenever he wanted brain soup, has he not been allowed to kill a pale-

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<sup>53</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, August 2, 1888, 3, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>54</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, December 21, 1888, 8, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>55</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, November 22, 1889, 8, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>56</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, November 1, 1889, 6, America’s Historical Newspapers.

face to furnish it?”<sup>57</sup> In September of 1889, the *Argus* instead found itself surpassed in this particular art of making light of Indian people: “A party of Bay City reporters amused themselves by filling an Old Indian brim-full of firewater and then burying him in the sand. Some people’s idea of pleasure is pitched wonderfully high!”<sup>58</sup> The function of these jokes within the frontier discourse was to marginalize, reduce, and trivialize Indigenous people. Their ubiquity further cemented representations of Indian people as drunk, poor, unclean, simple, and out of step with modern Michigan.

The *Argus* supplemented its steady diet of jokes about Indian people with news items about their disturbed burial grounds. A constant feature of the *Argus* throughout the time Dewey lived in Michigan were stories of a White farmer digging up Indian graves. A taste of this genre goes something like this: in August 1884, a farmer named William Briggs in Howell uncovered a copper lance “of Indian make” while working his fields.<sup>59</sup> On November 9, 1888, a “ruthless plow invaded an Indian cemetery,” revealing “great numbers” of Indian bodies and a sixteen-foot bead necklace.<sup>60</sup> Adam Himon of Port Sanilac was another farmer who “plowed into an old Indian buying ground.”<sup>61</sup> While burning 150 acres that he owned in December of 1894, even the former mayor of Ann Arbor, John Robison, discovered “an Indian arrowhead” in a deer skeleton he uncovered. “It may have been many hundred years since the arrow was buried in the deer,” the *Argus* wrote. “Nobody can tell.”<sup>62</sup>

In fact, the stories of Indian bones exhumed by White Michigan farmers became so common that the *Argus* began to jest that the bones of Indigenous people were White farmers’

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<sup>57</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, November 24, 1893, 2, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>58</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, September 6, 1889, 6, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>59</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, August 8, 1884, 3, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>60</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, November 9, 1888, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>61</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, May 1, 1891, 7, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>62</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, December 7, 1894, 5, America’s Historical Newspapers.

most reliable harvest. “While cultivating a field near Homer, Alfred Shupe harvested an Indian crop of six skeletons. The annual discovery of relics seems to have set in somewhat earlier than usual this season.”<sup>63</sup> These unearthings were also fodder for the *Argus* to take swipes at partisan rivals. When remains of an Indigenous man “with basket, kettle, and knife” were uncovered in Sylvan Lake, the *Argus* gleefully announced that “those skilled in anthrography have no hesitation in pronouncing him a republican ‘half-breed.’”<sup>64</sup> There were seemingly no repercussions for disturbing these burial sites, save for mockery in the *Argus*. In a story in May of 1891 where a “Gordon county gentlemen” had fallen into a seven-foot hole he had excavated for the purpose of digging up Indian relics, the newspaper joked that “before the body was resurrected his spirit had fled to the happy hunting grounds.”<sup>65</sup>

That these desecrations of Indian graves occurred at all, let alone were met with immense interest by Euro-Americans, is a testament to the settler colonial processes that made Michigan—namely, the logic of Native elimination. The frequency of these stories in newspapers during this period amounts to what Jean O’Brien has called “replacement narratives,” whereby “historical narratives and relic collecting place Indians in the past.”<sup>66</sup> The casual, almost off-handed nature of these stories illuminates how, in the words of O’Brien, “the local gave particular valence to the twinned story of non-Indian modernity and Indian extinction.”<sup>67</sup> These stories are best understood as micro-narratives that performed the ideological labor by non-Native Michiganders that was required to depict dead and buried Indian people as contemporary invaders of Euro-American farmlands.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, June 21, 1889, 6, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>64</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, June 29, 1894, 4, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>65</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, May 29, 1891, 7, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>66</sup> Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, xxiv.

<sup>67</sup> Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, ixv.

In addition to newspapers, another place where Dewey would have frequently confronted imagined Indians was on Ann Arbor's sidewalks. On his way to and from campus, Dewey routinely came face to face with a figure common to many nineteenth-century towns: the cigar-store Indian. Cigar or drugstore Indians are wooden carvings, varying from about three to ten feet tall, mounted on pedestals that were wheeled, chained, or otherwise affixed to sidewalks in front of various retail storefronts. They were a common sight outside Ann Arbor's tobacconists, bookstores, drugstores, and other retail shops, making them a ubiquitous feature of the urban space through which Dewey navigated for ten years. Most of all, cigar-store Indians were one of many forms of popular advertising that both reflected and produced an association between Indigenous people and tobacco.<sup>68</sup> Of course, many Indigenous cultures do have longstanding cultural practices that employ the growing, smoking, and trading of tobacco, including in the Great Lakes. In the Anishinaabe world, tobacco was an important ingredient in ceremonies and rites, a major trading good among Indigenous people and Euro-Americans, and long a crucial part of the calumet ceremony.<sup>69</sup>

However, later nineteenth-century cigar-store Indians were never intended to accurately represent actual Indian people's relationships to tobacco, but rather functioned to sanitize the history of Euro-American conquest to purposefully distort it in order to sell tobacco products to White customers. As Behnken and Smithers note in *Racism in American Popular Media*, these

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<sup>68</sup> On the historiography regarding cigar-store Indians, see Brian D. Behnken and Gregory D. Smithers, *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015); Ralph Sessions, *The Shipcarvers' Art: Figureheads and Cigar-store Indians in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Wulf D. Hund, "Advertising White Supremacy: Capitalism, Colonialism and Commodity Racism," in *Colonial Advertising and Commodity Racism*, ed. Wulf D. Hund, Michael Pickering, and Anandi Ramamurthy (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013), 21-67; Dolores Mitchell, "Images of Exotic Women in Turn-of-the-Century Tobacco Art," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 327-50; Jonathan P. Goldstein, "Race in Early Tobacco Advertising: The Case of American Tobacco Cards 1880-1911," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 43, no. 3 (2011): 340-47.

<sup>69</sup> See Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 20-23; 92-93; Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations*, 59-64, 153-54.

imagined proud chieftains, warriors of noble bearing, exotic maidens, and regal princesses who rounded out the cast of cigar-store characters were shaped in the image of the tropes of the frontier discourse. These tropes functioned not only to sell tobacco products to Euro-American consumers, but to hasten those consumers' "forgetting the long history of anti-Native American violence, forced removal, and assimilation efforts" which made tobacco cultivation possible on an industrial scale.<sup>70</sup> As Dolores Mitchell argues, it is no coincidence that so many cigar-store Indians were sculpted clutching peace pipes or offering outstretched hands: "Although there is an aura of generosity and nurturing in such a figure, it also encodes the belief that tribal peoples are glad to contribute raw materials to peoples of dominant culture."<sup>71</sup> In this light, Ann Arbor's cigar-store Indians functioned as yet another cultural canvas upon which Euro-Americans honed their depiction of Indigenous physicality, dress, and disposition as noble savages who were more at home in the past, vanishing into a bygone era, eager to offer their tobacco—and by extension, their land—to Euro-American people.

In 1877, the proprietor of Shiehan's books installed a figure of a man clothed in the imagined accoutrements of a New England Indian to draw attention to his store on State Street. As the university campus is directly across the street from this storefront, hundreds of university students and staff—including Dewey—would have passed such figures every day.<sup>72</sup>

In fact, Dewey might have been more attuned to the statues than most. After all, his father, Archibald Sprague Dewey, had been the proprietor of a general store in Burlington, Vermont, that sold tobacco products during the 1850s. When he mustered out of the Union army,

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<sup>70</sup> Behnken and Smithers, *Racism in American Popular Media*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Mitchell, "Images of Exotic Women in Turn-of-the-Century Tobacco Art," 336.

<sup>72</sup> Euro-American nostalgia for cigar-store Indians persists to this day; in 2012, a hundred and eighteen years after Dewey left Michigan, a five-foot cigar-store Indian statue carved by Samuel Robb in the 1880s was sold at auction in Ann Arbor for \$94,400. "Cigar store Indian puffs away for \$94,400," *Antique Trader Weekly*, October 17, 2012, 43.

Sprague became an accomplished tobacconist in the 1860s. Among other staples, Sprague's stores stocked a variety of tobacco products.<sup>73</sup> At thirty cents a cigar, rolled tobacco became a staple of frequent visitors, who bought them from Sprague's store by the handful.<sup>74</sup> Cigars in this period also featured Indian people on their packaging and marketing, often in the image of an exotic Indian princess or other members of imagined Indian royalty.<sup>75</sup> As the U.S. tobacco industry became increasingly corporate after the war, their marketing campaigns carried these representations of Indigenous people far and wide, including directly upon the shelves of Sprague's store. In fact, the volume of tobacco products in his store led to Sprague's colorful advertisements, like "a good apology for a bad habit, smokers will find one at A.S.D.'s" and "hams and cigars, smoked and unsmoked."<sup>76</sup> Sometimes his ads even identified which brands he sold, such as Lilienthal's, Fisher's, and Moaccoby Snuff, the latter of which sported representations of regal Indian smokers on its packaging.<sup>77</sup> One newspaper highlighted his tobacco products thusly:

There's Flour and Sugar, Soda, Snuff  
Pipes, Pickles, Pails and Kitchen Stuff,  
Cigars,—quite worthy of a 'puff,'  
At Dewey's<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "The Prose and Poetry of A. S. Dewey," 13, in *Correspondence: Biographical Information Regarding Archibald Sprague Dewey*, Box 1, John Dewey Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>74</sup> Examples of snuff and cigar sales can be found in the records of cash sales in Archibald Sprague Dewey's store from 1855 to 1870, Boxes 71 and 72, John Dewey Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>75</sup> Mitchell, "Images of Exotic Women in Turn-of-the-Century Tobacco Art," 327-50.

<sup>76</sup> "The Prose and Poetry of A. S. Dewey," 1, in *Correspondence: Biographical Information Regarding Archibald Sprague Dewey*, Box 1, John Dewey Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale. See also Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 2; Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of Liberalism*, 41-42.

<sup>77</sup> "The Prose and Poetry of A. S. Dewey," 13, in *Correspondence: Biographical Information Regarding Archibald Sprague Dewey*, Box 1, John Dewey Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

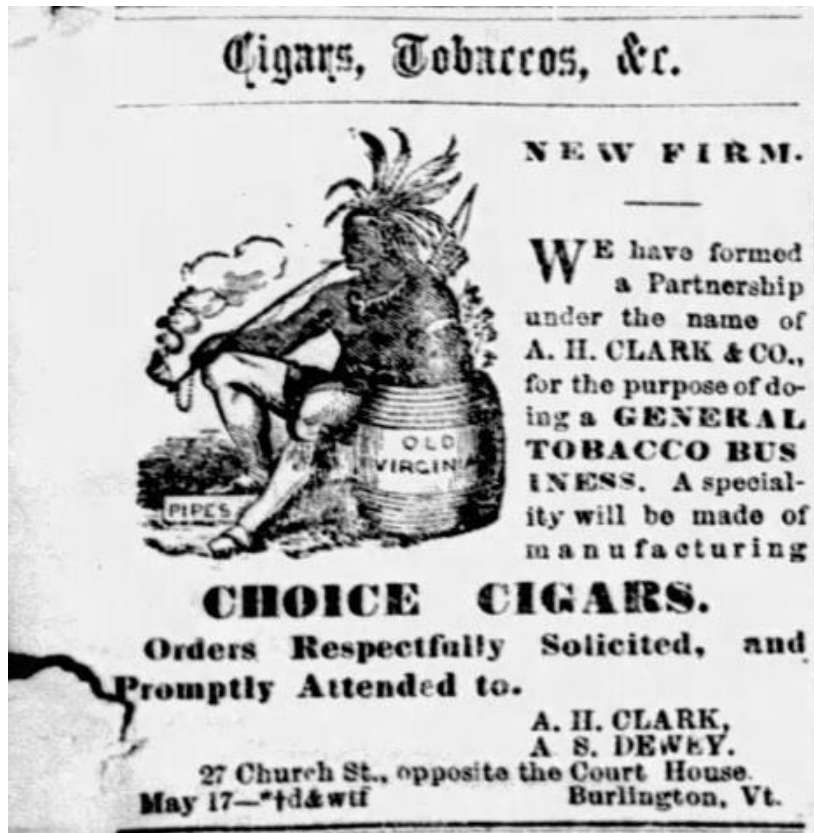


Figure 1.2. Advertisement of Archibald Sprague Dewey, *The Burlington Free Press*.

Moreover, Sprague did not hesitate to enlist the image of the tobacco Indian to promote his business. In June 1870, Sprague placed an advertisement in the pages of the *Burlington Free Press* featuring the image of an Indian man, sporting buckskin, bow, quiver, and feather headdress, reclining on a barrel of “Old Virginia” tobacco, blowing puffs of

smoke from a long pipe. The common presence of tobacco products in both of Sprague’s stores meant that by the time he left for the University of Vermont in 1875, Dewey would have already been well acquainted with the visage of the tobacco Indian from his father’s store, the brands of corporate tobacco products, and his father’s own advertisements. The ubiquitous nature of these imagined Indians and their association with tobacco make it very possible if not likely that Archibald’s shop featured a cigar-store Indian. Dewey confronted these material manifestation of the frontier discourse on a daily basis in both Burlington and Ann Arbor.

The prevalence of these representations aside, it was not impossible for Ann Arborites like Dewey to encounter Indigenous people of the living and breathing variety in their town. Most of the Indigenous people who appear in the historical record during this decade in Ann



Ann Arbor are those who were in town as entrepreneurs, performers, and actors. As businesspeople and workers, they too were caught up in a marketplace defined by the tropes of frontier discourse, which compelled them to conform to Euro-American expectations in order to find a profit in Euro-American markets. For example, Dewey would have seen advertisements for Adam Forepaugh and William F. Carver's "Forepaugh and Wild West Combination," which came through Ann Arbor in 1889. Forepaugh's show claimed to recreate the verisimilitude of the West in Ann Arbor because it was an event "interpreted by frontier heroes who have spent their lives amid the scenes they now re-enact." While those actors reenacted "Indian fights, raids, and rescues," the show's main event was "Custer's Last Rally." The "Custer Battle" was featured twice in an Ann Arbor venue that boasted over 15,000 seats, likely to accommodate the particular interest of Michiganders not so far from Custer's childhood home in Monroe, Michigan. The whole battle was brought to "romantic and realistic life" by over "200 mounted combatants, genuine savages, scouts and soldiers."<sup>79</sup> As the show was touted not as spectacle but historic reenactment, it was likely a vehicle for the employment of native actors, a mainstay of the Wild West circuit of the turn of the century.<sup>80</sup> Though the Wild West circuit was a place where Indigenous performers could escape the political economy of the reservation, many of the performances in which they participated further depicted them as a vanishing people.<sup>81</sup>

If Dewey had been in the mood for some shopping, he might have dropped in on the Umatilla Indian Medicine Company's arrival in Ann Arbor on November 1, 1889. Part theater,

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<sup>79</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, June 14, 1889, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 138-63.

<sup>81</sup> Ironically, this representation of Indians as wild frontier horsemen upset White reformers, who feared that this representation would undermine assimilation efforts. Moreover, there is an expansive literature on how the Wild West circuit offered Indian people a measure of agency in challenging their portrayals by the frontier discourse as vanished people. This is an important avenue that Indigenous people found vehicles with which to push against the settler colonial mesh. See Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*; L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and Images of the American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

part apothecary, the company was the brainchild of Donald McKay, made famous as a member of the Warm Springs Scouts in the Modoc War in 1873, and T. A. Edwards, a promoter and peddler of cure-alls.<sup>82</sup> These troupes were standard fare for local theaters in the late nineteenth century. According to Roger Hall, they were a marketing ploy where “patent medicine companies sent groups of seven to ten performers and Indians on the road to hawk their wares.”<sup>83</sup> The arrival of the company was noted in the *Argus*, who pointed readers to McKay’s outfit where they were “giving entertainments at the opera house every evening for two weeks.” After a week’s stay, the company decamped from Ann Arbor, reported the *Argus*, “in disgust because people would not buy their remedies more freely.”<sup>84</sup>

Or perhaps Dewey might have taken in a performance of Gowongo Mohawk in her self-produced vehicle *Wep-ton-no-mah, the Indian Mail Carrier*, which played at Ann Arbor’s Grand Opera House on December 29, 1891. Despite being from the Cattaraugus reservation in New York, Mohawk set her story on a western ranch and had her male protagonist Wep-ton-no-mah (a role which she cast herself) do combat with a villainous Hispanic character “Spanish Joe,” plot elements that would have specifically catered to White audiences. When the *Argus* reprinted a review of the play, it emphasized that “novelty is given the play, and its production, by the appearance in it of a full-blooded Indian, who adheres to her aboriginal name, Go-Won-Go Mohawk.” The review noted her “picturesque figure” who is “tall of stature and lithe of limb, and commands the admiration which is always excited by the noble specimens of the race.” Ann

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<sup>82</sup> Melinda Jette, “Donald McKay,” Oregon History Project, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/donald-mckay/#.XKPQ3ZhKiUk>

<sup>83</sup> Hall, *Performing the Frontier*, 138.

<sup>84</sup> *Ann Arbor Argus*, November 1, 1889, 3; December 13, 1889, 3, America’s Historical Newspapers.

Arborites may have been surprised to learn that the play included musical numbers, and that Mohawk's performance "proves that there is such a thing as music in the savage breast."<sup>85</sup>

From the scholarship on his life and works, we know that Dewey was keenly interested in popular media and was consistently disappointed in newspapers and their capacity to serve as vehicles for social intelligence. Partisanship, editorializing, and simple factual inaccuracies in Michigan newspapers compelled Dewey to come up with a solution: his own newspaper. Dewey believed that a newspaper could better harness the emerging technologies of mass media to curate reliable information to promote social intelligence than the existing newspapers in Ann Arbor. This led to an 1892 plan to found a newspaper, dubbed *Thought News*, with several Michigan academics and with journalist and entrepreneur Franklin Ford. Jeremiah Dyehouse suggests Dewey was clear-eyed about "new possibilities for the writing infrastructures—telegraphs, cheap paper, and publication equipment—that subtended the late nineteenth-century newspaper."<sup>86</sup> For Dewey, a newspaper like *Thought News* could scientifically verify information so that it might be made maximally useful to social intelligence in the pursuit of democracy; for Ford, it was a way to create a new kind of periodical and leverage Dewey's name to make money.

Neither the plan nor the partnership seems to have survived 1892; apart from placing advertisements in the local newspapers, Dewey and Ford never realized their project. But *Thought News* was an important moment in Dewey's career, as it signals his dissatisfaction with the popular media in his community and his desire to improve it in service of democracy. James Campbell characterizes Dewey's investment in the social utility of newspapers as one of "several

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<sup>85</sup> "The Indian Mail Carriers," *Ann Arbor Argus*, December 25, 1891.

<sup>86</sup> Jeremiah Dyehouse, "Theory in the Archives: Fred Newton Scott and John Dewey on Writing the Social Organism," *College English* 76, no. 3 (January 2014): 248-68.

other attempts to advance democracy as a cooperative experiment by means of voluntary institutions.”<sup>87</sup> This impulse suggests that Dewey began his thinking not about an abstract “American” community which newspapers might serve, but with a specific Michigan public in mind.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, Dewey never named the distorting effects of the frontier discourse as a factor in his desire to improve newspapers. Still, it is difficult to believe that Dewey could have navigated his ten years in Ann Arbor without becoming ensnared in the thicket of representations of Indian people in Michigan’s newspapers, advertisements, and entertainments. But newspapers, advertisements, and entertainments were not the only way that Dewey was exposed to the imagined Indians of Michigan’s past. Instead, the exposure came much closer to home.

### **Settler Colonial Authors of Frontier Discourse: The Riggs in Michigan, 1828-1901**

This brings us to the most salient connection to Michigan Indian people in Dewey’s biography: that Alice Chipman’s grandfather, Frederick Riggs, was allegedly an adopted member of a Chippewa tribe. In almost every biographical treatment of John Dewey since 1950, there is mention of Frederick’s status as an adopted “Copperhead Chippewa,” presumably among the Anishinaabe people who supported the Democratic party near what would become the Saginaw Chippewa reservation. As a result of this status, many biographers have suggested that Frederick Riggs was an advocate for Indian people. Riggs’ personal enlightenment on issues affecting Indigenous people is routinely mentioned as a critical influence on Alice Chipman—and by the transitive property of her own influence, on Dewey himself.

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<sup>87</sup> Campbell, *Understanding John Dewey*, 212.

<sup>88</sup> As late as the 1940s, Dewey was still irritated by the quality (or lack thereof) of information he found in newspapers. In a 1940 letter, Dewey shared with his colleague and friend Frank Manny how his antipathy for newspapers that had prompted him to consider launching *Thought News* had lived on: “When one sees how bad the papers are in most of American cities, one is compelled to believe that the level of political intelligence [sic] is higher than one would otherwise believe—for the newspapers are largely a disservice rather than an aid to understanding.” Letter from John Dewey to Frank Manny, February 20, 1940, John Dewey Special Correspondence vol. 2, The John Dewey Photography Series, Bentley Historical Library.

For example, Alan Ryan writes of Riggs: “Fred in particular was an adventurous sort; in his youth he made himself unpopular with the first White settlers in Michigan by making friends with the local Chippewa and consistently standing up for the rights of Indians against the newcomers.”<sup>89</sup> From Robert Westbrook’s definitive Dewey biography: “A champion of Indian rights, [Frederick] Riggs imparted to his granddaughter a disdain for social conventions and a critical conscience as well as a fiercely independent and self-reliant character.”<sup>90</sup> Jay Martin chronicles Frederick Riggs: “A fur trader for the Hudson Bay Company, he lived with the Chippewas, learned their language, and was made a member of the tribe. Later, he was a vigorous defender of Native American rights against the Bureau of Indian Affairs.”<sup>91</sup> Cornel West focuses on Riggs’ altruism for Indian people: “Frederick Riggs was an adopted member of the Chippewa tribe and ‘learned their language so that an Indian could not tell by his voice that he was a white man’ and worked with them in their efforts to get justice from white people.”<sup>92</sup> In her study of Alice Chipman’s life, Irene Hall calls Alice “a child of the Western frontier ... independent, stubborn, and free thinking,” traits that Alice herself used to describe “the rugged frontier where she grew up.” From the influence of her grandfather’s close associations with Michigan Indigenous people, Hall concludes that Alice “developed a critical attitude towards social conditions and injustices”<sup>93</sup> embodied by Michigan’s Indians. Consequently, Chipman instilled a similar attitude in Dewey.

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<sup>89</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of Liberalism*, 80.

<sup>90</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 34.

<sup>91</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 94.

<sup>92</sup> Cornel West, *American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 78.

<sup>93</sup> Hall, *The Educational Work and Philosophy of Alice Chipman Dewey*, 19.

A champion of Indian rights? A dissident against the Office of Indian Affairs? An advocate for Indian justice? Where does this story about Frederick Riggs come from, exactly? In part, it originates in Jane Dewey's 1956 biography of her father. There, she writes of Riggs:

One of the very early settlers, he surveyed the first road through the northern part of the state, managed Indian trading posts, and later took up farming in the wilderness. The two grandchildren, Alice and Esther, grew up in a household where memories of pioneering days were strong and the spirit of adventure was a living force. While a fur trader Grandfather Riggs had been initiated into the Chippewa tribe and he learned their language so that an Indian could not tell by his voice that he was a white man. Indians visited him all his life and he was a champion of their vanishing rights.<sup>94</sup>

Notice the particular narrative elements that appear in Jane's biography: that the Riggs were a newly arrived family to Michigan who carved out a homestead in its vast wilderness; that Frederick was an adopted member of a Chippewa tribe; that he looked fondly upon Indian people as they vanished before the spread of civilization. These elements, which have gone uncritically analyzed by scholars of Dewey's life and thought, are some of the same elements that can be found in Michigan's frontier discourse. As a result, they greater deserve historical scrutiny.

Jane Dewey got some parts of the Riggs family history correct. The Riggs family moved from New York to Michigan in 1828.<sup>95</sup> Led by Jeremiah and Lucy Riggs, the family settled in Pontiac, Michigan, and operated a gristmill, where the eighteen-year-old Frederick Riggs was so proficient in that trade that he "established an enviable reputation for turning out of a good

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<sup>94</sup> Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1939): 20.

<sup>95</sup> They were in good company. As Edward Bemis observed in 1882, "Probably no State can rival Michigan in number of sons from New York and New England. Of the 496 members of the Michigan Pioneer Association in 1881, 407 are from these sections." Bemis did not begrudge these immigrants, but applauded them for importing and invigorating the political habits and land use of New England's settler colonial states: "The local institutions of the East were transplanted to a new soil, losing in the journey none of their pristine vigor, but casting off such portions as were found unsuited a change of circumstance and time." Edward Bemis, "Local Government in Michigan and the Northwest," Lecture before the American Social Science Association, September 1882 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1883), 11-12.

quality of flour.”<sup>96</sup> During this period, Frederick also acquired a reputation for associating with local Anishinaabe people; Frederick was said to sometimes shirk his work at the mill to do so, and it would seem that it was in this capacity that he began to learn to speak with his Indigenous neighbors in Anishinaabemowin: “His every day associates were mostly Indians and he learned to speak their language as fluently as he could his own,” noted a local history.<sup>97</sup> He soon became involved as a trader in the fur trade, and he later joined the U.S. Army Engineering Corps tasked with surveying the territory between Saginaw and Mackinac.<sup>98</sup>

But Jane’s biography failed to capture the Riggs’ part in federal Indian policy. In 1836, Jeremiah Riggs maneuvered his way to gaining a post as an Indian farmer near Saginaw. The position of Indian farmer had been created fifteen years earlier by the Congressional “Civilization Fund” of 1819. The legislation not only provided funds for the purchase of agricultural implements intended for distribution among various Indigenous nations whether they were sedentary agriculturalists or not, but it also hired Euro-American men to teach their Indigenous counterparts how to use them. Jeremiah Riggs began lobbying the governor of Michigan territory for the position in early 1835, citing his loyalty to the Democratic party.<sup>99</sup> Soon after, Riggs became the choice of Albert Miller and eighteen other Euro-American men to take the job of Indian farmer at the Saginaw Chippewa Sub-Agency.<sup>100</sup> They cited not only his good reputation, but also his son Frederick’s ability to speak the language of the Saginaw Chippewa: “Judge Riggs is a man of regular habits, and good understanding, has a son perfectly

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<sup>96</sup> Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Record: Genesee, Lapeer, and Tuscola Counties, Michigan* (Chicago: Chapman Bros., 1892), 241.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 94.

<sup>99</sup> Jeremiah Riggs to Andrew Mark, February 2, 1835, Letters Received by the Superintendents, 1819-1835, 55-57, Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, Reel 31, Hatcher Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

<sup>100</sup> Petition on behalf of Jeremiah Riggs, Letters Received by the Superintendents, 1819-1835, 2, Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, Reel 31, Hatcher Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

acquainted with the Indian language whose services would be cheerfully rendered to assist his father in the discharging of his duties that might be incumbent on him.” In addition to his morally upright character, the current crop of Indian farmers argued that Riggs also possessed the requisite skills as a pastoralist: “We would further state that Judge Riggs is a pastoral [*sic*] agricultural man one with whom we have long been acquainted and in whom we have the utmost confidence.”<sup>101</sup> Jeremiah—aided by Frederick’s multilingualism and their democratic politics—got the job. The two went to work that year as agents of the federal government’s designs to transform Anishinaabe society through agriculture. Homestead farming was imagined by the United States as a means to convert Indian men into sedentary heads of households, eventually becoming citizens in the mold of the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer. Jeremiah’s labor as an Indian farmer was therefore not only manual labor, but ideological labor as well.<sup>102</sup>

On a day-to-day basis, the work of the Riggs’ father and son team among the Saginaw Chippewa would not have been much different from the work on their own homesteads. The Riggs laid plans to till Indian fields, demonstrate the proper use of plows and agricultural accoutrements, and instruct Indigenous people in the reaping and sowing of crops often already known to them. Riggs would also procure equipment for his Indian charges; records of the agency show that Riggs was reimbursed by the government for postage, animal fodder, and farming equipment. Riggs’ pay was carefully documented as a part of an 1834 congressional legislation to provide for the “disbursement or application of moneys, goods, or effects, for the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1973); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* [Abridged] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1986.



benefits of the Indians.”<sup>103</sup> In 1837, he earned a salary of \$500 for his labor to prepare the Saginaw Chippewa for incorporation into the polity of Michigan State as yeoman farmers.<sup>104</sup>

During his stint as an Indian farmer, Frederick Riggs married Evaline Bishop on January 26, 1836.<sup>105</sup> In 1837, Riggs purchased land in Tyrone township in Livingston County, where he “built a log house and barn, living in true pioneer style for several years.”<sup>106</sup> He used the land as a farm and lived there for nearly thirty years until moving to Fenton in 1867.<sup>107</sup> By 1870, Frederick and Evaline Riggs were living in Fenton, along with their orphaned granddaughters, Harriet Alice and Maria Augusta Chipman, age eleven and nine, respectively. This began a long series of multigenerational configurations living in the Riggs’ home, the same place where Dewey was married to Alice in 1886 and spent many hours with the Riggs family. In Fenton, Dewey was undoubtedly regaled by Riggs’ stories about his days as a surveyor, fur trader, Indian farmer, and, now, a semi-retired pastoralist himself. Perhaps he told some stories in Anishinaabemowin for the young philosopher to hear. Those stories, however, were told from a Euro-American point of view, where they soon became part of the larger memory project of the frontier discourse.

Much of what we know about the stories Fredrick Riggs might have told his family comes from his great-granddaughter, Helen. Marie Helen Topping Miller was the daughter of Isaac Wallace and Maria Augusta Chipman Topping. Like her aunt Alice Chipman before her, Helen was born in Fenton, Michigan, on December 8, 1884, the year Dewey arrived in Ann

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<sup>103</sup> “Disbursements to Indians,” Letter from the Second Auditor of the Treasury Department, 26th Congress, House of Representatives, March 3, 1841, 1.

<sup>104</sup> “Persons Employed, Indian Department.” Letter from the Secretary of War, 25th Congress, January 30, 1838, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 241; Oakland County Marriage Certificates, 1827-1837, in Michigan Record of Marriages, 1827-1919, 243-244, *FamilySearch*, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939V-JBCD-C?cc=1810350&wc=Q868-NLP%3A150748701%2C150748702> : 11 May 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 241.

<sup>107</sup> Franklin Ellis, *History of Livingston County, Michigan* (Philadelphia: Everts and Abbott, 1880), 399.



Figure 1.3. Frederick F. Riggs, date unknown, Fenton Historical Society, Fenton, Michigan.

Arbor.<sup>108</sup> Helen lived in Michigan for twenty-four years—at least sixteen of those in the home of her grandparents—graduating from Michigan State in 1905, after which she became a teacher and novelist.<sup>109</sup> Her writing acumen landed her a job at Mercer University in Georgia, where she taught classes in modern fiction. By the time of her death in 1960, she had written forty-six novels.<sup>110</sup>

One of those novels was inspired by her own family history.<sup>111</sup> In 1949 she published a novel entitled *Born*

*Strangers: A Chronicle of Two Families*. In this fictionalized family history, Miller imagines a mid-nineteenth-century Michigan landscape of fields and fences like the one Jeremiah and

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<sup>108</sup> “Readers share stories of: women who made a difference,” *Michigan History Magazine* 86, no. 6 (2002): 13.

<sup>109</sup> U.S. Census, 1900. Michigan, Genesee County, Fenton Village, Enumeration District 8, NARA microfilm publication T623 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration), in *FamilySearch*, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-DCV7-H2W?i=47&wc=9BQJ-C6B%3A1030554301%2C1033582001%2C1033604501&cc=1325221>.

<sup>110</sup> “Helen Topping Miller is Dead; Novelist Had Written 46 Books,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1960, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>111</sup> Though the book is treated by many contemporaneous readers, reviewers, and publishers as a novel like all the others, it is clear that Miller intended *Born Strangers* to faithfully account for many historical details of the family’s history in Michigan. All of the characters in the book correspond with the names and occupations of real family members; settings where the plot unfolds are in fact places where the Riggs lived; and details about the lives of members of the family are reconstructed (albeit dramatically) with fidelity. Miller also captures how Maria and her sister Alice Chipman were raised by their grandparents: “Grandmother Evaline and her Grandfather Riggs had done the best they could for her and her sister Hattie.” Helen Topping Miller, *Born Strangers: A Chronicle of Two Families* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1949), 13. “Readers share stories of: women who made a difference.” *Michigan History Magazine*, 13.

Frederick had helped to cultivate under threat from the conditions of a changing world of roads, trains, and fences. The *Los Angeles Times* reviewed the book as a novel of “sturdy people settling a new country with their ambitions, burdens and troubles woven into a picture of the Middle West in the 19th century.”<sup>112</sup> A *New York Times* review praised the book, a novel where “the hardships of pioneer life in both families are realistically pictured”—though the review admonished Miller for a “story [that] suffers from the packing of too many people and events.”<sup>113</sup>

The book bulged with detail in large part because it essentially preserved and exaggerated so many of Frederick Riggs’ tales about his days on the Michigan frontier. From the first page, it is clear that *Born Strangers* not only is an account of how Helen remembered Frederick, but also captures how Frederick might have portrayed his own experience to his family—and by extension, to Dewey. Though the book tells us more about what people imagined life was like in the land that would become Michigan in the middle of the twentieth century, the book is a useful source to mine for details about the Riggs family’s real and imagined relationship with Michigan’s Indigenous people.

Miller introduces her readers to the protagonist of the novel, Frederick Riggs, as an unnamed man following a canal boat “for five days, limping along, feet tracking straight like an Indian’s.”<sup>114</sup> When he finally caught up with the canal boat making a trek from the heart of civilization in New York to its bleeding edge in Michigan, Frederick’s character reveal is accomplished when one of the boatmen mistakes him as “part Injun.” “‘Nope, he ain’t,’ said the

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<sup>112</sup> “Settlers Go into Michigan.” *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1949, D6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>113</sup> Barbara Bond, “Old Michigan: *Born Strangers*,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1949, BR43, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>114</sup> Miller, *Born Strangers*, 21.

captain. ‘I know who he is. Old Judge Jeremiah Riggs’ boy. Talks Injun anyway.’<sup>115</sup> The two boatmen then debate Frederick’s racial identity: “‘He’s part Injun, I tell you,’ argued the tow driver. ‘Couldn’t be, unless old Judge Jeremiah’s wife took up with a young buck, and that I’ll never believe,’ declared the captain.”<sup>116</sup> In scenes like this, Miller establishes the prejudice of many White characters and sets up Frederick as something of a racially enlightened cultural broker between Euro-American settlers and Indian people.

However, Miller populates *Born Strangers* with Indian characters by drawing on the frontier discourse and its stock of tropes to depict Michigan Indian people as equal measure noble savages and supreme woodsmen. For example, soon after his run-in with the boatmen, Frederick meets Wabonais, a “Chippewa” man. After the two decide to travel together, Miller informs her readers that Frederick is a kindred spirit: “Mr. Riggs was always at ease with Indians. Their proud taciturnity suited his mood, their woods ways satisfied him,” she wrote.<sup>117</sup> “Early in adolescence he had learned their tricks, their skill in hunting, their soundless tread, how to make a quick, hot smokeless fire, how to tan hides and jerk meat, how to be silent and invisible—hearing everything, giving forth nothing.”<sup>118</sup> On their journey into Michigan, Frederick realizes they are being followed by White bandits. When he draws a knife to ambush one of their stalkers, Frederick’s new Indian companion proclaims, “Wabonais do this. For a White man it is not seemly.” Miller depicts Wabonais as fueled by his casual familiarity with violence and ready to commit murder on behalf of the respite of a new White counterpart: “Like

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>117</sup> Miller’s character Wabonais might have been based on a prominent Saginaw Chippewa man known as Wahbesins, who was recorded by an 1879 local history in the same vein as in *Born Strangers*: “No Indian hunter was more skilled in woodcraft than he.” Franklin Ellis, *History of Genesee County* (Philadelphia: Everts & Abbot, 1879), 14.

<sup>118</sup> Miller, *Born Strangers*, 32.

smoke he was up, lithely, and almost instantly vanished into the forest.”<sup>119</sup> In this fashion, Miller depicts Michigan’s Indian people as violent sylvan warriors who are also seen as helpers to White settlers who have come to bring civilization to the territory.

This juxtaposition plays out when Evaline and their children make it to Michigan to join Frederick and make a home for their family. Upon arriving by wagon, the youngest daughter Esther remarks, “Is this Michigan? Father said there would be Indians. I don’t see any Indians in Michigan.” Esther’s brother Frank retorts, “They’re tame Indians.” Esther does not believe it: “They are not. They’re wild as anything, aren’t they, Mother?”<sup>120</sup> When Evaline and her three children finally rendezvous with Frederick and construct a cabin, Miller portrays her impatience with Indians like Wabonais as a stand-in for the coming of civilization to Michigan<sup>121</sup>: “I’ve had enough of Indians. Stinking things, eating you out of house and home and lying around in my kitchen! The trouble with you, Fred Riggs, is that you never did grow up.”<sup>122</sup> Miller attempts to harness the reader’s pity for Wabonais by emphasizing his vanishing Indian tribe, writing that Evaline became a progressively bitter host, feeding “the proud young Chippewa buck as though he were a tramp or a dog at her door, rather than with the courtesy due to a brave of a haughty nation.”<sup>123</sup>

Eventually, Evaline grows tired of her husband’s association with Indian people and gives her husband an ultimatum: “This settles it, Fred Riggs! Either you move me out of these woods or I walk out and take my children with me! I’ve put up with your dirty Indians and fed them and swept out after them and gagged at the stink of them!”<sup>124</sup> Evaline tells Frederick that

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 141

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 97.

his land in Shiawasse country is more suitable to raise a family, where “we can live like white people!” As Lucy Riggs explains to a friend, her mother “doesn’t like Indians. I guess it’s because she’s always afraid they’ll coax Father to go back to the woods.”<sup>125</sup> This begins a long-running tension between the characters of Frederick and Evaline and their respective affinity with the wilderness and the other civilization, which Miller portrays as inherently and essentially at odds with the other.

Miller’s imagining of her great-grandfather as a remote man more at home in the woods by dint of his affinity for Indian people becomes the central theme of the novel. Insofar as Miller has Frederick learning woodcraft from Indians, so too does he seem to have acquired his own sense of aloofness, wariness, and craftiness seemingly defined from his proximity to Indian people on the Michigan frontier. When Frederick meets a White doctor in Flint who accuses him of being the strangest stranger he has ever met, Frederick says, “Calculate maybe I was born a stranger. Been a stranger all my life. Truth is, I like being a stranger.”<sup>126</sup> In this exchange, Miller insinuates that just as Frederick has “gone native” and invested himself with wanderlust that will forever alienate him from civilization, so too Indian people are increasingly strangers within the modern state of Michigan.

Miller brings this home in the climax of the novel, which she imbues with her era’s own frontier nostalgia over the closing of the Michigan frontier. Frederick increasingly feels penned in by Michigan’s fences, roads, and rails (the very changed landscape he and his father had helped to affect as homesteaders and Indian farmers). “Michigan was being tamed too fast,” Miller wrote without irony.<sup>127</sup> The disquiet that Frederick felt over the closing of the frontier of

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

Michigan is what Miller uses to explain his eventual departure that concludes the novel.

Frederick finally got his chance to trade a closed Michigan frontier for a new one when he learned of a promising mining claim in Colorado from a Norwegian miner. Miller depicts how Frederick deeded all of his possessions in Michigan to Evaline, stole out of the Fenton house on a rainy Monday, and boarded a train west, propelled by “the elusive thing that had tormented him through the years, the call of the wild and the far and the free that had been stifled in his ears.... The forests would comfort him, and the remote and silent mountains sustain him. He would make a fire again, deftly, with flint and steel. He would walk in the trails of the woods creatures and be as canny as they.” In other words, Frederick Riggs would live like an Indian again.<sup>128</sup> Helen Topping Miller’s book ends with Frederick Riggs abandoning his family in Michigan in pursuit of the next frontier advancing into the Far West.

Through the novel *Born Strangers*, Helen Topping Miller both preserved and invented Frederick Riggs’ associations with Indian people. While the book contains some shreds of historically verifiable truth, it is just as frequently inaccurate. But reading *Born Strangers* this way would be a mistake. *Born Strangers* is better understood as yet another production of the frontier discourse that continued to shape Euro-American visions of nineteenth-century Michigan. Whether perpetuating stories that Frederick himself told or inventing new ones, Miller’s novel thickens the linkage between Frederick and frontier Michigan vis-a-vis his real and exaggerated dealings with Indigenous people. Though we do not know if Dewey ever read *Born Strangers* in the three years before he died (he had some of Helen’s novels in his library),

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 287.

the book is a useful tool to reconstruct how Alice Chipman, Jane Dewey, and the rest of the family understood Riggs' experience in a largely Anishinaabe world.<sup>129</sup>

Barbara Bond, who reviewed Miller's book for the *New York Times* in 1949, could not have known how close she came to the truth when she concluded that "*Born Strangers* has at once the fascination and diffuseness of stories that grandfathers tell to entertain the children."<sup>130</sup>

Contrary to the biographical treatments of Dewey, which praised Riggs as "a friend to the Indians" who helped them "pursue justice against white people," there is no doubt the stories from *Born Strangers* hint at the Riggs' true inheritance passed on to Alice Chipman, which in turn influenced John Dewey's thinking about Michigan, the frontier, and Indian people.

Just prior to Dewey's arrival in Michigan, Riggs did, in fact, decide to leave Michigan for the Far West. Riggs' decision to "head west," as one biography described it, was motivated by Riggs' "hope of regaining his health which had not been robust for some time."<sup>131</sup> On the alleged "advice of a physician," Riggs made his way to Colorado's Rocky Mountains. Out of his concern for his health (or that of his pocketbook), Riggs decided to get in on the Colorado Silver Boom in 1879 when he purchased a metal mine dubbed "Little Jessie" around Del Norte, Colorado.<sup>132</sup> A biography of Genesee County describes what Frederick did next: "Delighted with the mountain scenery and the beneficent effect of the climate, Mr. Riggs spent several years prospecting and eventually located several mining claims in Southwestern Colorado."<sup>133</sup> Frederick found a

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<sup>129</sup> Dewey reportedly had a copy of Miller's other books in his library. Moreover, the two exchanged several letters on important occasions to the family, such as Alice's death in the 1929. In 1944, Frederick Dewey wrote to his father requesting Helen's address. Frederick Dewey to John Dewey, February 9, 1944, *The Correspondence of John Dewey, 1871-1952*, ed. Larry A. Hickman, vol. 3, 1940-1953, 2nd ed. (Carbondale, IL: Center for Dewey Studies, 2008).

<sup>130</sup> Bond, "Old Michigan: *Born Strangers*," BR43.

<sup>131</sup> Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 241.

<sup>132</sup> Colorado Mine Directory 1879-1910, Denver Library, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://history.denverlibrary.org/sites/history/files/CO1879-1910mineDirect.pdf>.

<sup>133</sup> Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 242.



suitable claim in Rio Grande County and built a cabin there, “perched upon a dizzy mountain eleven thousand, five hundred feet above the level of the sea.”<sup>134</sup> In 1880, the federal census

captured Riggs living alone in Rio Grande County, where his occupation is listed as miner.<sup>135</sup>

Back in Michigan, a local biographer noted that “although eighty-one years old our subject still enjoys mountain life.”<sup>136</sup>

Although Dewey became close to Frederick as he courted Alice, the relationship between the two men would come into its own over the management of Frederick’s Colorado mine. Alan Ryan writes in his biography of Dewey that “much of Dewey’s surviving family correspondence is concerned with Fred’s problems with a mine that might or might not eventually yield a profit.”<sup>137</sup> But Riggs’ mountain life did make some kind of financial sense. “You know there is heaps of excitement now about the mines,” Maria Chipman wrote to her sister Alice in 1882. “[Frederick] is making money with his blasted mines and will all probability make more.”<sup>138</sup>

Though Riggs had incurred some expense by hiring a man named Cicero Stoner to look after his land, assets, and his ailing wife in Michigan, the silver mine promised a chance at great wealth. A Colorado history published in 1895 noted that the region of Del Norte had proven recently to be “a new element of wealth and prosperity” and that the region in its entirety allegedly produced \$38,910.29 in the year 1889, of which “\$5,430.20 was silver.”<sup>139</sup> Riggs wrote to Dewey in 1896, promising that “I will keep you informed have not hear [*sic*] anything from the mountain” and “if

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>135</sup> U.S. Census, 1880. Colorado, Rio Grande County, Del Norte, Enumeration District 99, NARA microfilm publication T9, (National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, in FamilySearch, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YBZ-63V?cc=1417683&wc=X41B-168%3A1589395618%2C1589396166%2C1589396163%2C1589394862> : 24 December 2015.

<sup>136</sup> Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 242.

<sup>137</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 80.

<sup>138</sup> Maria Chipman Topping to Alice Chipman Dewey, January 29, 1882, *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>139</sup> Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado* (Denver: Blakely Print Company, 1895), 296.

I get any money from the mines I shall buy a hors [sic] and buggy that we may ride.”<sup>140</sup> In the long run, the mine proved to be unreliable, however. Riggs decided to sell his claim and move back to Fenton, Michigan.

But lost in this episode is the important meaning that the Colorado mine held for both Frederick and Dewey alike. “The mine was probably a dud,” writes Alan Ryan, “but it was impossible to tell at a distance, and it was not easy for the elderly Riggs and the busy young professor to go out into the hinterland and inspect it up close.”<sup>141</sup> The mine may not have produced much in the way of silver, but it did offer a rich vein of symbolism. Much like as it is told in *Born Strangers*, Riggs seems to have regarded the whole mining enterprise as an extension of his pioneer days. His earlier surveying of Michigan territory had simply progressed into prospecting the peaks of Colorado. Dewey seems to recall it similarly when, in 1892, Dewey traveled to Colorado to lend Riggs a hand.

Though their exact mission in visiting the area is unclear, Dewey wrote a letter to Alice describing his journey to the mine. To get there, Dewey and Riggs had to ascend the Sangre de Cristo mountains, tales of which Riggs had almost certainly spun to his family back home. As they climbed through La Veta Pass, Dewey observed the surroundings with some dissatisfaction, perhaps invested in a more sylvan ideal of the wilderness of Michigan. “I agree with you that the Rockies are disappointing. It is not only that they aren’t wooded, but the rocks look more like clay through which rain has been pouring than like rocks.” As he and Frederick made their way to a work camp nearby, Dewey speculated about the future of the place. The landscape, which seemed to beg for “improvement,” caught Dewey’s imagination. “San Luis valley will

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<sup>140</sup> Frederick Riggs to John Dewey, April 20, 1896, and Frederick Riggs to John Dewey, May 10, 1896, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of Liberalism*, 80.

undoubtedly be fine some day.... When the whole valley is irrigated and trees are growing some and there are more crops, say in a generation, I don't doubt this valley will be remarkably fine." Despite his hope for a more verdant future, Dewey settled for what was at hand when he picked flowers near the top of the pass and enclosed them in his letter to his wife.<sup>142</sup>

Not long after, Stoner argued that he was owed money for looking out for Riggs' estate while he was mining in Colorado and for additional expenses in connection with caring for Riggs after his return. Alice Chipman did her best to adjudicate the issue for the man who had raised her like a father, but in the end it was her husband who was drawn into the center of Frederick's deteriorating personal and financial life. A lengthy letter from an exasperated Dewey to John Carton in 1900 lays out the facts of the lawsuit and how Dewey sought to minimize Riggs' exposure to Mr. Stoner's suit for \$1000 in unpaid debt.<sup>143</sup> Before the suit could be resolved, Frederick Riggs died; the *Flint Evening Journal* reported on April 1, 1901 that members of Riggs' family attended his funeral in Fenton on Friday, March 29, 1901.<sup>144</sup> After Frederick's death, the Supreme Court of Michigan upheld a lower court's judgment in *Stoner v. Riggs* and found that Riggs' estate—now passed to Alice and her sister—owed Stoner \$2,025 for unpaid debts.<sup>145</sup> Dewey handled the details out of probate and found the matter settled.<sup>146</sup>

Though Dewey's trip to San Luis valley in Colorado had been brief, it left an outsized mark on this thinking. Nearly three decades later, in his 1920 *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey went on a lengthy and revealing discussion of how living beings interact with their surroundings. "In the interests of the maintenance of life there is transformation of some

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<sup>142</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey, August 9, 1892, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>143</sup> John Dewey to John Carton, November 1, 1900, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>144</sup> "Additional Local," *Evening Journal*, April 1, 1901.

<sup>145</sup> John Brooks, *Michigan Reports: Reports of Cases Heard and Decided in the Supreme Court of Michigan* (Chicago: Callaghan and Co., 1902), 129.

<sup>146</sup> *Flint Journal*, February 24, 1900.

elements in the surrounding medium. The higher the form of life, the more important is the active reconstruction of the medium.” He went on:

This increased control may be illustrated by the contrast of savage with civilized man. Suppose the two are living in a wilderness. With the savage there is the maximum of accommodation to given conditions; the minimum of what we may call hitting back. The savage takes things ‘as they are,’ and by using caves and roots and occasional pools leads a meagre [*sic*] and precarious existence. The civilized man goes to distant mountains and dams streams. He builds reservoirs, digs channels, and conducts the waters to what had been a desert. He searches the world to find plants and animals that will thrive. He takes native plants and by selection and cross-fertilization improves them. He introduces machinery to till the soil and care for the harvest. By such means he may succeed in making the wilderness blossom like the rose.<sup>147</sup>

In this passage, Dewey clearly uses the vocabulary of savagery and civilization to foil Indians-as-savages with the pioneers, settlers, and miners like Riggs. Indians let the rivers flow; pioneers dam them. In so doing, the latter manipulates the environment and thus demonstrates their experiential intelligence. In this account, we see an early account of how his method of experimentalism rendered the U.S. history of settler colonialism as experimentalism in action—and implied that Indians had only a background role in that story. The distinction between control and accommodation, the distinction between experimental intelligence and habitual thinking, the conversion of deserts into rose gardens—the trajectory of these ideas can be drawn directly from his journey to Colorado with Riggs. Long after his trip to Colorado, however, Dewey would continue to draw on the frontier discourse. Consequently, Dewey’s immersion in the frontier discourse was not mere theorization; it began as a matter of personal experience.

In particular, Dewey’s 1892 trip to Colorado connected firsthand the hinterland mine to Riggs’ experience settling on the Michigan frontier. Dewey’s association with his grandfather-in-law’s mine consolidated Dewey’s impression of Riggs as a frontiersman. In the course of their

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<sup>147</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Middle Works*, 12:128-29.

commute by train, their haul up the Sange de Cristo range, and the time spent around the mine in the Colorado mountains, Dewey likely heard firsthand from Frederick the same stories of Michigan's frontier past that Helen Topping Miller preserved in *Born Strangers*. Moreover, as we have seen, the frontier discourse of Michigan was also made personally legible to Dewey in newspapers, advertisements, and entertainments prominent in Ann Arbor. It was ultimately Dewey's relationship with Frederick Riggs that cemented in Dewey's imagination that American history was a story of the development of the country from wilderness to civilization. As such, the frontier came to play an important part in much of Dewey's thinking about American history long after his career took him out of Michigan.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that the formation of Dewey's philosophy was heavily influenced by his time in Michigan. In particular, Dewey spent a decade steeped in Michigan's cultural, social, and economic environment, which shaped the conditions of possibility for how Dewey encountered Indigenous people. Dewey, like so many others, experienced Michigan's Indigenous people in the late nineteenth century through the realm of representations cast in the frontier discourse. These representations spread in the circulation of the cultural productions like newspapers, histories, novels, entertainments, and advertisements. As we have seen, the frontier discourse was highly visible in Michigan's local histories that depicted vanishing Indians, in newspaper stories of unearthed Indian graves, and in popular entertainments like the Wild West show that claimed to preserve a disappearing frontier well into the 20th century. "From a trackless wilderness and virgin land, [Michigan] has come to be a center of prosperity of civilization," local historian Isaac Fancher wrote in 1911. "Can any thinking person be insensible to the fascination of the study which discloses the aspiration and efforts of the early pioneers who so

strongly laid the foundation upon which has been reared the magnificent prosperity of later days?”<sup>148</sup>

With the development of Euro-American Michigan in the twentieth century, Indians in the state were imagined by most White Michiganders as either rapidly disappearing or long gone. Without irony, John C. Wright wrote in 1917 of Harbor Springs that “I am sure that one cannot visit the site of the famous old village without being thrilled with inspiration of nature or overcome by a feeling of sadness at the memories of a departed race”—despite the fact that a full five percent of Emmet County identified as Indian on the 1920 federal census just three years later.<sup>149</sup> Stanley Newton of Sault Saint Marie wrote a history of his home in 1923 that serves as a useful summary of the frontier discourse. “Every normal white man or woman is just naturally interested in Indians,” Newton pontificated:

Their roving lives, wild and free, their deer and bear hunting, their burnings at the stake, the devilishly painted face, the tomahawk, the scalping knife, the necklace of scalps, the medicine man, the unsurpassed Indian orator in council, the pipe of peace—ah, what a treasure trove of breathless interest are these! He who eyes for the first time an old Indian stone axe, instinctively visualized the skulls it has split. The child on your knee by the evening fire craves Injun stories. There’s a wonderfully satisfying thrill in the yelling, galloping Indian at the Wild West show.<sup>150</sup>

Dewey was no exception. His immersion in the frontier discourse began in reading Michigan newspapers, being hailed advertisements on the streets of Ann Arbor, or witnessing national entertainments featuring Indians—real and imagined—which reinforced the enduring association between Indians and savagery in Dewey’s philosophy.

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<sup>148</sup> Isaac Fancher, *Past and Present of Isabella Count* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen and Company, 1911), Preface.

<sup>149</sup> John C. Wright, *The Crooked Tree: Indian Legends and Short History of the Little Traverse Bay Region* (Harbor Springs: C. Fayette Erwin, 1917), xii.

<sup>150</sup> Stanley Newton, *The Story of Sault Ste. Marie and Chippewa County* (Sault St. Marie: The Sault News Printing Company, 1923), 1.

Ultimately, it was Dewey's association with Frederick Riggs that made the frontier discourse a part of Dewey's own lived experience in Michigan. Regardless of his alleged personal benevolence for Indian people, Riggs' actual career as a fur trader, a surveyor, a farmer, and a settler implicates him as a cog in the machinery of settler colonialism. Riggs came with his father to Michigan with an appetite for land; he stayed there to make a home for his family; he left for Colorado to speculate in an extractive industry that defined much of the West. Each of these pursuits required extinguishing Indigenous title to land and suppressing Indigenous sovereignties. For all his warm associations with Michigan's Indigenous people, Riggs likely believed that he and his father's effort to convert Michigan from wilderness to civilization as Indian farmers was a noble legacy.

Nearly thirty years after his passing, Frederick Riggs' life and memory as a Michigan pioneer still loomed large in Dewey's thinking. Almost a decade after his supposed embrace of cultural pluralism, it was Riggs to whom Dewey returned to make sense of the future of democracy in America. In his 1930 lecture titled "Construction and Criticism," Dewey mused about America's lost shared pioneer experience and a disappeared generation of Euro-American settlers in decidedly personal terms. "Perhaps the most striking idea evolved in the interpretation of the history of the United States is the importance of the frontier. But the frontier has virtually disappeared, and with it has disappeared the pioneer," Dewey wrote. He went on:

I am old enough to have known and talked with some of these pioneers. I recall one who went from New York when a boy with his family who were looking for new territory to conquer. He went to Michigan, then a wilderness, and became a fur trader in the north, lived with Chippewa Indians and was adopted as a member of their tribe, later becoming a millwright and farmer, and as civilization closed in around him went west in advance of the railway and shot buffaloes; after he was seventy he went gold hunting in Colorado

and lived in a mining camp ten thousand feet above the sea. His life was a true American Odyssey, and there were thousands like him.<sup>151</sup>

This unnamed New York pioneer, who “conquered” Michigan territory, “lived” among the Chippewa, escaped as “civilization closed in,” and went west “gold hunting,” and whose life was “a true American Odyssey” was none other than Frederick Riggs. Nearly thirty years after his trip with Riggs to his Colorado mine, twenty years after his death, and after a decade and change living in New York, John Dewey was still thinking about Riggs and the settlement of Michigan. As evidenced by this 1930 lecture, Dewey carried Riggs as the embodiment of the frontier discourse that obviated Indians long after he left Michigan. Dewey wrote to Horace Kallen that he had known “one American pioneer, my wife’s grandfather,” placing Riggs in the center of American history as someone who “made and was made by the settling of the West.”<sup>152</sup>

Why did Frederick Riggs’ life in Michigan and his adventure with Dewey in Colorado have such a hold on Dewey? For Dewey, Riggs himself was the walking and talking epitome of the frontier thesis in American history. Riggs made the frontier and its conceptual stock intimately real to Dewey, a product of his own lived experience; and like Turner, Indians were largely incidental to Dewey’s memory of Riggs’ life. Riggs’ biography as surveyor, trader, miller, farmer, and gold miner seemingly presented Dewey with firsthand empirical examples of experimentalism in action—all with personal eccentricity and flair. Far more important than whether Riggs actually did these things is the way in which Dewey imagined Riggs’ biography through his own contemporary culture milieu. Through his relationship with Riggs, Dewey

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<sup>151</sup> John Dewey, “Construction and Criticism” (1930), *Later Works*, 5:146.

<sup>152</sup> John Dewey to Horace Kallen, December 17, 1917, Kallen Collection, Box 7, Folder 14, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, cited in Hall, “The Unsung Partner,” 18.



imbibed the frontier discourse in a way he believed was consistent with his own emerging pragmatist method: as a product of his own experience.

However, Dewey proved unable to acknowledge the extent to which he made historical meaning out of Riggs' own life through the frontier discourse. Riggs' life in Michigan, spent surveying, trading, and farming on the edge of the Anishinaabe lands, was understood by Alice Chipman and Helen Topping Miller as an individual act in a national western melodrama. But Riggs was more than just Dewey's familial version of Buffalo Bill Cody; Riggs' biography would come to serve Dewey as the embodiment of Turner's frontier thesis. Dewey regarded Riggs' individual feats largely as firsthand evidence of Turner's national story. Conversely, Indian people assumed their place in the background of Riggs' pioneer life, bit players in the story of the settlement of Michigan and the Great Lakes. From his relationship to Riggs, Dewey found the notes of western expansion and rearranged them to fit a Turnerian score.

It is high time to put to rest the claim that through the conduit of Alice, Dewey inherited Frederick Riggs' positive inclinations towards Indian people. What Dewey really inherited was a history that imagined Michigan as a frontier world of wilderness populated by Indian people that was developed into civilization by Euro-American settlement. As a matter of personal experience, this was a democratic creation myth that left Indigenous people by the wayside. While his own thinking would become more sophisticated, Dewey never reconciled Indian people's survivance with their supposed vanishing as a part of the frontier discourse. As we shall see, this silence on contemporary Indigenous people would make Dewey's work ripe for translation—and misapplication—by those eager to translate Dewey's philosophy to the federal system of Indian education.

## CHAPTER 2:

### **Divergence: Andrew J. Blackbird and the Frontier Synthesis of Education and Democracy, 1887-1908**

The autumn of 1889 saw John Dewey arriving in Ann Arbor for a second time. In the winter of the previous year, Dewey had been offered a position on the other side of the Great Lakes as chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy and Logic at the University of Minnesota. He accepted, and the Deweys moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota. He taught in Minnesota for only a year. When his colleague and mentor at Michigan, George Sylvester Morris, passed away, Dewey was recruited back to Ann Arbor to take up his former teacher's position. This is how, at the start of the fall term in 1889, Dewey found himself chair of the philosophy department at Michigan. We might imagine that as he crossed the threshold into University Hall, he might have looked up at the auditorium's façade to an inscription that might have seemed aptly Deweyan; plucked from the Northwest Land Ordinance of 1787, the passage inscribed on the building bound together the vitality of the nation's democracy with the vigor of its schooling: "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."<sup>1</sup> This may have struck Dewey as a welcoming sentiment. Upon his return to Michigan, Dewey would begin to formulate the grounds for a new philosophy that would take the Northwest Ordinance's ideology linking

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<sup>1</sup> Terrance McDonald, "The Mystery Above the Pillars," *Bentley Historical Magazine*, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://bentley.umich.edu/news-events/magazine/the-mystery-above-the-pillars/>.

schooling and democracy into an industrial age and help to create from it one of the most important philosophical movements of the twentieth century.

As we imagine Dewey passing underneath the words inscribed in University Hall, he was—like anyone else in that auditorium—also making a deliberate passage of forgetting. By extolling the link between schooling and democracy, the passage obscured the university’s origins in the Indigenous dispossession driven by Northwest Ordinance itself. Overlooked in the celebratory passage was the conscious design of the authors of the 1787 legislation to use their law as a means to erase Indigenous sovereignties over the land that became Michigan territory in 1805; how the subsequent sale of that land would support the founding of public universities such as Michigan; and that the very plot of land where the campus was built was the result of the 1817 Treaty of Fort Meigs signed with Michigan’s Indigenous people. Moreover, the passage from the Northwest Ordinance placed above the auditorium in University Hall (and later etched into the ediface of Angell Hall, where it remains to this day) was directly followed by another, less remembered sentence in Article 3 of the document itself: “The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed.” The Indigenous history of Michigan lays bare the falseness of this oft-forgotten part of the Northwest Ordinance.

So it was that near the end of the 1800s, two different syntheses of education and democracy had begun to emerge from Michigan. These contrasting accounts were carried forth principally through two works. The first was *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan*, by Anishinaabe and Odawa author Andrew J. Blackbird. In this 1887 book, Blackbird documented, among other things, the Odawa campaign for Michigan state citizenship, his



Figure 2.1. Andrew J. Blackbird, ca. 1908, Harbor Springs Library and Andrew J. Blackbird Museum.

personal experience as a student and a voter, and the challenges that Michigan's Indigenous citizens faced in realizing the fruits of democracy in a polity where Euro-Americans vastly outnumbered them. The second was Dewey's first theorization of democracy in an 1898 essay titled "The Ethics of Democracy." In this essay, Dewey defended democratic political theory from contemporary critics by defining democracy not simply as the rule by majority, but as a common culture. Citizenship, Dewey theorized, was but a ticket in the door to the democratic community. Once in the club, the true democratic quality of life would be determined by the community's

empowerment of individuals to grow into their fullest potential as human beings. Dewey concluded the essay by issuing a challenge that in order for democracy to remain a robust form of social organization, it must account for the increasing inequities of an industrial age, which threatened it.

For Blackbird and Dewey alike, citizenship was an integral foundation of their respective visions of democratic culture. Citizenship offered both men a basis for effective communication and cooperation among diverse communities, which they regarded equally as the basis for

successful democratic life. Both believed that the challenges born from the marginalizing effects of industrialized democracy facing the next generation of citizens would require new strategies in order to realize the true potential of democratic life in the twentieth century. It is particularly noteworthy that by calling for the adaptation of an institution born from resistance to removal from Michigan in the nineteenth century into a tool with which to expand, protect, and amplify the political agency of the next generation of Indigenous Michiganders, Blackbird was making an argument similar to Dewey's.

However, Blackbird and Dewey's respective position vis-a-vis Michigan's frontier discourse made all the difference in their conception of the possibilities and limits for citizenship, schooling, and democracy. When Dewey imagined citizenship as a means for individuals to enter into a relationship with the democratic state that gave meaning to their identities as a part of a larger social and political whole, he failed to grapple with the fact that Michigan's polity rested on top of a score of Indigenous sovereignties that might complicate that relationship for Indian citizens. Blackbird spent his energy as an advocate for Michigan's Indigenous citizens by making an argument Dewey himself might have made in "The Ethics of Democracy" had he pierced the veil of the frontier discourse and witnessed the contemporaneous experience of Michigan's Indigenous citizens. In a later essay titled *The Indian Problem*, Blackbird did what Dewey did not: he connected Indigenous people's welfare in democracy through citizenship to schooling.

This chapter chronicles the cost of Dewey's immersion in the frontier discourse. Indigenous thinkers, activists, and authors like Andrew Blackbird should have interested Dewey. Not only might Dewey have been compelled to include Indigenous people such as the Odawa as part of the formula for democratic culture in Michigan and the United States more broadly, but

Blackbird's biography might have chastened Dewey's confidence that citizenship empowered all Michiganders equally. Had he learned from Blackbird's experience, Dewey might have realized how state citizenship increased Indigenous people's entanglement and vulnerability to the settler colonial mesh, rather than protecting from it. As we shall see, the earliest iterations of Dewey's theorization of democracy proved ill-suited for diagnosing Michigan's anti-democratic frontier synthesis of education and democracy. It marked the beginning of a lasting divergence between Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy and Indigenous people.

### **Michigan's Frontier Synthesis of Education and Democracy**

Long before John Dewey arrived in Michigan, a settler colonial mesh had begun to descend upon Michigan's Indigenous people. Since time immemorial, the People of the Three Fires Confederacy have called the Great Lakes home. For the Anishinaabeg, stories are told of how the people came from the Eastern seaboard, along the lakes and rivers, to make their homes on the shores of the region's many waterways.<sup>2</sup> Anishinaabewaki, in the words of Michael Witgen, was "a landscape of relationships."<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, those relationships were harmonious, maintained through kinship, diplomacy, and trade networks; at other times, they were thrown out of balance by disputes that resulted in raiding, reprisal, and violence, often exacerbated by French, English, and American colonial meddling. For hundreds of years, would-be colonial interlopers found themselves at the edge of a Native New World where the lattice-like "landscape of relationships" was so tight that Indigenous people very well could—and did—

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<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between the people and water in Anishinaabeg stories, see Melissa K. Nelson, "The Hydromythology of the Anishinaabeg," in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, ed. Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 216-24. For the story of Anishinaabeg migration, see Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) and Thomas Peacock and Marlene Wisuri, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa: We Look in All Directions* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society, 2010), 25-27.

<sup>3</sup> Witgen, *Infinity of Nations*, 39.

force Euro-Americans to conform to their political and cultural patterns of trade, diplomacy, and settlement.<sup>4</sup>

As European and later American power encroached ever further into the region, treaties began to populate the landscape with new relationships. Between 1795 and 1864, Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadomi people signed fourteen treaties with the federal government of the United States. These treaties divvied up the land which eventually composed the state of Michigan in exchange for federal recognition of the people of Anishinaabewaki. However, as the eighteenth century wore on, treaties began to take on an increasingly coercive cast. Treaties in the 1850s brought allotment and termination of tribal governments to Michigan Indian people several decades before such policies became the mainstay of federal Indian policy. Meanwhile, as the state's Euro-American population grew, agriculture in the southern part of the state and extractive industries like mining and forestry in the north began to target Indigenous lands. Reservations were targeted by land fraudsters and timber interests (often one and the same). Despite the fact that they had retained rights in treaties to off-reservation hunting and fishing territories, Indigenous people were pushed to the margins of the state's economic life, all while their land and resources fed the state's growth. The Native New World was undergoing a thorough dismantling by the time of Michigan statehood in 1837.<sup>5</sup>

Schooling made up an important thread in the settler colonial mesh in which Indigenous people in Michigan found themselves ensnared. More specifically, there were three systems of schools—parochial, state, and federal schools—where Indigenous people were educated in

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<sup>4</sup> On imperial diplomacy and conflict across the Great Lakes, see Gregory E. Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Michael A. McDonnell, *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang: 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Witgen argues that in the Great Lakes region, the Native New World arguably blinkered out in 1869 with the Red River Rebellion—an attempt at Métis democracy put down by the English-Canadian state. Witgen, *Infinity of Nations*, 359-69.

Michigan. While each network had a different history, they were all suspended in what I call the frontier synthesis of education and democracy. While these schools each enrolled Indigenous students, it was Euro-Americans who firmly controlled the administration of each system. As a result, they each represent varying degrees of anti-democratic education imposed upon Native people.

The first expression of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy arrived amongst the Indigenous nations of Michigan through the Catholic Church. In the early eighteenth century, Native people who lived in the Great Lakes were increasingly targeted by colonial agents of Britain, France, and the United States. Many Catholic missionaries brought schooling as a means to acquire a commercial and diplomatic foothold in the Native New World. U.S. power in this place was precarious. As a result, the United States came to rely on colonial agents such as missionaries to influence Indigenous people. The network of missions that they constructed eventually developed into an enduring system of day and boarding schools, including the Holy Name Day School in Assinins, opened in 1901; Holy Cross School in Cross Village, in 1906; Holy Childhood School in Harbor Springs, in 1916; and St. Joseph's School in Baraga, in 1938.<sup>6</sup>

One missionary in particular, Rev. Gabriel Richard, was instrumental in forming the state's flagship university. Richard was a French Catholic who ingratiated himself with

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<sup>6</sup> As missions gave way to more permanent schools, treaty-making began to capture the increasing importance of schooling in Indian communities. The Treaty of La Pointe signed in 1842 included a provision in Article Four for the allocation of two thousand dollars "for the support of schools for the Indians party to this treaty." As in other regions, Indigenous people in the Great Lakes and Euro-Americans had contrasting ideas about the purpose of such schools. Whereas Euro-Americans often viewed such schools as a mechanism for the erasure of language, disintegration of national communities, and development of Indians into consumers and debtors, which could grease the wheels of land acquisition, many Indigenous people regarded schools as a place to gain an advantage in such subsequent struggles. Consequently, the first schools in the land that would become Michigan were not the mediums for Indigenous self-determination. "Indian education" as a form of schooling "for" Indians, not "by" Indians, predated the Northwest Ordinance. Indigenous struggles over control of their land, citizenship, and schooling go hand in glove with the frontier synthesis of education and democracy. Treaty of La Pointe, U.S.-Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi and Lake Superior, October 4, 1842, Article IV, in Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2:543-544.



Indigenous communities in and around Detroit. With sanction by the territorial government of Michigan in 1805, Richard opened the Spring Wells Academy, a school intended for the religious instruction of both Euro-American settlers and Indigenous children alike. Though Richards attempted to secure federal funding for the school, these resources never materialized, and the school proved short-lived. When the War of 1812 further disrupted the region, Richard became a member of the territorial government. In 1817, Richard became a broker of a treaty signed between Indigenous peoples (described in the treaty as “the sachems, chiefs, and warriors, of the Wyandot, Seneca, Delaware, Shawanese, Potawatomees, Ottawas and Cheppeway”) and the Michigan territorial government known as the Treaty of Fort Meigs, or the Foot of the Rapids Treaty. In exchange for their land, the Indigenous signers “being attached to the Catholic religion, and believing they may wish some of their children hereafter educated, do grant to the rector of the Catholic church of St. Anne of Detroit, for the use of the said church, and to the corporation of the college at Detroit.” In 1817, these Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadmi people exercised their sovereignty in the face of removal to exchange a portion of their land in order to remain in Michigan and have access to a university paid for by their concession.

This university became the Catholic college called the Catholepistemiad of Michigania. While documentary records remains evasive, historians such as Michael Witgen believe there may very well have been a class of Indigenous students who attended the Catholepistemiad in its first year in operation. However, Richard’s second school did not last long before it too folded. Its assets went dormant until 1837, when Michigan joined the union under the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance. That year, Catholepistemiad was resurrected as the University of Michigan and moved to Ann Arbor in 1837. Though the modern university emerged from the land and wealth allocated to it by the Fort Meigs Treaty of 1817, it was 130 years before the first

documented Indigenous students began to enroll at the University of Michigan. This absence of Indigenous people at the university left scholars such as Dewey free to pontificate about American democracy without paying any mind to the Indigenous people who experienced its formation in a fundamentally anti-democratic way.

The second thread in the web of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy was strung in 1787 with the passage of the Northwest Land Ordinance. The Northwest Land Ordinance set forth the procedure by which much of the territory of the Great Lakes would become a part of the polity of the United States. Well known amongst these provisions was the population threshold upon which Michigan Territory could draft a constitution and submit it for approval to Congress in order to be incorporated into the U.S. polity as a state on equal footing with the original states. Among the many provisions and structures of government set forth by the Northwest Ordinance, the ordinance also outlined the mechanisms to organize, fund, and operate a system of common schools. Along with the Land Ordinance of 1785, the Northwest Ordinance offered a blueprint for the establishment of a system of public schools.

Passed by the Continental Congress in 1785, the Land Ordinance imposed a grid system over the landscape of the Great Lakes, transforming what had been Indigenous land into a new cartographic reality of townships divided into thirty-six sections each. The Northwest Ordinance then reserved one of the sections in each township for the purpose of supporting local schools. This section would either become the site of a school itself or be rented or sold off to raise money for schools in the respective township.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the Northwest Ordinance established that the territory-cum-state, not the federal government itself, would ultimately be responsible for organizing public schools. When the territory became a state, the federal

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<sup>7</sup> Carl F. Kaestle, "Public Education in the Old Northwest: 'Necessary to Good Government and the Happiness of Mankind,'" *Indiana Magazine of History* 84, no. 1 (March 1988): 60-74.

government would then devolve the lands it had retained (mostly from treaties signed with Indigenous people) to the state, provided it was earmarked for sale to settlers in order to provide for a statewide education fund.

For Euro-American settlers of this new grid in Michigan, townships, municipalities, and counties proved to be important jurisdictions for the realization of the principle of local control over schools.<sup>8</sup> But the principle of local control of schools embedded in the Northwest Ordinance was not a vehicle for self-determination in education for Indigenous citizens of Michigan; instead, it was a system designed for the children of Euro-Americans, which drew jurisdictions for a new form of local government, school districts, literally on top of Indigenous communities. As tribal governments had been abolished in treaties signed in 1855, Michigan's Native people could no longer rely on their own polities to organize their own schools. Consequently, Native communities had a greatly diminished capacity to organize their own schools, create their own curriculum, or hire their own teachers. That left them at the mercy of the state's common school system. In theory, Native voters could participate in the elections that governed these local school systems, but as we shall see later in this chapter, electing Indigenous people to local office

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<sup>8</sup> The processes of creating a polity for Michigan as established by the Northwest Land Ordinance of 1787 were still ongoing when Dewey came to Ann Arbor. For example, by 1885 the state had not yet even completed drawing its own county boundaries, a process that had begun with the creation of Knox County in 1790. Counties (and townships they corralled) were important jurisdictions in the creation of a democratic polity, not just in Michigan, but across the United States. Counties often organized the most important local functions, including organizing elections and establishing courts, police, and, most importantly, the ownership of land. These mechanisms often served as vehicles for Indigenous dispossession. In the ten years Dewey lived in Michigan, five counties (all in the Upper Peninsula)—Alger, Iron, Gogebic, Luce, and Dickinson Counties—were incorporated. These new counties were derived from older counties such as Ontonagon and Iron Counties, which had been originally organized to facilitate the mining industry in the northwestern part of the state. This territory had been dispossessed from Anishinaabe people from Fond du Lac, Sandy Lake, and Mississippi bands by the La Pointe treaty of 1842, the last of the eleven treaties which had carved up Indigenous Michigan. (Miners wasted little time; Ontonagon County was incorporated the following year in 1843.) The last of Michigan's counties to be organized, Dickinson, was formed in 1891. The final boundaries of all counties were clarified in 1897. In this fashion, while Dewey began to write about the nature of democracy from Ann Arbor, the polity of Michigan was literally still being constructed under the feet of Indigenous communities. Richard W. Welch, *County Evolution in Michigan, 1790-1897* (Lansing: Michigan Department of Education, 1972), 4-15.

(even school boards) was a tall order. State-level offices were even more difficult to influence through electoral politics; Indigenous voters were too minor a bloc to effectively shape public schooling at this scale through at-large voting. As a result, public schools proved to be significant element in the frontier synthesis of education and democracy that rendered Indians as the objects of schooling and not its agents.<sup>9</sup>

Then there was the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School. Not all of the mission schools in Michigan developed into Catholic boarding schools or the state flagship research university. One mission school was located among the Saginaw Chippewa in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Eventually, this land was organized into the Saginaw Chippewa's Isabella Reservation. A product of an 1855 and 1868 treaty, the Isabella Reservation contained six townships where the federal government operated one-room day schools for Indians. From the 1860s to the 1890s, the Saginaw Chippewa people had to contend with these schools, negotiating the opportunities afforded by such an education to better fend off what Michael Witgen calls "the economy of plunder," despite the costs that such training posed to their language and lifeways. This calculus was roiled in 1892, when the Saginaw Chippewa became a candidate for the latest expansion of the federal government's system of industrial schools. While Dewey was living in Ann Arbor, the federal government announced to much fanfare the formation of a new school for all Michigan Indians located adjacent to Michigan's largest reservation. As we shall see later in this chapter, the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School became the gold standard in anti-democratic Indian schooling.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Nancy Beadie, "War, Education and State Formation: Problems of Territorial and Political Integration in the United States, 1848-1921," *Paedagogica Historica* 52, no. 1-2 (February 2016): 58-75.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Littlefield, "BIA Schools: Theories of Resistance and Social Reproduction," *Humanity and Society* 13, no. 4 (1989): 428-41; Alice Littlefield, "Indian Education and the World of Work in Michigan, 1893-1933," in *Native American Labor: Retrieving History, Rethinking Theory*, ed. Alice Littlefield and Martha Knack (Norman:



Figure 2.2. Map of the fourteen treaties that defined the boundaries of what would become Michigan Territory, 1795-1864.



Figure 2.3. Map of county lines drawn based on the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 in Michigan State, 1885.

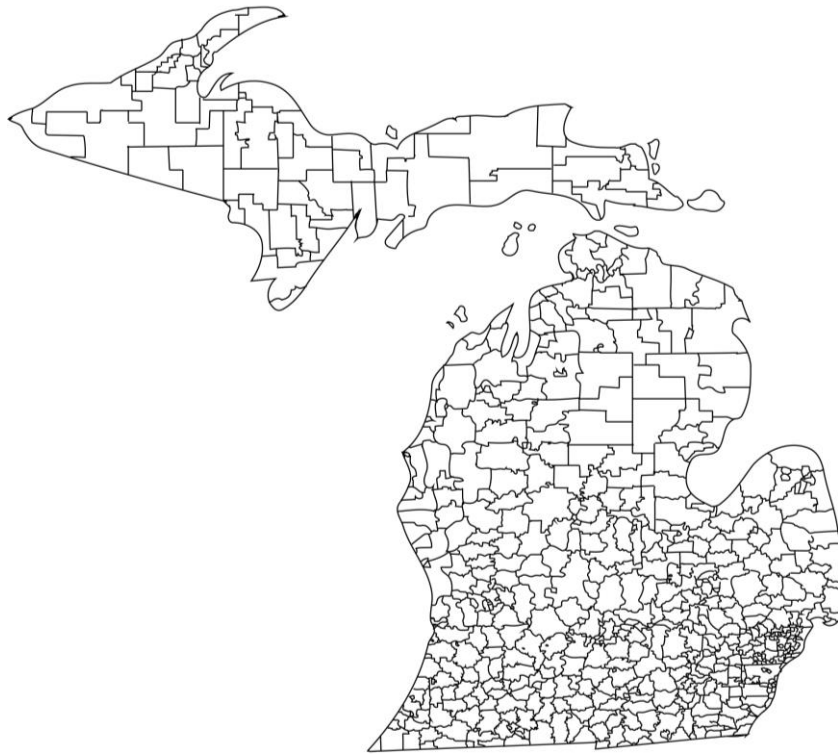
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University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 100-21; Veronica Pasfield, “The Head, the Heart, and the Hands: Hampton, Carlisle, and Hilo in/as Circuits of Transpacific Empire, 1819-1887” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013).



D.C.B.  
2021

Figure 2.4. Map of Michigan counties and American Indian reservations, 2021.



D.C.B.  
2021

Figure 2.5. Map of public school districts in Michigan, 2021.

Between parochial schools, federal day schools, reservation boarding schools, and the crown jewel of the federal Indian School Service in Michigan, the MPIIS, an entire infrastructure “for” Indian education had come to dominate the educational prospects of Michigan’s Indigenous people. When Michigan Indian people stepped outside this system of “Indian education” and enrolled their children in public schools, they were sending their children to schools whose classrooms were often hostile to Indian children, and in which Indigenous political distinction was otherwise meaningless. Taken together, Indigenous people in Michigan who wanted to organize their children’s learning through schooling faced a system of anti-democratic choices. Like a fishing weir, the frontier synthesis of education and democracy sought to corral Indigenous people into schools not of their own making. This was, of course, precisely the intention of Euro-Americans who shaped the system of Indian education in Michigan. Michigan was therefore ripe for a critique by a champion for democratic education.

### ***The Ethics of Democracy, 1888***

When Dewey arrived at the University of Michigan, he began to take an interest in democracy, which would eventually lead him to his most important philosophical contribution, his synthesis of education and democracy. But before Dewey could have such a synthesis of education and democracy, he needed a theory of the latter in which to situate the former. Teodora Pezzano has argued that the key to Dewey’s philosophy of democracy lies in his very first writing on the subject, his 1888 essay “The Ethics of Democracy.” While many readers point to Dewey’s 1916 *Education and Democracy* as the most comprehensive account of his synthesis of education and democracy, Pezzano notes that “the birth of John Dewey’s democratic and educational theory does not occur in that important work, because he was questioning himself about the deep meanings of democratic value with respect to human action several years

before.”<sup>11</sup> Regarding *Democracy and Education* as a culmination rather than a beginning, Pezzano instead points to Dewey’s theorizations about democracy begun in Ann Arbor as the true origin of his synthesis of education and democracy.

I extend Pezzano’s reorientation away from *Democracy and Education* towards “Ethics of Democracy” by arguing that the essay is a foundational work for two reasons. First, “Ethics of Democracy” was the first time Dewey had engaged with democratic culture as a product of American history. It contained his first articulation of what would become a quintessential Deweyan idea: that democracy in America is not just a mechanism for governance, but part of a culture that encompasses the habits of mind and behavior in public life. As such, it would serve as the foundation for much of his thinking on the nature of democratic culture in an industrialized United States for decades to come.<sup>12</sup> Second, this essay illustrates the cost of Dewey’s immersion in the frontier discourse in Michigan. In particular, as he began to consider how democracy had historically developed and functioned in republics such as the United States, Dewey looked right past Indigenous people in Michigan as members of the polity to which he himself immediately belonged. For this reason, I suggest that “Ethics of Democracy” marks the beginning of the career-long divergence of Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy from Indigenous people’s ongoing experience with anti-democratic education.

“Ethics of Democracy” was most immediately a defense of democracy from the critique of Henry Maine, whose 1885 book *Popular Government* cast aspersions on its viability as the basis for sound government. Maine argued that democracy was an unworkable political system in part because it fragmented political intelligence from a reasoned centralized government to the

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<sup>11</sup> Teodora Pezzano, “The Search for the Self: The Essence of Dewey’s Ethics,” *Educational, Cultural and Psychological Studies Journal* 7 (2013), 224.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Hahn, “Introduction,” in John Dewey, *Early Works*, 1:xxxiii.



irrational masses of individual citizens. Maine argued that a system that devolved political sovereignty in this fashion was vulnerable to the shocks of political contingency, too variable to serve as a stable foundation for reliable government over time, and ultimately was a system that leaves a polity vulnerable to authoritarianism. Perhaps most aggressively, Maine concluded that democracy was inherently antagonistic to scientific governance. As Maine wrote, “The establishment of the masses in power is of the blackest of omens for all legislation founded on scientific opinion.”<sup>13</sup>

These must have been fighting words for Dewey. Democracy, Dewey felt, was not a mechanism for majority rule, rule by expert problem-solvers, or maximum individual freedom; rather, it was communication, communal problem-solving, and cooperation in service of the realization of individual potential. As Dewey would come to argue with Walter Lippman in the *Public and its Problems* nearly forty years later, democracy was no obstacle to social intelligence; in fact, Dewey felt that the only way to realize the scientific method in social matters was through democracy itself. While Lippmann and Dewey’s debate would become one of the twentieth century’s touchstones on the theorization of democracy in modern America, it was Maine’s 1888 attack on democracy as the death of socially intelligent governance that clearly piqued Dewey many years before Lippmann.

Beyond offering a counterpoint to Maine, Dewey also used his essay to account for his emerging articulation between an individual and society. Dewey began his essay by conceding that Maine had a point: history had provided some evidence of democracy’s failure, often devolving into dictatorship. But Dewey said this was a condemnation of a particular historical iteration of democracy, and hardly a knock against democracy more broadly. “The charge lies

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<sup>13</sup> John Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy” (1888), *Early Works*, 1: 229.

against the form of government which breeds such a mass,” wrote Dewey, “not against democracy.”<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Dewey saved his sharpest barbs for Maine’s depiction of democracy as simply “a numerical aggregate, a conglomeration of units.”<sup>15</sup> For Dewey, democracy wasn’t simply devolution of political sovereignty among “the multitude”; democracy “is no more adequately defined by any merely quantitative conception than a tree is defined by counting the number of cells which constitute it,” Dewey argued.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Dewey advanced for the first time what would become his lifetime refrain that democracy was best understood not as a structure of government, but as a lived culture:

To say that democracy is only a form of government is like saying that the home is a more or less geometrical arrangement of bricks and mortar; that the church is a building with pews, pulpit and spire. It is true; they certainly are so much. But it is false; they are so infinitely more. Democracy, like any other polity, has been finely termed the memory of an historic past, the consciousness of a living present, the ideal of the coming future.<sup>17</sup>

Dewey set forth a new premise, one of “social organicism.” Democracy was a natural form of human association, what he would later call “associated living.”<sup>18</sup> In 1888, Dewey had

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<sup>14</sup> Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 229.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>18</sup> Dewey’s budding interest in democracy began as an outgrowth of his naturalism. A term as imprecise in philosophy as the label “progressive” is in the field of history, naturalism was a movement in the nineteenth century to align the method of philosophy with the method of science. In the late nineteenth century, many American philosophers led the charge in developing naturalism as an account of the world, a product of specific environments, conditions, and contingency. Naturalist thinkers insist that the forces of history manifest not just on things of being unto themselves, but rather upon their interaction with a given context. It was this function of historicism within naturalism that developed in the late nineteenth century which marked that period as one which scholars have dubbed the “revolt against formalism” and “a second great enlightenment,” where philosophers began to reject realist and essentialist ontological arguments whose objectivity rested on their immutability and permanence in favor of contextualized, environmental growth that emerged from flux and adaptation in relation to changing conditions. Soon, the “new science,” “new psychology,” and “new education” were increasingly defined by naturalism. Cited in Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education*, 16. For a sense of the interdisciplinary reach of this “revolt against formalism,” see Henry Cowles, “A Living Science,” in *The Scientific Method: An Evolution of Thinking from Darwin to Dewey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Peter Novick, “Consensus and Legitimation” in *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61-85; Thomas McCarthy, “Social Darwinism and White Supremacy,” in *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

not yet coined this term, so he leaned on the metaphor of political organism, or holism, from his earlier studies of Georg Friedrich Hegel and Thomas Henry Huxley. Dewey concluded that democracy is the mode of living for “man [as] essentially a social being.”<sup>19</sup> By paying close attention to the way human beings evolved and their corresponding forms of social association, Dewey felt as if his theory of democracy was born out in the history of human social development. “Society, as a real whole, is the normal order, and the mass as an aggregate of isolated units is the fiction,” wrote Dewey.<sup>20</sup>

Where, exactly, did Dewey get this impression about the nature of American democracy? When Dewey wrote “Ethics of Democracy” in 1888, he found himself at the bleeding edge of a new historical interpretation that sought to explain democracy in the United States not as the product of Anglo-Saxon racial stock, but as a result of the settlement of the North American continent. This revisionist history sought to displace the so-called “germ theory” articulated by the likes of Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins and John W. Burgess of Columbia. As recently as 1882, Adams had written in essays such as “The German Origin of New England Towns” of the Germanic origins of New England town meetings.

In fact, Dewey held that U.S. history was simply the latest iteration in the historical development of democracy as a form of “social organicism”: “The ordinary American expression of the sovereignty of every elector is not a mere exaggerated burst of individualistic feeling, fostered through crude Fourth of July patriotism, but is the logical outcome of the organic theory of society,” he argued.<sup>21</sup> Democracy as a feature of American life was not evidenced simply by

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2009), 69-95; Peter T. Manicas, “Psychology: Theoretical and Applied,” in *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 294-318.

<sup>19</sup> John Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy” (1888), *Early Works*, 1:233.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

the trappings of patriotism, but instead was realized in a form of social life expressed through individual consciousness. In other words, a ballot cast in Michigan was not a count of a single voter, but instead was an expression of a larger social organism of the United States as it was expressed through individuals.<sup>22</sup> “This is the theory, often crudely expressed, but none the less true in substance, that every citizen is a sovereign, the American theory,” he concluded.<sup>23</sup>

Dewey’s made-in-Michigan critique in “Ethics of Democracy” was therefore trying to articulate a different origin story for American democracy, not from Anglo-Saxon germs but from European encounters with the environment of the North American continent. Like Turner, Dewey’s account rejected the germ theory of democracy in favor of a historicist account, substituting this essentialism with a “biological-institutional explanation for American exceptionalism.”<sup>24</sup> In just several years after 1888, both Dewey and Turner would soon invoke the U.S. settlement of the frontier as a means to reject the essentialist germ theory of democracy that was prevalent at the time. As Thomas Fallace suggests, “philosopher John Dewey, psychologist William James, historian Frederick Jackson Turner, sociologist Albion Small and anthropologist Franz Boas attacked ... static essences and closed systems. In place of essences, they offered history and growth.”<sup>25</sup> For his part, Dewey would later write that embracing the history of the frontier was trying to extract a more contingent historicism from his earlier debts to Hegel.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as Adam Dahl has suggested, we must grapple with the fact that Dewey’s political

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<sup>22</sup> Teodora Pezzano, “Dewey, Education and Democracy: A Seminar and Discussion,” Part I, American Institute of Philosophical and Cultural Thought, accessed May 29, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxZSojfhqJQ>.

<sup>23</sup> John Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy” (1888), *Early Works*, 1:238.

<sup>24</sup> Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education*, 30. On the replacement of the “germ theory” of democracy in America by frontier-inflected historicist explanations, see Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 86-108.

<sup>25</sup> Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> In a letter to W. T. Harris, Dewey wrote that “it may interest you to know—what I shouldn’t like to give away to the public—that I started first by trying to turn Hegel’s logic over into psychology and then that into pedagogy.” Cited in Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race*, 13-14.

philosophy was entangled with, and in some ways reliant upon, a Hegelian-influenced understanding of history that excludes Indigenous sovereignties.

One example at the heart of the matter is Dewey's treatment of citizenship. At the center of "Ethics of Democracy" was his accounting for the relationship between individuals and the social whole. A key component of this relationship was citizenship, rendered not simply as the right of the franchise, but as a means to make oneself legible as a political subject to one's fellow citizens. Extending citizenship to new previously excluded classes of people was the means to include them in the democratic fold. "Every forward democratic movement is followed by the broadening of the circle of the state, and by more effective oversight that every citizen may be insured the rights belonging to him."<sup>27</sup>

However, Dewey overlooked the fact that the democratic polity from which he was drawing most immediate inspiration for had included Indian citizens for nearly forty years. This was because something unique in the history of the United States happened in Michigan: in 1850, Michigan became the first and only state to extend citizenship to Indigenous people in its constitution. By the time Dewey had arrived in Michigan, the state counted the third largest Indigenous population of any state and had permitted men over twenty-one years of age among them to vote for over thirty years.<sup>28</sup>

It is my contention that Dewey's failure to recognize the Indigenous citizens of Michigan and their relevance to the "Ethics of Democracy" was due to their elision, distortion, and obfuscation by the frontier discourse. Consequently, Dewey missed a golden opportunity to

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<sup>27</sup> Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy," 242-43.

<sup>28</sup> By 1888, Indian citizenship would have been a prominent national news item among Euro-Americans. In 1884, the Supreme Court ruled in *Elk v. Wilkins* that Indian people born on reservations could be denied the right to vote under the Fourteenth Amendment, and in 1887, the General Allotment Act had created a new legal architecture for Indian citizenship. "Rank of Michigan Among the States," Census of the State of Michigan, 1884 (Lansing: Thorp & Godfrey, 1886).

consider Indigenous people in his philosophy in a way that would be commensurate with his emerging pragmatic method: as a product of his own lived experience in Michigan. Dewey never interrogated how Indian people's inherent political status impacted their fate as citizens in Michigan—and U.S.—democracy.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence of his immersion in Michigan's frontier discourse, Dewey's philosophical considerations quickly began to diverge from actual Indigenous people.

As a consequence, Dewey fumbled how Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadomi people had integrated their status as Michigan citizens into their political repertoire as early as the 1850s, a historical development that might have given Dewey some pause. Some years later, when Dewey tried to demonstrate how liberalism was a relatively new invention in Western political theory, he posited that Indians-as-savages did not quite fit the model of associated living he had in mind in his 1888 "Ethics of Democracy": "In savage societies, the individual is also lost in the group—in the clan or tribe. Not till a comparatively recent point of historic development do we find individuals possessing rights on their own account in contradistinction from their status as members of a family, guild, class, caste, etc."<sup>30</sup> In actuality, it was certainly possible for Indigenous people to imagine themselves as both Michigan citizens and Indian people—they had been doing so for decades before Dewey even arrived in Michigan. We know this because such things were argued by an Anishinaabe and Odawa man named Andrew J. Blackbird.

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<sup>29</sup> In a painful irony, both Dewey and the Society of American Indians (SAI) were grappling with the same problem at the same time: What was the role of citizenship training in schooling? With Dewey's Instrumental Indians so playing such an instrumental part in the formation of his political philosophy by the publication of his seminal *Democracy and Education* in 1916, his master work was of little use to the community of Indian intellectuals and progressives in the newly formed SAI. As the SAI sought to evaluate the utility of citizenship to advance their interests amid a federal effort to assimilate them through schooling, Dewey's take on such question was of little instrumental value to them.

<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, "Contributions to a Cyclopaedia of Education Volumes 3, 4, and 5" (1912-1913), *Middle Works*, 7:238.

## **Andrew Blackbird and Indian Citizenship in Michigan, 1850-1887**

In 1887, Dewey found himself happily preoccupied with the birth of his first child, whom he and Alice christened Frederick after the family's resident pioneer, Frederick Riggs. However, that same year, a book was published that challenged Riggs' and other settlers' role in the development of Michigan. Titled *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan: A Grammar of Their Language, and the Personal and Family History of the Author*, author Andrew J. Blackbird, an Odawa and Anishinaabe man, narrated a story about the role of Indigenous people in the formation of the state. While the book contains many important insights, perhaps its most salient details reveal how Indian people like Blackbird negotiated the frontier synthesis of education and democracy in Michigan using the state citizenship granted to them in the 1850 Michigan constitution to mount an effective (albeit qualified) resistance against the political, cultural, and economic forces that sought to marginalize them. In short, Blackbird's history provided readers with an important counternarrative to Michigan's frontier discourse.

Blackbird was an Odawa man born sometime around 1820 who grew up in L'Arbre Croche, or *Waganagisi*, to a father named Mackadepenessy. Mackadepenessy himself was an advocate for assimilation and citizenship as a means to avoid removal from Michigan; as such, Blackbird inherited this particular strategy to resist American settler colonialism. He attended a private boarding school in Ohio and returned to Michigan, where he later attended and came to teach at the State Normal School in Ypsilanti, becoming something of a cultural broker on behalf of the Odawa. Blackbird's *History* provides an account of how Indian people pursued state citizenship as a promising way to defend their homelands and ensure a future in Michigan. Blackbird's account of this campaign starts in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Michigan was growing rapidly with an influx of Euro-American settlers. By this time, many

Michiganders felt that the 1836 constitution was in need of revision in order to meet the demands of the growing polity. In 1850, a second constitutional convention was called to update the 1836 constitution. The delegates once again took up the question of who would be permitted to become a citizen and a voter in the state. However, by 1850, Indian people across the state, including Blackbird himself, had been injecting themselves forcefully into this debate over citizenship for many years.<sup>31</sup>

The campaign for state citizenship was led by the Grand Traverse Ottawa as early as the 1840s. A contingent of the Odawa regarded citizenship as a solution not only to the threat of removal, but of preemption, another federal policy of allowing Euro-American squatters to convert their land into their own legal homesteads. This prompted the Odawa to petition the U.S. Congress and President in 1843 to grant them federal citizenship. As Matt Fletcher documents, “Congress responded favorably to this petition, but recommended that the Michigan Indians seek citizenship from the state government.” After their rejection by the federal government, the Odawa began to lobby the Michigan government for state citizenship. An appeal to the Michigan legislature written by a group of thirty-six Odawa petitioners was published in the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* in 1844.

The petition was a way for these Odawa people to “humbly sheweth [*sic*] that your petitioners are most anxious to enjoy the rights and privileges of American citizenship.” The

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<sup>31</sup> Theodore Karamanski argues that Blackbird deserves much of the credit for establishing and clarifying citizenship for Indian people. Karamanski has argued that Blackbird lobbied for sufficiently “civilized” Indians to qualify as citizens of the state of Michigan as the central plank in an Indigenous platform to avoid the federal policy of Indian removal and achieve a modicum of self-determination. Blackbird, however, was only the tip of the spear of a larger constituency of Michigan Indian people who were only too happy to eschew a lightly held sense of tribal nationhood as defined largely by non-Native conceptions of Indigenous governance in exchange for a means to stay in their homelands. Understood as such, Michigan citizenship offered a bulwark against the wave of federal removal policy for many Michigan Indian people. See Theodore J. Karamanski, “State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence: A Case Study of the Anishinaabeg of Michigan,” *Michigan Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 119-38; Theodore J. Karamanski, *Blackbird’s Song: Andrew J. Blackbird and the Odawa People* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012).



petition identified the many reasons why the Odawa felt they deserved to be citizens: “justice; for you to have the homes which were once theirs”; “mercy, for their old men, are now feeble, and their women and children tremble to go forth into a strange land among the enemies of their tribe”; and “ties of their common humanity—by the pleadings of their helplessness, by their sorrowful past [and] their foreboding future.” For the Odawa, state citizenship appeared to offer a strong foundation for their political resistance to federal removal and preemption and therefore offered a robust vehicle to protect their interests. The language of their petition indicates that they were more than capable of inverting the tropes of the frontier discourse to elicit Euro-American sympathy for the political welfare of supposedly vanishing Indians.<sup>32</sup>

This demand for state citizenship originating among Indigenous people themselves runs somewhat counter to many scholarly accounts of Indian citizenship in the nineteenth century. Extending citizenship status to Indigenous people was for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century a vehicle of Euro-American policy, which aimed for Indian assimilation.<sup>33</sup> Prior to statehood, Indigenous people had been regarded as beyond the polity by dint of the U.S. Constitution. Even after Michigan achieved statehood in 1837, Indigenous people within the boundaries of Michigan still signed treaties with the U.S. government. However, these treaties increasingly contained what scholars have labeled allotment and termination articles. Allotment was the means by which the federal government would divide communal lands and assets and divide them amongst individual Native people, often in fee simple title; these policies worked in

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<sup>32</sup> Matt Fletcher, *The Eagle Returns: The Legal History of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 38-40; “Ottawa Indians,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, February 20, 1844, 3, Indians of North America Collection, Public Library of Detroit, Detroit, Michigan.

<sup>33</sup> The politics of Michigan Indian people regarding the benefits and costs of citizenship were similar to those undertaken by the SAI in the latter half of the 1910s. On that controversy, see Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race and Reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “The Mutuality of Citizenship and Sovereignty: The Society of American Indians and the Battle to Inherit America,” *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 333-51; Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1971).

concert to disintegrate people's cultural and political autonomy. Termination was the legal erasure of Native polities then regarded as "tribal" governments. Nearly fifty years before these policies became a standard feature of federal Indian policy in the General Allotment Act of 1887, they were deployed in the state of Michigan. It is no exaggeration to say that the state of Michigan was as much a laboratory for democracy as it was a proving ground for federal Indian policies.

During the early decades of Michigan statehood, Indigenous people therefore faced a unique conundrum. Allotment and termination provisions in treaties signed with the federal government had precipitated a legal vacuum for their communities and for individuals. Assigned individual allotments of land and no longer members of their tribal nations, Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadomi people therefore faced a precarious political situation. Worse still, the federal government's wholesale removal policy (begun in the 1820s but not abandoned until the 1850s) cast a dark shadow on Indigenous people's future prospects to remain in Michigan. Subsequently, some Native people themselves began to push for citizenship as a means to protect their interests in the state that had been erected atop their homeland.

Why would the Euro-American elected officials in Michigan state have any interest in extending citizenship to Indians? Simply within the scope of electoral politics, there was much incentive for Euro-American Michiganders to advocate for Indigenous citizenship. Euro-American delegates from counties such as Chippewa, Emmet, and Baraga realized that counting Indians as citizens within their jurisdictions increased the proportion of their representation in the state legislature. As Karamanski argues, "Delegates [to the convention in 1850] recognized that only the federal government could set the terms under which individuals could acquire American citizenship ... However, by opening the door to citizenship status in Michigan, the convention

delegates held out the promise that Native Peoples in that state ... might become individuals exercising crucial political rights—the right to vote and to own property within the state.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, state citizenship would crack open Indigenous assets held in trust by the federal government to Euro-American Michiganders eager to acquire them. Freed from federal trust status, that property could then be purchased, taxed, or cheated out of Indigenous possession.

For many Euro-American Michiganders, the franchise was also intended to be a wedge driven through the heart of Indigenous communities. As Michael Witgen notes, “Accommodating American notions of citizenship and civilization, however, forced the mixed-blood people of Michigan territory to reimagine their relationship with the Anishinaabe relatives.”<sup>35</sup> This was because the delegates to the 1850 constitutional convention decided to adopt language that made only “civilized” Indian men eligible for citizenship. More than anything, this qualification was not a legal standard, but a cultural one, associated vaguely with the English language, Euro-American clothing, and renouncing tribal membership. By becoming a Michigan citizen and voter, Euro-Americans were counting on Indigenous people being forced to choose between being Indian or being a part of Michigan’s democracy.

From our view in the present, it is easy to dismiss state citizenship as a nonviable path to political power for Indian people. The delegates to the 1850 constitutional convention approached the extension of state citizenship to Indigenous people not as a form of racial justice or an attempt to translate the collective political distinction of Indigenous sovereignty into a special legal class within the new state polity. Instead, they likely saw the franchise as a tool to facilitate Indian assimilation on Euro-Americans’ own terms. On the other hand, it is crucial to note by 1850 just how promising the ballot appeared to Blackbird and other Indigenous people in

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<sup>34</sup> Karamanski, “State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence,” 127.

<sup>35</sup> Witgen, *Infinity of Nations*, 345.

Michigan. With the ballot, some Indian men could lay claim to the privileges of Michigan state citizenship, vote in statewide elections, and even elect Indian people to municipal, township, and county offices. Moreover, many believed they might use citizenship status to better secure ownership to their land, albeit only as individuals and not as tribal nations.

After the ratification of the 1850 constitution, Blackbird practically flew to Lansing to lobby for the cause of Indian citizenship. While the new constitution established citizenship for Indians, it had reserved this status for those men over the age of twenty-one deemed sufficiently “civilized.” Specifically, this criterion extended citizenship rights only to those Native men in Michigan who had met the requirement that they “become ‘civilized’ or abandoned tribal relations.”<sup>36</sup> What, exactly, made a Michigan Indian “civilized” was unclear. Blackbird resolved to find out.

In audiences with Michigan Supreme Court Justice Warner Wing and Governor John Barry, Blackbird lobbied to clarify that by individually accepting state citizenship, Odawa men would not abrogate their individual claim to collective treaty rights.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, while the wording of the provision was potentially ambiguous and could have been interpreted to grant voting rights only to people of mixed-race parentage, Blackbird’s lobbying ensured that both Wing and Barry adopted his own interpretation that the provision would enfranchise all Indian people deemed sufficiently “civilized.” Blackbird’s trip to Lansing “resulted in the 1851 joint resolution by the Michigan legislature that essentially accepted the Indian interpretation of the

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<sup>36</sup> When the 1850 constitution was ratified, most Indian people in Michigan failed to meet the new constitution’s requirement that they “become ‘civilized’ or abandoned tribal relations.” But the Detroit Treaties of 1855 saw to the legal dissolution of all tribes in the state through their termination provisions, thus making a substantial number of the indigenous population of Michigan eligible to vote. See Fletcher, “States and Their American Indian Citizens,” 331.

<sup>37</sup> Karamanski, “State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence,” 119-38.

1850 constitution.”<sup>38</sup> Theodore Karamanski credits Blackbird for the “Indian initiative in the political sector [which] transformed what might have simply been a provision for mixed-blood voting rights into a broadly recognized opportunity for Indians to secure ‘equal rights and privileges with white inhabitants.’” Due in no small part to Blackbird’s politicking, Michigan became the only place in the United States where citizenship for all Indigenous men was established not by statute, but in the state’s constitution. Blackbird and the Odawa had made what Bodewadomi historian John Low has called “an imprint” on the legal pillars of the settler colonial polity.

It did not take long for Blackbird and the Odawa to begin to use their new citizenship status to enter the fray of Michigan’s electoral politics. In 1856, the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* published “An Appeal to the Citizens of the United States by the Ottawa Indians of Michigan.” Using the language of uplift and assimilation, the forty-two Ottawa addressed the newspaper’s Euro-American readership by invoking their new status as citizens. “We deem it not improper to call you fellow citizens,” their appeal begins. The Odawa authors reminded their readers that by dint of the 1850 Constitution, the Odawa had “thus come under the laws of the State of Michigan and those of the United States, in short, to have equal rights and privileges with American citizens.”

The appeal raised an issue over which they felt much concern: the Odawa believed that the federal government had reneged on its promises in previous treaties to adequately fund the education of their children. The appeal noted that allocating funds for the education of the Odawa had many practical benefits for Euro-American Michiganders and was a small price to pay compared to the enormous cost of removing the Odawa from Michigan altogether. “You

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<sup>38</sup> Karamanski, *Blackbird’s Song*, 122-44.

should consider the amount it would have cost the Government if she had concluded to move the Indians to the west of the Mississippi,” they noted. Their appeal further cataloged the various factors behind the Odawa’s successful evasion of federal removal policy: “By the hands of Providence, and the instrumentality of Michigan citizens we have been spared.”<sup>39</sup> Though the appeal concluded by couching Odawa goals within the Euro-American framework of assimilation, the petitioners specifically used their citizenship status to strengthen their call for education on an equal measure with their Euro-American fellows. “We think it is the only true and the best policy in order to be acquainted with the arts and sciences, language, manners, and custom of the white man.” The petition concluded by noting that its contents were “witnessed by A. J. Blackbird.”<sup>40</sup>

Before long, Indigenous men began to vote in Michigan. While voting patterns are difficult to establish due to Anglicized names and lack of voting registration that identified voters by race, there is enough circumstantial evidence of the patterns of Indian voting to conclude that Indigenous men were active, enthusiastic, and often influential Michigan voters.<sup>41</sup> As Bruce Rubenstein notes, “As the number of Indian voters increased, their ballots became critical not only in deciding local and gubernatorial contests, but also in determining the makeup of the State

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<sup>39</sup> “Address,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, February 18, 1856, 2, Indians of North America Collection, Public Library of Detroit, Detroit, Michigan.

<sup>40</sup> “An Appeal to the Citizens of the United States by the Ottawa Indians of Michigan,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, February 18, 1856, 2, Indians of North America Collection, Public Library of Detroit, Detroit, Michigan.

<sup>41</sup> This scholarship on Indian citizenship focuses rightly on 1887 and 1924 as the pivotal moments for formal Indian inclusion in the American polity, as the General Allotment Act and the Indian Citizenship Act are the two most important pieces of federal legislation to establish criteria for Indian citizenship. However, as scholars have increasingly noted, state citizenship was an important route into formal democratic politics for Indian people, most often pursued as a strategy to avoid federal removal. While much scholarly attention has been focused on the Cherokee and Choctaw in the 1830s, less studied is the Michigan case and figures like Blackbird as part of a broader Great Lakes historiography. For the best recent work on this region, see Theodore J. Karamanski, “State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence”; Stephen Kantrowitz, “‘Not Quite Constitutionalized’: The Meanings of ‘Civilization’ and the Limits of Native American Citizenship,” in *The World the Civil War Made*, ed. Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 75-105; Matt Fletcher, “States and Their American Indian Citizens,” *American Indian Law Review*, 41, no. 2 (2017): 331.

Legislature, which chose United States senators.”<sup>42</sup> In the Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a Michigan Indian agent reported that most of the “intelligent Indians prized the privilege and took no little interest in election matters.”<sup>43</sup> In places where Indigenous voters were numerous, at-large voting schemes worked to elect Indigenous men into local offices. Isabella County elected Indian candidates to fulfill the office of sheriff and coroners, and “Emmet and Oceana Counties regularly elected Indian township supervisors and town treasurers until the mid-1880s.”<sup>44</sup> Blackbird himself was elected register of deeds and probate judge, alongside a wave of Odawa men who became deputy sheriffs and supervisors of the townships near Harbor Springs, Bear Creek, and Cross Village. As Karamanski writes, “Overnight the Ottawa went from being simple wards of the federal government to masters, for a brief time, of their own Michigan local governments.”<sup>45</sup> Suddenly, it appeared that the polity established by the Northwest Ordinance could be mastered by Indigenous citizens.

Steeped in the frontier discourse, it was difficult for many Euro-American Michiganders to imagine Indian people could become elected officials. In 1859, a newspaper editor from Senneca City revealed the contours of the frontier discourse by musing how strange it was to imagine the Saginaw Chippewa people not only as prudent landholders and savvy businesspeople, but voters equal to their Euro-American neighbors: “What will the big knives think when they see some of them coming to Saginaw City or East Saginaw in their carriages?”

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<sup>42</sup> Bruce Rubenstein, “Justice Denied: An Analysis of American Indian-White Relations in Michigan, 1855-1889” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1974), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Report of the Secretary of the Interior, “Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” House Exec. Doc. 1, part 1, Vol. 2., 39th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865), 636, cited in Rubenstein, “Justice Denied,” 159.

<sup>44</sup> Rubenstein, “Justice Denied,” 159-60.

<sup>45</sup> Karamanski, *Blackbird’s Song*, 155-56.

What will they say when [they] send some of their sons to help the big knives make laws in Lansing, for the State?”<sup>46</sup>

Despite Euro-American astonishment, soon there was no denying that “the Indian vote” was a valuable electoral prize, in not only local elections, but state and even national ones as well. As a consequence, Indigenous voters were subjected to constant partisan contestation. Blackbird himself recorded that when he voted Republican ticket in 1856, the Indian agent at Grand Traverse “sent the message to Indians to vote for no other ticket but the democratic ticket.” When Blackbird kept his resolve and cast his ballot for the Republican party, he was harassed by the agent. “At that time I felt almost sorry for my people, the Indians, for ever being citizens of the State, as I thought they were much happier without these elections,” he remembered.<sup>47</sup> Despite such strife, Blackbird ultimately championed Indigenous voters in his 1887 history, whose “voice was to be recognized in the ballot box in every election; and I thought, this is what ought to be, for the same God who created the White man created the red man of the forest, and therefore they are equally entitled to the benefits of civilization, education and Christianity.”<sup>48</sup>

Even after the especially divisive election of 1860, the power of “the Indian vote” endured. That meant that Indigenous voters remained a target for lobbying—and worse—by partisan federal Indian agents. Rubenstein documents the various means by which Indian agents sought to tamper with Indian ballots: withholding annuities, supplies, or land patents until after an election; postponing councils between federal officials and Indian leaders; and even sending

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<sup>46</sup> *East Saginaw Courier*, October 6, 1859, Newspapers.com.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew J. Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan* (Ypsilanti: Ypsilantian Job Printing House, 1887), 65.

<sup>48</sup> Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 98.



“pre-marked sample ballots to all teachers and interpreters for distribution in Indian villages.”<sup>49</sup>

In 1863, the *East Saginaw Courier* published an expose of a Republican scheme to influence Indian voters to back their candidate against the sitting Democratic judge, and decried “information leading to the belief that certain Republican influences are at work to influence the Indian vote.”<sup>50</sup> A story appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1879 that sought to explain the key to winning the Indian vote in Michigan that was consistent with the themes of the frontier discourse: “The Indian has nothing. He votes with or for the man who shows cause in the way of benefits granted. His principles are a mere matter of pork and flour,” the newspaper opined. “‘Buying’ is an ugly word, so the Michigan politicians call it ‘influencing’ the Indian vote. Having caught your Indian, you must not let him out of your sight until his vote is in.”<sup>51</sup>

When bribery, withholding goods and services, and other forms of voter suppression failed to produce the desired outcomes, state officials sometimes tried to block Indigenous people’s access to the ballot altogether. Matt Fletcher notes that in the 1860s, the Michigan State attorney general began to argue that the state’s constitutional provision for Indian citizenship had only been intended for mixed-race people. This gave local election officials cover to block Indigenous voting. “Bingham Township election officials refused to allow Grand Traverse Band members to vote in 1866,” Fletcher notes.<sup>52</sup> Yet Andrew Blackbird’s early assurances from the governor and attorney general that all Indian people were eligible to vote, not just mixed-race people, seemed to hold. This allowed Indigenous voters to sometimes turn the tables on their would-be political bosses. Elijah Pilcher, a prominent member of the Saginaw Chippewa who would serve as chairman of the Board of Control of the State Reform School, went so far as to

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<sup>49</sup> Rubenstein, “Justice Denied,” 10.

<sup>50</sup> *East Saginaw Courier*, September 16, 1863, Newspapers.com.

<sup>51</sup> “Indian Voters in Michigan,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1879, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>52</sup> Fletcher, *The Eagle Returns*, 41.

threaten his Republican federal Indian agent that unless he and his people were delivered a team of oxen and some agricultural equipment which they needed, he would vote for the Democratic candidate in the following election. While it is not clear how Pilcher ultimately cast his ballot, the agent delivered to him the requested goods.<sup>53</sup>

In the decades after the Civil War, the settler colonial mesh began to tighten around Michigan's Indigenous citizens, undermining the ballot as a vehicle to advance their interests. The late nineteenth century presented Indian people with the challenges of living in a state with Euro-American neighbors who had a newly hardened sense of racial difference amid the birth of scientific racism, the onset of the Jim Crow regime in the South, and the pressures of Eastern European immigration to urban areas. In the 1870s, Michigan's frontier discourse, newly intensified by the enmity towards Indigenous people as a result of the Great Plains Indian Wars, soon cast Indian people as diseased, filthy, and unfit to hold office in Michigan's government. With treaty-making ended as a result of the Peace Policy of 1871, and the intensification of assimilation policy with the passage of General Allotment Act in 1887, Indian blood quantum evolved from a colloquial way to determine racial status to a formal metric used by the federal government to determine the eligibility of Indian voters. Even as they increasingly assimilated into Michigan's settler colonial community by adopting English, working in the state's labor force, and seeking education in the state's institutions, in the waning years of the nineteenth century, Michigan Indian people were made out to be Others in their own homeland like never before. More than any other factor that demanded citizenship as a potential vehicle for democracy for Indian people, however, was the ballooning population of non-Natives in counties where Indigenous candidates had a measure of success in electoral politics. Many Indigenous

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<sup>53</sup> Rubenstein, "Justice Denied," 11.

communities in the northern part of the state not favorable to agriculture had managed to temporarily turn the polity of the Northwest Ordinance in their favor to elect their own candidates to local office, but the volume of settlers that eventually overwhelmed them meant that a democracy synonymous with at-large voting would eventually condemn them to the margins of democratic politics.

Beyond the ballot box, state citizenship for Indians was increasingly cutting like a double-edged sword. In fact, citizenship status made Indigenous people bigger targets for predatory state taxation and lawsuits that targeted their land. When it came to protecting that land, Fletcher concludes that “the extension of state citizenship did little to improve Anishinaabek legal standing in Michigan.”<sup>54</sup> Promising rights afforded to Indian people as citizens (such as sitting on juries in a court of law) were eclipsed by the proliferation of lawsuits and intimidation brought upon Indian people as state citizens by land speculators. In his study of Michigan Indian voting, Rubenstein wryly observes that by the end of the nineteenth century, “the only ‘privilege’ of citizenship granted fully to Indians was tax-paying.”<sup>55</sup> Michigan state citizenship therefore functioned as a means to make Indigenous people and their assets—allotted land, communal resources, labor, etc.—increasingly legible as targets of the various mechanisms of the plunder economy, such as state taxation, foreclosure of assets or land, liens, etc. While some aspects of citizenship could be used to advance Indigenous ends, more often state citizenship imposed new constraints and vulnerabilities. By 1885, an Indian agent in Michigan wrote that “all Indian Michigan are classified as ‘civilized.’ Tribal relations are abolished, and the government treats with individuals, not with tribes. They vote, pay taxes, and in imitation of

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<sup>54</sup> Fletcher, *The Eagle Returns*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Rubenstein, “Justice Denied,” 164.

their white brother, drink, many of them to excess.”<sup>56</sup> While Indigenous people were never legally barred outright from the ballot box in Michigan, their political influence as a voting bloc had been curbed by the time Dewey arrived and penned his first theorization of democratic citizenship in 1888.

While state citizenship ultimately failed to change the terrain of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy, it is crucial to acknowledge that Andrew Blackbird’s pursuit of state citizenship in the 1850s was an experiment to use the apparatus of the settler colonial state (if not the Northwest Ordinance itself) to pursue Indigenous ends. When the ballot failed to secure a satisfactory degree of self-determination, Blackbird turned to education. In fact, Blackbird had every intention to attend the University of Michigan. Blackbird was well aware of the 1817 treaty provisions that had established the university and the funds for the education of Indian people from the 1855 treaty that he had himself advised. “I approached the Indian agent with request if he could possibly arrange for me to have the benefit of our Indian educational fund, set apart for that purpose at the council of Detroit, 1855,” Blackbird noted. The agent replied, ““Mr. Blackbird, how far do you intend to go to get your education?” I said, ‘I intend to go to Ann Arbor University, sir.’” The agent, who managed these funds, begrudgingly covered Blackbird’s fare to Detroit, but little else. Desperate to secure funding for tuition, Blackbird paid a visit to former Governor Lewis Cass to see if he might help use his political influence to unlock more of the funds set aside for education by the Treaty of Detroit.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *The Lake County Star*, March 19, 1885, Newspapers.com.

<sup>57</sup> For more recent work on interpreting the formation of public universities through the lens of settler colonialism, see Nikki Luke and Nik Heynen, “Abolishing the Frontier: (De)colonizing ‘public’ education,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 22, no. 3 (March 2021), 403-24; Robert Lee, Tristan Ahtone, Kalen Goodluck, and Margaret Pearce, “Land-Grab Universities,” *High Country News*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>.

In their meeting, Cass evidently dissuaded Blackbird from applying to the university. “Is it possible?” Cass wondered aloud. “Are you prepared to enter such a college?” Blackbird replied, “I told him I thought I was.” Cass was unconvinced, however. He recommended that Blackbird enroll at the Ypsilanti State Normal School instead. “This was the first time I ever heard of that school, and it sounded quite big to me,” Blackbird recalled.<sup>58</sup> If Blackbird abandoned his hope to study in Ann Arbor, Cass promised to write the Office of Indian Affairs on his behalf. Feeling he had no other option, Blackbird made his way to Ypsilanti. He enrolled in courses at the normal school, training to become a teacher. While he performed adequately, the experience was a struggle. “I attended this institution almost two years and a half, when I could not hold out any longer, as my allowance for support from the Government was so scanty it did not pay for all my necessary expenses,” Blackbird later wrote. “I imagined that I was beginning to be sick on account of so much privation, or that I would starve to death before I could be graduated, and therefore I was forced to abandon my studies and leave the institution.”<sup>59</sup> Only able to secure an allowance of thirty-seven dollars from the government, Blackbird quit school before he could graduate. He was never able to attend the University of Michigan. Try as he might, Blackbird had been unable to leverage his state citizenship to pierce the frontier synthesis of education and democracy to attend the same university where Dewey began his career.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 67.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 69. On his time at the Ypsilanti Normal School, see Karamanski, *Blackbird's Song*, 157-65.

<sup>60</sup> Blackbird's inability to study where Dewey began his career as a philosopher is made all the more frustrating by the deep structural connection between Blackbird's history and Dewey's education. Dewey enrolled at the University of Vermont in 1875. Hailing from Burlington, this may have seemed like a natural choice. According to Westbrook's treatment of Dewey's biography, however, this was hardly a foregone conclusion. Westbrook notes that during the 1850s the University of Vermont was regarded as “something of an embarrassment to the community, but after it was named the state's land grand institution in 1865, it managed to restore its respectability if not its preeminence.” It was this boost in prestige which compelled the Deweys to send their sons Davis and John to the university. Thanks to Tristan Ahtone and Bobby Lee's impressive Land Grab Universities research project,

Nevertheless, Blackbird's bet on state citizenship is particularly important, as it embodies the creativity, determination, and optimism that Indigenous people could often express as they confronted the dilemmas of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy. It would soon be eclipsed by another experiment in Indian citizenship, the off-reservation Indian industrial boarding school.

### **The Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School, 1888-1894**

In 1887, the U.S. Congress passed the General Allotment Act, commonly known as the Dawes Act. The Dawes Act inaugurated a new era in federal Indian policy commonly referred to as allotment. As it had unfolded in a series of treaties signed in Michigan in the 1850s, allotment divided up Indigenous land that was communally held among members of a given tribal nation and assigned each member an individual plot. These allotments (typically one hundred and sixty to eighty acres each for men and women and children, respectively) would be held in trust by the federal government. This wardship status would remain until non-Native Indian agents and competency commissions held that their new individual "owners" were ready to take possession of these lands in fee simple. While the government held allotments in trust, federal schools would work to prepare a future generation of landowners to become citizens in the image of the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer. On this theory, Indian people who entered federal schools as a tribal people would graduate as newly minted detribalized federal citizens.

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we know that the University of Vermont received \$122,000 in 1865 (nearly \$2 million adjusted for inflation in 2020) from the federal government's sale of 148,397 acres of land as part of the Morrill Act. A substantial acreage from this sale was from federal lands in Michigan, principally in Keweenaw and Alger Counties. This was land that had been ceded to the federal government by Anishinaabe and Odawa in the Washington Treaty of 1836. This land offered an impressive return to the University of Vermont; while the U.S. government paid Anishinaabe and Odawa nations \$15,897 for the land, the University of Vermont received \$76,474, a sum that represented an eleven-to-one return on the value of the 1836 treaty lands. In no small measure, it was Blackbird's community in Michigan that footed the bill for Dewey's undergraduate education in Vermont. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 5; "University of Vermont," Lee et al., "Land-Grab Universities."

Once Indians held their allotments in fee simple, they could (in theory) do with their acreage as they saw fit. Undoing centuries of Indian collective land use practices, Euro-American assimilators believed that with a plot to call their own, land severalty would inculcate Indian people with a sense of pecuniary initiative derived from individual possessive ownership. This would supposedly induce Indigenous students turned citizens to prudently abandon their communal patterns of life, thus obviating Indigenous nations as a barrier to Euro-American settlement. Proponents of this scheme therefore believed that citizenship and assimilation went hand in hand as components of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy.<sup>61</sup>

Fortuitously for the architects of this scheme, the federal government had already embarked on the creation of a school system that could be readily adapted to carry out this new allotment policy. When Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Morgan took over the reins of the Indian Office in 1889, he made expanding the federal school system for Indians modeled by Richard Henry Pratt's Carlisle School a top priority. Morgan outlined his vision for assimilation through schooling in an 1889 report appropriately titled "Indian Education." Morgan was bullish on federal schooling as the most efficient means to perform cultural assimilation and political disintegration of Native communities. "When we speak of the education of the Indians, we mean that comprehensive system of training and instruction which convert them into American citizens, put within their reach the blessing which the rest of us enjoy, and enable them to compete successfully with the white man on his own ground and with his own methods," Morgan wrote.<sup>62</sup> Morgan depicted his brand of uplift by schooling as both necessary and benevolent because "the Indian population are surrounded everywhere by white populations, and

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<sup>61</sup> Of course, this transformation of Indigenous land had long been the policy of the federal government, beginning with Jeremiah and Frederick Riggs' role as Indian farmers in 1819 as part of the Civilization Act.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Morgan, "Indian Education," 8, Records of the Indian School Service, Record Group 75, National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

are destined inevitably, at no distant day, either to be overpowered or to be assimilated into the national life.”<sup>63</sup> This made Morgan eager for Michigan to have its first federal off-reservation industrial Indian school.

To the detractors of his plan who worried that Morgan’s sprawling network of expensive boarding schools would bankrupt the Indian Office, the new commissioner promised that Indian schools would be only a temporary institutional necessity. As federal schools were meant to usher Indian children through their liminal savage state on the path to civilization, Morgan explained that these off-reservation schools were ultimately disposable institutions. A large part of the blueprint of assimilation was achieved simply by placing students in the boarding school itself. Away from their parents, extended families, and tribal communities, Indigenous children would be removed from their home and community environment and remade in a new one controlled by Euro-Americans. To induce Indigenous parents to send their children for a term of usually three to five years, school superintendents would often go “recruiting.” When this failed, federal guidelines allowed for superintendents to withhold federal annuities from Indigenous families until children were sent to such schools. When the children arrived at the off-reservation schools, they were shorn of their Indigenous hairstyles, clothing, and given names, and new haircuts, uniforms, and Euro-American names were imposed upon them. Boys and girls alike were organized into companies (later platoons), wore military uniforms, and were subject to harsh military discipline. As David W. Adams notes, this was an ambitious agenda: “All this called for an artful use of schooling as an instrument for furthering the process of white political and ideological hegemony, but philanthropists were convinced they could pull it off.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>64</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 24.



Morgan's 1889 "Indian Education" is important not only because it served as a blueprint for the system of off-reservation Indian industrial boarding schools, but also because it received the endorsement of one of the era's most prominent philosophers of education, William Torrey Harris. Though he was born in Connecticut in 1836 and studied at Yale, W. T. Harris made his career in American education, becoming an elementary school teacher and eventually school superintendent in St. Louis, Missouri, in the 1850s. A prominent school reformer, Harris was a champion for the widespread establishment of kindergartens and libraries in the westward-expanding public school system of the United States. Moreover, as nominal leader of the most prominent school of American philosophy, the St. Louis Hegelians, Harris was a major figure in nineteenth-century philosophy, perhaps best known for founding the leading philosophy publication of the period, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. This reputation also spurred him to serve as the President of the National Education Association in 1875. He was then appointed as the U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906. It was in this capacity that he wrote the foreword to Morgan's "Indian Education," giving it his ringing endorsement.<sup>65</sup>

Harris lauded Morgan's "new education for our American Indians," heaping praise on it as a totalizing approach with which to alter Indigenous subjectivity, a "radical system of education not merely in books, not merely in religious ceremonies, but in matters of clothing, personal cleanliness, matters of dietary, and especially in habits of industry."<sup>66</sup> To facilitate the efficacy of these schools in their mission of cultural reprogramming, Morgan called for the government's Indian educators to integrate the latest social scientific insight into their design.

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<sup>65</sup> "William T. Harris, 1834-1909," Education Encyclopedia StateUniversity.com, accessed July 27, 2019, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2030/Harris-William-T-1835-1909.html>. See also William Reese, "The Philosopher-King of St. Louis," in *Curriculum and Consequence: Herbert Kliebard and the Promise of Schooling*, ed. Barry M. Franklin (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> Morgan, "Indian Education," 4. See also Joel Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

Harris approved. “Modern studies in ethnology have made us acquainted with the depth to which the distinctions of civilization penetrate,” he wrote. “We do not now expect to work the regeneration of a people except by changing the industrial habits, the manners and customs, the food and clothing, the social and family behavior, the view of the world, and the religious conviction systematically and co-ordinately.”<sup>67</sup> Federal boarding schools would be the keystone in transforming Indigenous people from semi-sovereign outsiders into productive citizens within the democratic polity of the United States.

While Harris and Morgan’s rhetoric touted the parity of their school’s Indigenous citizens with their Euro-Americans brethren, their words could not alter the reality that schooling in this manner was an exercise in Native elimination. While Morgan’s rhetoric of uplift seemed to proffer a peaceful solution to the “Indian problem,” it also thinly veiled the government’s willingness to use extracurricular force if necessary. “We owe it to ourselves and to the enlightened public opinion of the world to save the Indian, and not destroy him,” Harris wrote. But he insisted that “we can not save him and his patriarchal or tribal institution both together.”<sup>68</sup> Harris’s commentary belies the Janus-faced dynamic of the government’s nineteenth-century Indian policy: the supposed olive branch of schooling on the one hand and the clenched fist of state violence implied in the other.

These two intertwined impulses (which relied equally on the termination of Indigenous lifeways and the imposition of Euro-American substitutes) is what Paul Kramer has called the civilizing and absolute power inherent in the logic of turn-of-the-century U.S. imperialism.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Morgan, “Indian Education,” 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Kramer, “Shades of Sovereignty: Racialized Power, the United States and the World,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 251.

“Absolutizing power spoke in a language of fixity: individuals were assigned to single, all-encompassing social categories defined by unchangeable features; social groups were seen as unable to alter their fundamental characteristics; salient difference was grounded in transcendence, especially in God or natural order,” he explains. “By contrast, civilizing power was grounded in process: individuals and groups were assessed precisely in terms of their position and potential with respect to advancement in hierarchical, evolutionary time.”<sup>70</sup>

In his preface to Morgan’s report, Harris also superficially spoke of schools in the language of civilizing power, but with a hint that the absolutizing power of the federal government lay just beyond the surface.<sup>71</sup> Harris’s praise for Morgan included his belief that as long as there were Indian people living off reservations, seemingly unpacified or capable of the violence of “outbreak” at the drop of the hat, then the federal government should be in the business of schooling: “While the patriarchal [*sic*] or tribal form exists our own civilization must protect itself from the dangers which menace it from that lower form of civilization by supporting military forces or an armed police on the tribal frontiers,” he claimed.<sup>72</sup> In “Indian Education,” Morgan and Harris cloaked the federal government’s schools in the language of uplift, language that concealed the reality of the anti-democratic nature of the federal Indian schools.

Upon its opening, the MPIIS quickly took its place as one of the crown jewels in the new national system of off-reservation industrial boarding schools. MPIIS was formally established in 1892 and opened the following year in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. The school came to enroll

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>71</sup> On the fundamental role of citizenship training in the logic of Indian education, see Adams, “Fundamental Considerations,” 1-28.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan, “Indian Education”, 4; see also Phil Deloria, “Violence: The Killings at Lightning Creek,” in *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004).

(through a combination of Indigenous voluntarism and federal coercion) nearly three hundred students across grades one to eight. The MPIIS, like all of the federal government's Indian industrial schools, was a citizenship factory. As Morgan outlined in his vision for Indian education, the purpose of the school was "the development of the individual and his preparation for citizenship." Those developments included good physical fitness and hygiene, a desire for self-improvement, the habits of "regular, sustained, [and] useful" industry, and a virtuous moral conscience. These traits would supposedly inculcate in Michigan's Indian students an appreciation of their "civil duties, including love of country, obedience to law, respect for civil rulers, fidelity to official trusts, nature and obligations of oaths, the ballot, and other duties involved in good citizenship."<sup>73</sup>

In his very first report from MPIIS, Superintendent Andrew Spencer made it clear he was committed to imposing Morgan and Harris' vision for federal citizenship on Michigan's Indigenous people. Spencer dismissed Michigan Indians' forty-year history as state citizens; instead, he emphasized that Michigan's Indian industrial school would use federal citizenship training less as a political project than a cultural one. Spencer made careful note that while "the Indians are citizens of the State, and hence they have access to the public schools of the State," those public schools would not be able to rise to the challenge of teaching these students to join the ranks of democratic life as Harris and Morgan intended. Not only did Spencer feel Indian students' lack of English ability would hamper public school educators, but he reported that

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<sup>73</sup> "Rules for Indian Schools" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1892), 39 in Publications Relating to Indian Schools, 1885-1952, Box 4, Record Group 75, National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

many Indigenous parents did everything they could to avoid sending their children to public schools. A different kind of schooling would be required.<sup>74</sup>

Instead of relying on the state's public-school system, Spencer believed that Michigan's Indigenous citizens needed a crash course in citizenship that only such totalizing institutions as federal schools such as the MPIIS could provide. "Even if it were possible to secure their attendance at the public schools, the literary training which they would receive there is not the education that they most need," Spencer wrote. "It is more important that we develop cleanly habits, a desire for a neat appearance in person and in home ... than that we give them literary training, even in so important branches as the 'three R's.'" Rather than provide a robust education in the "three R's" (reading, writing, and arithmetic), Spencer understood the purpose of the MPIIS to groom Indian citizens for their eventual subordination to White cultural and economic authority: "The young need to be brought to a true appreciation of the universally accepted principles of morality, to be made more trustworthy and reliable, more faithful to promises, more obedient to law," Spencer wrote to Morgan.<sup>75</sup>

The curriculum that Spencer would use to accomplish this subordination was agricultural education. Spencer believed that agricultural education for boys and housekeeping for girls was the best means to make Michigan's Indigenous children into self-sufficient yeoman farmers, the supposed building block of Harris and Morgan's vision for Indian assimilation in conjunction with the General Allotment Act of 1887. The school farm came to encompass over 320 acres near the school (which also impeded on a nearby Saginaw Chippewa burial ground).<sup>76</sup> In this

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<sup>74</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 384. While Spencer attributed this reluctance of Indian families to send their children to public schools to an irrational racial recalcitrance, scholars have shown that Indigenous parents sought to spare their children the ostracism, discrimination, and neglect their children could expect to face in the state's public schools as late as the 1930s.

<sup>75</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1894, 384.

<sup>76</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1894, 385, in *Annual Reports 1905, 1924-1925*, Mt.

way, at MPIIS agricultural training *was* citizenship training. As one MPIIS administrator reported in 1895, Michigan's Indian industrial school was already hard at work cultivating a new generation of Indian citizens:

At their future homes, either upon small farms belonging to themselves from allotment or as employees of white farmers, these Indians must make their living. They need ... a practical and working knowledge of agriculture ... then a sufficient intellectual training to enable them to transact the business of a small farm, and finally a development of such habits and characters as will make them industrial, frugal, and reliable citizens. The girls need the training that will make them good and saving housekeepers, faithful and worth wives.<sup>77</sup>

Nor did Harris and Morgan's design for assimilatory schooling end with the completion of a student's terms. Upon graduation, federal educators intended that students would be a vanguard for civilization. They imagined that Indian graduates, inculcated in the values of a Protestant Republican ideology, would return to their families and communities and transmit these values on their behalf. These "returned students" would be able to run a farm on their allotted land, earn a living from a trade, or participate in wage economies of Euro-American communities. Such graduates would thus become what they called "self supporting citizens" and become living proof of the success of the program of assimilation.

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Pleasant Indian School Collection, 1865, 2003, Box 1, Clarke Historical Library.

<sup>77</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1895, 375, in *Annual Reports 1905, 1924-1925*, Mt. Pleasant Indian School Collection, 1865, 2003, Box 1, Clarke Historical Library, Mount Pleasant, MI.

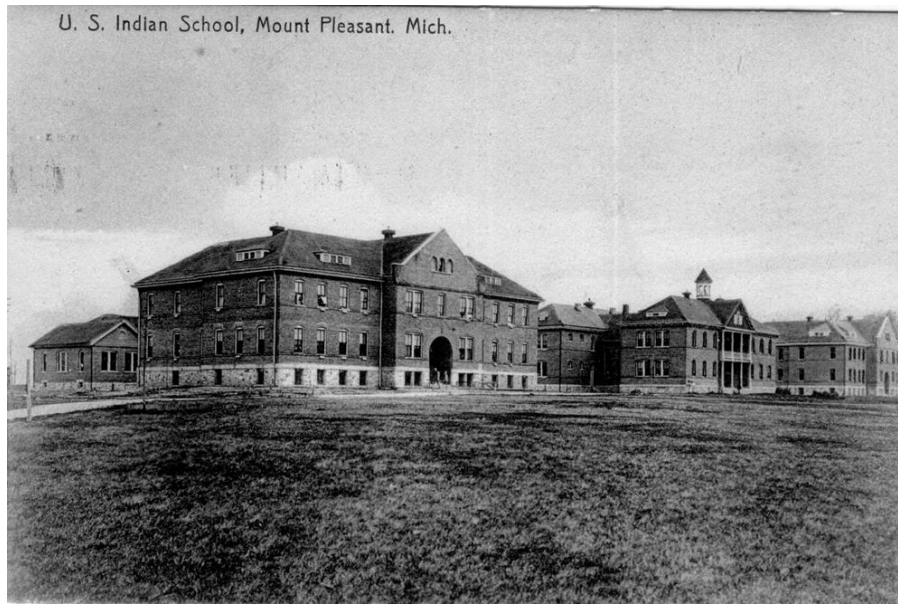


Figure 2.6. A postcard depicting the grounds of the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School, ca. 1910, William Cron Collection, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

MPIIS's program of federal citizenship training therefore marked a departure from the state citizenship that Blackbird and the Odawa had lobbied for forty years prior. On the one hand, the grand architects of federal Indian education such as Harris and Morgan were less invested in the immediate electoral politics of Michigan's Indian citizens than their local predecessors in the Indian bureaucracy. Unlike the partisan Indian agent in Blackbird's biography, MPIIS administrators cared less about who their alumni might vote for (though they had their preferences) and were instead invested in placing their alumni into a specific position in the social strata of Michigan. Instead, Harris and Morgan intended citizenship training at MPIIS to facilitate Indian students' seamless incorporation in the polity of the United States as a class of auxiliary citizens. "When we speak of the education of the Indians," Morgan told the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1889, "we mean that comprehensive system of training and instruction which will convert them into American citizens and enable them to compete successfully with the white man on his own ground and his own methods."<sup>78</sup> Morgan's hope was that graduates of

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<sup>78</sup> Proceedings of the Lake Monhonk conference (1889), 16-19, cited in Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club*, 75.

schools like the MPIIS would fade into a nominally democratic mass under the rubric of federal citizenship and would therefore cease to be Indians insofar as an Indian person had a distinct political status.

Cloaked in the vocabulary of racial uplift (of making self-determining citizens on parity with “the white man”), schooling at MPIIS affected community disintegration, cultural destruction, and dispossession of land from Michigan’s Indian people. Between 1892 and 1935, entire generations of Indigenous people in Michigan passed through the dormitories, classrooms, workshops, and fields of the MPIIS. In so doing, Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadomi people from across the state could understand the theft of their resources—material and cultural alike—through the metaphor of a boarding school.<sup>79</sup> As Brenda Child has argued, boarding schools such as MPIIS have become understood by Native people across the Great Lakes as the leading institution for their dispossession. At the MPIIS, this dispossession came in the form of federal citizenship, itself a mechanism “to incorporate subordinate people.”<sup>80</sup>

By inculcating this suite of “civilized” values in Indigenous children, Morgan and the Office of Indian Affairs hoped to restructure Indigenous subjectivity that would help to usher in a new era of assimilation in Indian policy effected not by an army of soldiers, but an army of teachers. “Education for citizenship involved the delicate business of engendering a deep devotion to the nation and its flag,” writes Adams in his history of these boarding schools, “including the idea that the westward sweep of the American empire, that is to say the dispossession of Indian land, was clearly justifiable.”<sup>81</sup> For Michigan’s Indigenous citizens, citizenship training at the MPIIS functioned as what David Tyack has described as “a kind of

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<sup>79</sup> Brenda Child, “The Boarding School as Metaphor,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 37-57.

<sup>80</sup> Deloria, “From Nation to Neighborhood,” 364-67.

<sup>81</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 24.



pedagogical mop-up operation” that would tighten the frontier synthesis of education and democracy into an impenetrable mesh.<sup>82</sup> MPIIS represents the eclipse of Blackbird’s vision for Michigan state citizenship and its supplanting by Morgan’s designs for new federal citizenship.

Before he left the state for Chicago, Illinois, Dewey had nearly three years to comment on this novel presence among Michigan’s pedagogical landscape: an industrial boarding school run not by the state of Michigan, but by the U.S. government as part of a national system dedicated to make Indians into federal citizens. Considering Dewey’s nearly decade-long career in Michigan, his routine public school inspections on behalf of the University of Michigan that took him on travels across the state, and his growing professional interest in the philosophy of education and citizenship, Dewey’s silence on the founding of MPIIS in 1892 is rather curious.

While he never mentioned this school, Dewey might have been aware of Morgan’s designs for Indian education through his close relationship with W. T. Harris. Harris was John Dewey’s long-time mentor and close personal friend. In fact, many scholars attribute the start of Dewey’s career in philosophy to Harris. After graduating from the University of Vermont in 1881, a then twenty-year-old John Dewey contemplated going to graduate school in philosophy. Unsure of his acumen in the subject, Dewey decided to submit an article to Harris’ *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and solicited the editor’s candid feedback. An uncertain Dewey wrote to Harris, “I suppose you must be troubled with many inquiries of this sort, yet if it would not be too much to ask, I should be glad to know your opinion on it, even if you make no use of it,” he wrote with such deference that it bordered on the farcical. “An opinion as to whether you considered it to show ability enough of any kind to warrant my putting much of my time on that sort of subject would be thankfully received. I do not wish to ask too much of your time &

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<sup>82</sup> David Tyack, *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13.

attention however.”<sup>83</sup> Harris responded favorably and accepted the article for publication, encouraging the would-be philosopher to continue in the field.<sup>84</sup> “Thanks for your favorable opinion,” Dewey wrote in reply.<sup>85</sup> This was a momentous moment for Dewey’s biographers, who narrated Harris’ acceptance of the essay as the beginning of Dewey’s life work. According to Jane Dewey, her father’s “mind was now turned toward the teaching of philosophy as a career.”<sup>86</sup> Soon after, the two men became close friends, and Harris even visited the Deweys’ home in Ann Arbor in 1893. Endorsed as they were by his mentor and friend W. T. Harris, Dewey was perhaps blinded to the ways in which Indian schools such as the MPIIS were a betrayal of his own emerging philosophy of education and democracy.<sup>87</sup>

It should startle contemporary readers, then, when Alfred Bayliss, superintendent of public instruction of Illinois, invoked Dewey in the context of this very project. In a 1902 essay, Bayliss pontificated that when it came to Indian education, what was often dismissed as mere vocational education for Euro-American children served as excellent citizenship training for

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<sup>83</sup> John Dewey to William Torrey Harris, May 17, 1881, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Jane Dewey, “Biography of John Dewey,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1939): 3-45. Dewey’s article in question is described by Alan Ryan in 1995 as “unreadable 110 years later.” Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 58.

<sup>85</sup> John Dewey to William Torrey Harris, October 22, 1881, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Jane Dewey, “Biography of John Dewey”; Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 22-24.

<sup>87</sup> Spurred by the publication of Dewey’s first article by Harris, the two men began a long relationship that was both professional and personal. In the early part of 1884, Dewey wrote to Harris and informed him that he shared one of Harris’ major philosophic interests: “I should not have ventured on your time in saying so much had I not known of your interest in educational matters as well as philosophic; I hope that when the public mind is somewhat at rest on the subject of “sciences” in education, there may be a humble agitation in favor of smuggling philosophy in somewhere.” This mutual interest in education anchored their relationship. For decades, Dewey and Harris corresponded with one another, discussing issues of philosophy, their scholarship, and, eventually, their personal lives. In time, Harris became good friends with both John and Alice alike; he wrote both letters of introduction and counseled Dewey on his tumultuous resignation from the University of Chicago in 1904. Not only did both of the Deweys exchange letters with Harris, but so did their children. On a family vacation in New York in 1893, John encouraged a young Fred Dewey to write to Harris about their trip, and he concluded his missive by informing him that “Papa got your letter today and thanks you for it.” When Harris sent Fred and Evelyn gifts, Fred wrote to the U.S. Commissioner of Education that he and his sister “would like very much to have you come and see us in Ann Arbor,” a wish Harris obliged the following year. John Dewey to William Torrey Harris, January 17, 1884; Frederick A. Dewey to William Torrey Harris, August 30, 1893; and Frederick A. & Evelyn Dewey to William Torrey Harris, September 8, 1893, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

Indians. In preparing Indians to become citizens through vocational education, Bayliss suggested that Dewey offered a perfect rationale for industrial Indian schools like the one at MPIIS. ““One typical thing in the modern school movement is that which passes under the name of manual training,’ says Mr. Dewey. Teach the Indians to become good citizens. Home making, cleanliness, beauty of person and surroundings, cooking, sewing, sawing, driving nails, industry, economy, accumulation of capital, are elements in good citizenship,” Bayliss insisted. While Euro-American students may not derive learning that would offer them a robust democratic training from vocational education, Indians-as-savages certainly would. “Like every school, the Indian school should have its library; but, more than others, it should have its garden, shop, tools, textile industries, and kitchen,” he concluded. Bayliss saw the agricultural curriculum of MPIIS as something that resembled a Deweyan project.<sup>88</sup> In so doing, Bayliss turned the pragmatist into an apologist for what scholars have since called Indian proletarianization. This was a dark portent for what was to come in future translations of Dewey to the project of federal Indian schooling.

### **Michigan Indians as Pragmatic Citizens, 1887-1900**

While Dewey was silent on the matter, Indigenous people such as Andrew Blackbird did not sit idly by as the MPIIS dictated the terms of federal citizenship for Michigan Indians. In 1900, Blackbird published a pamphlet called *The Indian Problem from the Indian’s Standpoint*. While Dewey had left Michigan in 1894, *The Indian Problem* evidenced Blackbird’s ongoing concerns about democracy in Michigan. According to Thomas Karamanski, *The Indian Problem* was less of a critique of federal policy than it was a polemic against the racism and paternalism confronting his Ottawa and Chippewa community in Michigan. In particular, Blackbird used his

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<sup>88</sup> “Annual Report of the Indian School Superintendent” (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 40.

essay to comment on the challenges now facing Indigenous citizens in Michigan at the end of the nineteenth century. There were many serious social problems. He decried the proliferation of the predatory liquor trade among the Odawa, condemned the defrauding of Indian citizens by Euro-American land speculators, and critiqued the White cultural chauvinism that formed much of the basis for Michigan's frontier discourse. But read as a sequel to his 1887 *History*, it is clear that Blackbird's 1900 essay also contains a nuanced defense of his vision for Indian citizenship in Michigan. Blackbird's later writings consolidated his place as an important fly in the ointment of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy in Michigan.

Throughout his career, even while citizenship made his community vulnerable to dispossession by Michigan's callous homesteaders, land speculators, and courts, Blackbird never gave up on citizenship as a tool that could work to service the interests of Indian people. In *The Indian Problem*, Blackbird told a story about an Odawa widow in Harbor Springs, Michigan, who had been duped into signing over the rights to her eighty acres of land to an unscrupulous real estate speculator. Blackbird believed that she had been cheated out of her rightful treaty land because she lacked the education necessary to understand the contract for the exchange, let alone to contest the authority of the White sheriff who came to evict her in the first place. "These poor people evidently had been taken advantage of, on account of their ignorance and timidity and inability to protect their rights as American citizens," Blackbird wrote, his rage leaping off the page.<sup>89</sup> But this anecdote is not just an indicator of Blackbird's vehemence, but also a testament to his larger political philosophy. In telling a story of an Odawa woman cheated out of her land that concludes that this act was a violation of her citizenship rights, Blackbird casts the Odawa woman's inability to defend her rightful land by treaty as a defect of her citizenship not only as a

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<sup>89</sup> Andrew J. Blackbird, *The Indian Problem, From the Indian's Standpoint* (Ypsilanti: Scharf Tag, Label & Box Co., 1900), 12.

member of an Odawa nation, but in a Michigan democracy and in the republic of the United States. He implies that had the Odawa woman been properly educated about her rights—as a Michigan citizen, or a federal citizen, or a party to the treaties governing the Odawa—then she may have been able to find a measure of justice.

In this way, Blackbird forcefully used his essay *The Indian Problem* to champion education as the best means for Indian people in Michigan to address the shortcomings of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy and achieve the full potential of their citizenship. While he not only endorsed Carlos Montezuma’s praise for Richard H. Pratt’s Carlisle school in the essay (he took the title from Montezuma’s own writings), Blackbird clearly had his own agenda for his state: he argued for integrated public schools, a curriculum that would place Indian people at the same pedagogical plane as their Euro-American peers, and an education that went beyond the half-and-half curriculum of Carlisle—or MPIIS. “After teaching the children how to cipher a little, some geography, some grammar, and manual training, for 5 years in a boarding school, they say these children have graduated and they must be let loose, or sent adrift to go to their heathen parents,” Blackbird lamented. “In a few years they become worse heathen than their parents, very much disposed to dissipation and degradation.”<sup>90</sup> Speaking to a non-Native audience (most likely that of the Ypsilanti chapter of the Women’s National Indian Association), Blackbird’s essay deftly leveraged the reformer society’s worst nightmare—the non-Christian, drunken, “blanket Indian” who takes no interest in Euro-American civilization—in order to call for a more robust citizenship training for Indians. Blackbird lobbied for Indian students to “come in contact, face to face, with the phases of civilized life and become good

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 15.

citizens of this country.”<sup>91</sup> Blackbird warned that any schooling with less rigor than that of public schools for Whites would fail to secure democracy for Michigan Indians.

Blackbird, a devoutly religious Christian, wholeheartedly believed in a program of assimilation, uplift, and reform for Michigan’s Indian people. This attitude made many of his writings complimentary of, rather than in outright opposition to, federal Indian policy of assimilation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that even when addressing Michigan’s predominantly White audience, Blackbird never ceded his identity as a member of a contemporaneous Odawa community. “We Indians, although rude and dark, yet love to tread upon this broad land, where our forefathers’ bones are now bleaching, although they were once the lords of the country,” Blackbird wrote. “We are aware that our skins are dark, but our lives are just as precious and sweet to us as to any Caucasian race coming to this country.”<sup>92</sup> In this way, Blackbird managed to avoid the trap of the mutual exclusivity inherent in the state constitution between his identity as a Michigan citizen and his identity as an Odawa man.

Nor was Blackbird naive about the limits of the new federal citizenship offered by the MPIIS to achieve justice for Michigan’s Indian people. “Indians are exposed to hate, to be shot at, and to be robbed in every way and manner, of their little possessions of lands which the government has allotted to them in treaties.” Citizenship, the supposed shield bequeathed to its citizens as liberal subjects, was no protection for the state’s Indigenous people from settler colonial appetites: “They are cheated by the crooked works of the law,” he wrote. Blackbird pulled no punches about Euro-American racial discrimination against Michigan’s Indian people, prejudice that undermined democracy for Indigenous citizens. “Every white man knows that the Indians stand very helpless before the law of the country,” Blackbird attested. He went on to

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 13.

relate a bitter memory from September of 1896, when a drunken argument between an Indigenous man and White man escalated into the murder of the former by the latter. Blackbird betrayed no surprise that the slain Indigenous man's citizenship status did little to afford him a fair trial: "Was the white man punished for this murder? No. His white brothers of course let him off on his own evidence."<sup>93</sup> For all his faith in democracy's potential, he concluded, "There is no peace nor shelter for the Indians, from injustice."

Blackbird wrote from experience. Over the course of his long life, Blackbird had become intimately familiar with both the possibilities and limits of citizenship in the state of Michigan, and the unwillingness of the Euro-American members of Michigan's polity to live up to their democratic ideals. Though he was pressured to sell his own allotment and fell into poverty his twilight years, Blackbird never gave up on his hope that citizenship in the state and nation could protect his interests as an Odawa. To the end of his life, Blackbird remained optimistic that the solution to the problems of citizenship, like democracy, was more of it for Indian people, rather than less. As Karamanski notes, "Even when Blackbird despaired over the theft of Ottawa homesteads in the 1870s and 1880s, he still envisioned a future in which education would be the means by which the promise of citizenship would be redeemed." In fact, Blackbird was so confident that he offered his services to the Indian Office to help carry out the program of citizenship training at MPIIS. He wrote to Commissioner Thomas Morgan "relative to a position [in the] Indian school service—particularly, Mount Pleasant Indian School" in 1893. Blackbird's letter reveals that he sought to lend his service to the MPIIS in order to ensure federal educators were carrying out the important task of citizenship training of Michigan Indian children to his satisfaction. "I thought at the time for a position as an assistant superintendent as I could have

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 14.

done many things in this particular line of duty especially towards getting up [sic] students for the school, or, if I could not get that, some other position and peradventure as an assistant teacher, or any other way in which to advance civilization of my people (the Indians).”<sup>94</sup> He was never offered the job, leaving him destitute. In his final years, Blackbird refused to abandon his efforts to participate in the democratic life of the state of Michigan. He gave talks and wrote essays, lobbied Michigan state officials to protect Indian interests, and wrote to real estate speculators on behalf of Odawa landholders who could not read or write in English. When Blackbird passed away in the Emmet County Poor Farm on September 7, 1908, he died as a ward of Michigan state.<sup>95</sup> “As long as Blackbird could see and hold a pen steady enough to write,” writes Karamanski, “he remained an advocate for the Ottawa.”<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

Reading Dewey’s “The Ethics of Democracy” today, it is clear that his first statement on democracy appears woefully under-theorized in light of the experience of his contemporaneous fellow Indigenous citizens in Michigan and their persistent struggle against the frontier synthesis of education and democracy. While Dewey’s “Ethics of Democracy” essay has since been critiqued (including by Dewey himself) for his youthful Hegelian influences and its reliance on a Huxleyan metaphor of social organism, this important essay nevertheless planted a cornerstone for Dewey’s mature synthesis of education and democracy. The essay cemented Dewey’s conception of democracy not only as a mechanism for governance, but as a culture, and one that

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<sup>94</sup> Andrew J. Blackbird to Thomas Morgan, March 15, 1893, Box 963, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1881-1907, Record Group 75, National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>96</sup> Karamanski, *Blackbird’s Song*, 230.



grew out of the evolutionary history of humanity. It also marked the earliest elision of Indigenous people from his political philosophy.<sup>97</sup>

Blackbird's solution to "the Indian problem" could be described as quite Deweyan. A lifetime of denigration and marginalization at the hands of Euro-Americans in Michigan had left Blackbird convinced that citizenship rendered as a simple political status would never be enough to protect Indian people from racial discrimination. With proper education, Blackbird felt Indian citizens could enter into contracts with Euro-American neighbors with confidence, leverage the state's legal system without being taken advantage of, and make responsible and informed decisions at the ballot box. In support of candidates from their own communities, Blackbird made an argument for a conception of democracy that went beyond the mere apparatus of popular sovereignty which would simply include Indigenous people. To the contrary, Blackbird attempted to take the most basic machinery of democratic life—citizenship—and transform it not as an end but as a means for the realization of something greater: a democratic culture that was fair and just for its Indigenous members. Blackbird was ultimately convinced that citizenship, when reconstructed for the realities of settler colonialism, could still be a powerful tool for Indigenous participation in democratic life.

Meanwhile, Blackbird's life, career, and his history of Michigan had the potential to revolutionize Dewey's understanding of the nature of American democracy.<sup>98</sup> If Dewey had cared to examine the history offered in Andrew Blackbird's book from his perch at the University of Michigan, he might have had cause to reevaluate his argument in "Ethics of

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<sup>97</sup> Fesmire, *Dewey*, 159.

<sup>98</sup> It should be noted that by 1889, a new legal path to Indian citizenship both in Michigan and beyond had opened through the 1887 General Allotment Act. Although Michigan Indian reservations were not systematically allotted by this legislation, its provisions regarding citizenship may have offered Indian people further leverage as they sought to use this status to advance their interests in the state of Michigan. See Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 211-38.

Democracy.” Blackbird’s political career, speaking tours, and writings offered direct testimony to the fact that Indigenous people had attempted to profoundly shape the contours of democracy in the state of Michigan, both as individuals and as nations, through treaties, state citizenship, and their pursuit of schooling. When Blackbird and the Odawa lobbied Michigan’s 1850 constitutional convention and the governor and attorney general, they demonstrated that democracy in Michigan was not a product of Germanic genes or unilateral actions of Euro-American settlers, but rather that it would be shaped by Indigenous people’s contestation of settler colonialism. Blackbird offered Dewey an ideal historicist alternative to the “germ theory” he was looking for in “Ethics and Democracy.”

Philosophers have long suggested that as a pragmatist, Dewey was attuned to practical problems of everyday experience. Indeed, building off his critique of Maine in “Ethics of Democracy,” Dewey would later champion a method of that philosophy that aimed to address and resolve contemporary problems in social life. The irony is that in Michigan, it was Indigenous peoples who were at the bleeding edge of unresolved questions of education and democracy as a matter of everyday life. While Dewey was theorizing about the nature of democracy in abstract fashion, Blackbird was the one swimming in the stream of everyday experience, working to define its practical meaning for Indian citizens. With Blackbird on the lecture circuit based out of nearby Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1887, it would not have been difficult—let alone impossible—for Dewey to have encountered him as a speaker or come across his book. If he had, Dewey might have been able to see how Blackbird’s own advocacy was a kindred spirit to Dewey’s own emerging brand of pragmatism: creative, experimental, and adaptive in light of problems encountered in the course of his community’s political life. Moreover, with the popularity of the publications of other notable Indigenous authors, such as

Sarah Winnemucca's *Life Among the Piute* (1883) or Simon Pokagon's *The Red Man's Rebuke* (1893), Dewey had many opportunities to attend to the history of Michigan's (and the United States') Indigenous citizens while in the Great Lakes. Dewey's decade in Michigan was an ideal moment for him to include contemporary American Indian people into his burgeoning philosophy.

When he ignored Blackbird's experience of Michigan's democracy, Dewey failed according to the standards of his own method. Having dispatched Henry Maine's assertion that democracy was flawed due to an inherent tension between the individual particular and the social whole by casting individuals as social organisms and democracy as a culture of associated living, Dewey's 1888 essay concludes with another pragmatic innovation: that political philosophers should not be engaged in the measurement of the perfect forms of government in the realm of the ideal, but rather should be in the service of the actual refining of political matters in their own time. Theorizations about the best kind of government, concern for the tyranny of the majority, anxiety over the tragedy of the commons—all of these concerns should be subordinated to experience and historical specificity. To do otherwise is to engage in a kind of philosophy which "is the relic of the time when governmental polities were regarded as articles of clothing, to be cut and sewed by any acute political tailor, and fitted to any nation," Dewey wrote.<sup>99</sup> Dewey argues that for this reason, he would stick to the concrete circumstances of democracy in the history of the United States. This history, however, excluded Indians.

By the time Dewey left Ann Arbor, Michigan, for a position at the University of Chicago, he had become thoroughly enveloped in the Great Lake's frontier discourse. This functioned to calve off Indigenous people from Dewey's philosophical interests. Dewey could not grasp that

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<sup>99</sup> Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy," 241.

his Indigenous neighbors in Michigan had experienced schooling at places like MPIIS as a form of imposition which left their community disoriented and divided over the role of education in their lives. When he failed to consider Indigenous citizens' role in shaping Michigan's electoral politics, take heed of Blackbird's concerns in *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan*, or treat the MPIIS as a part of his nascent concerns for the role of citizenship training in democratic society, Dewey's political philosophy left behind the Indigenous people that ought to have been squarely within his purview.

The ultimate consequence of Dewey's immersion in the frontier discourse was that he could not make the experience of Indigenous interlocutors like Andrew Blackbird with schooling a part of his own philosophical commitment to critical democracy. Consequently, Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy and Indigenous people's urgent need for greater self-determination in education would grow almost entirely apart. While this divergence first began in Michigan, the frontier discourse would remain a part of Dewey's philosophy long after he left the state. In fact, the frontier discourse traveled with him across the Great Lakes from Ann Arbor to Chicago, where it soon found a central role at the heart of his career-defining Laboratory School.

### CHAPTER 3:

#### **Play: The Laboratory School and Re-Playing Indian, 1896-1904**

In the twilight of the nineteenth century, John Dewey was wrestling with his own Indian problem. The year was 1899, and Dewey was trying to refine his philosophy of education from insights he had gleaned from his work at the University of Chicago. After he left Ann Arbor in 1894, Dewey had created the Laboratory School, an experimental school to test his emerging ideas about teaching and learning. It was there, in the course of trying to shape the school's curriculum, that Dewey had encountered his Indian problem. Dewey's issue with this particular Indian lay in how he was being treated in the classroom; Dewey insisted that teachers who encountered this Indian man had him all wrong. This was a little ironic. After ten years living in a state alongside such prominent potential Indigenous interlocutors such as Andrew Blackbird, it was only after Dewey had moved to Chicago that he finally availed himself of the perspective of an Indian from Michigan. Except, of course, that this Indian man wasn't really from Michigan at all; the Indian person Dewey was upset with was none other than Hiawatha.

Strictly speaking, Hiawatha was not really from Michigan, either. The real Hiawatha was a Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) leader in the fifteenth century who helped to create the Great Law of Peace and the League of the Haudenosaunee. But the Hiawatha that Dewey was concerned about, the Hiawatha in his classroom, was actually the fictional product of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In 1855, Longfellow had written what was probably one of America's most famous epic poems, *The Song of Hiawatha*. Based on Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's two-volume

compilation of Anishinaabe stories published in 1839, Longfellow wrote his version of Hiawatha as a Chippewa man from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, a place where five of the state's actual Anishinaabe nations still reside today across eleven areas of land reserved by nineteenth century treaties.<sup>1</sup> Longfellow wrote his protagonist as hailing from the Pictured Rocks region of Michigan's upper peninsula, a picturesque area defined by sweeping sandstone cliffs dramatically dyed red with mineral deposits, now a National Lakeshore. To capture the personification of this natural grandeur, Longfellow had planned to call his protagonist Manabozho, a name recorded by Schoolcraft to mean the Anishinaabe figure often called Nanabush. But somewhere in the editing process, Longfellow had a change of heart and, figuring that all such Indigenous names were fungible, opted for the Haudenosaunee name Hiawatha instead.

*Hiawatha* was a hugely popular product of Michigan's frontier discourse. Hiawatha was a product of Schoolcraft's early eighteenth-century treatment of Ojibwe traditions, translated in part by his Anishinaabe wife Jane Johnston, combined with Longfellow's epic imagination, and loosed upon a reading public hungry for stories of vanishing Indians. Longfellow's plot resurrected a world that had long past into legend, a reconstruction of a bucolic world before the White man. Many nineteenth-century readers imagined that Hiawatha and his people who had called Michigan home were long gone, vanished in the face of modernity. According to Robert Berkhofer, Longfellow "reinforced the antiquity of Hiawatha's time by selecting the meter and mood of an old legend."<sup>2</sup> While Berkhofer suggests that its popularity faded somewhat after 1850, Longfellow's *Hiawatha* was a lasting artifact of the frontier discourse. Joseph Kossuth Dixon, a Baptist minister and self-styled Indian educator, interpreted *Hiawatha* as a product of

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<sup>1</sup> Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian*, 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

the frontier discourse *par excellence*. On his reading, Dixon believed that Longfellow had accurately forecast the soon approaching day “when the last real North American Indian will be folded in his blanket and laid amid the sighing branches of the pines upon some lonely and desolate hill crest, whose only dirge will be the liquid notes of the meadow-lark.”<sup>3</sup>

However, by the 1890s, *Hiawatha* was experiencing something of a second life. In that decade, *Hiawatha* became a hot topic in debates over American education. Pedagogues across the country reached for Longfellow’s poem as an example of great American literature. In using Indigenous characters as protagonists of an imagined American history—characters who were then ushered off the narrative stage at the conclusion of the epic—*Hiawatha* functioned as a textbook case of backgrounding Indigenous people in American memory. “*Hiawatha* triumphs also for the vision of conquest it sublimates,”<sup>4</sup> writes Alan Trachtenberg. “The demise of the magical aboriginal world that makes the nation possible, just as surely as the very possibility of *Hiawatha* as a figure of white imagination rests on the centrality of his eventual departure, a feat accomplished symptomatically by the poem itself.”<sup>5</sup> *Hiawatha* allowed Euro-Americans to safely sympathize with Indians as Noble Savages “safely dead and historically past” without paying much heed to contemporary Indigenous people in the United States.<sup>6</sup> This made the poem an ideal package for Euro-American instructors in classrooms increasingly filled with immigrant children from Eastern Europe eager to conscript Indians (both real and imagined) as a symbol of American distinction from Europe. This “Americanizing” function gave the text new life in the

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<sup>3</sup> Berkhofer notes that while Schoolcraft and Longfellow’s writing on Michigan’s Indigenous people had once been regarded as innovative literature in the early nineteenth century, by the 1850s it had become a familiar form that was soon eclipsed by other popular writers. “Although Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* achieved great success during this decade, it was quickly ridiculed in one satirical imitation after another.” Berkhofer, *White Man’s Indian*, 95. For Dixon, see Maddox, *Citizen Indians*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 58.

<sup>5</sup> Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Berkhofer, *White Man’s Indian*, 90.

1890s as a master trope of assimilation, useful for educators teaching in public schools, boarding schools such as the one at Hampton, Virginia, and New York settlement houses.<sup>7</sup>

None of this was Dewey's interest in *Hiawatha*. Instead, the Laboratory School's experimental nature had primed Dewey to consider *Hiawatha* in an entirely different way. Specifically, by 1899, Dewey had a bone to pick with a faction of educators and their agenda for *Hiawatha*, a group of pedagogues known as the Herbartians. Herbartianism, which Thomas Fallace has called the most popular "fad" among American educators in the 1890s, was associated with Johann Frederich Herbart, a German pedagogue who created a popular theory of learning using reference to "cultural epochs" of the past. Herbartian pedagogy imagined that the classroom should be structured around a child's re-creation of the progress of mankind through various epochs, a series of socio-cultural eras arranged in stadial evolution, from savagery, through barbarism, to civilization. One of the ways that the Herbartians proposed to re-create such phases of history was through works of evocative literature supposedly representative of each epoch. As it was one of the nation's most celebrated story of Indians, Longfellow's *Hiawatha* was regarded by the Herbartians as an ideal means for students to recover the "savage" epoch of the distant past.

Dewey rejected this idea about *Hiawatha*. Dewey felt that literature, while valuable for learning, paled in comparison to a curriculum of experiential learning. "I cannot avoid the feeling that much as the Herbartian school has done to enrich the elementary curriculum in the direction of history, it has often inverted the true relationship existing between history and literature," Dewey wrote. "In a certain sense the *motif* of American colonial history and of De Foe's 'Robinson Crusoe' are the same," Dewey mused, echoing the frontier thesis. "Both represent

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<sup>7</sup> Cynthia D. Nickerson, "Artistic Interpretations of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 'The Song of Hiawatha,' 1855-1900," *The American Art Journal* 16, no. 3 (1984): 49-77.



man who has achieved civilization, who has attained a certain maturity of thought, who has developed ideals and means of action; but suddenly thrown back upon his own resources, having to cope with a raw and often hostile nature, and to regain success by sheer intelligence, energy, and persistence of character.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Dewey remained unconvinced that educators should use works of literary imagination as the means for students to understand the past, especially through works about Indians:

Whatever may be the worth of the study of savage life in general, and of the North American Indians in particular, why should that be approached circuitously through the medium of “Hiawatha” instead of at first hand?—employing, indeed, the poem to furnish the idealized and culminating touches to a series of conditions and struggles which the child has previously realized in more specific form. *Either the life of the Indian presents some permanent questions and factors in social life or it has next to no place in a scheme of instruction* [my emphasis]. If it has such a value, this should be made to stand out on its own account instead of being lost in the very refinement and beauty of a purely literary presentation.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of setting his students to read *Hiawatha* as a means to use literature about Indians to reconstruct their past, Dewey proposed a very different idea: “Why not give the child the reality with its much larger sweep, its intenser forces, its more vivid and lasting value for life, using the ‘Robinson Crusoe’ as an imaginative idealization in a particular case of the same sort of problem and activities?”<sup>10</sup> In other words, instead of using literature as a world into which students might imaginatively enter, literature like *Hiawatha* could instead be used to prime students to reconstruct the past in the present. Rather than have students simply imagine a wilderness past through literature about castaways or Indians, Dewey thought, why not use the classroom to have them re-experience the past firsthand?

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<sup>8</sup> John Dewey, “Group IV. Historical Development of Inventions and Occupations” (1900), *Middle Works*, 1: 223-224; Dewey, “History for the Educator” (1909), *Middle Works*, 4:195.

<sup>9</sup> Dewey, “History for the Educator,” 195.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

It is worth a pause to consider why the debate over the most efficient means to re-create the past in the classroom was a cutting-edge pedagogical question during the last decade of the nineteenth century. As a means to organize curriculum, both the Herbartians and Dewey shared a commitment to various forms of racial recapitulation theory. Drawing from the theory of evolution, racial recapitulation held that not only had mankind developed from a state of savagery to a stage of barbarism and culminated in civilization, but that individuals also reproduced this development in the course of their individual lives (what Fallace calls linear historicism and genetic psychology, respectively). When translated into the schoolhouse, racial recapitulation theory suggested that schooling should be organized around each individual student's re-creation of this progress of mankind. By aligning stages of stadial evolution with individual child psychology, the curriculum could be configured to maximize learning potential. Dewey and his progressive pedagogues believed for nearly thirty years that this was the model for the structure of American classrooms.<sup>11</sup>

How Dewey proposed to fit an epic poem into this scheme can be illustrated from a portion of *Hiawatha*. In one section titled "The Fasting of Hiawatha," Hiawatha undergoes a fast. The Chippewa hero does so to make an appeal to the divine for relief from hunger for his people. Hunting, fishing, and foraging, Longfellow seems to imply, were too unreliable to sustain Hiawatha and his Chippewa brethren. Over the course of seven days, Hiawatha fasts and prays for relief from famine. At sundown on the seventh day, Hiawatha looks up to see "a youth

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<sup>11</sup> No other scholar has written as thoroughly about this moment in Dewey's career than Thomas Fallace. His articles on this topic are legion, including Fallace, "John Dewey and the Savage Mind: Uniting Anthropological, Psychological, and Pedagogical Thought, 1894-1902," *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 44, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 335-49; Fallace, "Was John Dewey Ethnocentric? Reevaluating the Philosopher's Early Views on Culture and Race," *Educational Researcher* 39, no. 6 (2010): 471-77; Fallace, "The Mind at Every Stage Has Its Own Logic: John Dewey as Genetic Psychologist," *Educational Theory* 60, no. 2 (2010): 129-46; Fallace, "The Savage Origins of Child-Center Pedagogy, 1871-1913," *American Educational Research Journal* 52, no. 1 (February 2015): 73-103.



Figure 3.1. Frederic Remington, *Mondamin*, in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha* (1890; repr., New York: Bounty Books, 1968), 51.

approaching/ Dressed in garments green and yellow/ Coming through the purple twilight/ Through the splendor of the sunset/ Plumes of green bent o'er his forehead/ And his hair was soft and golden."<sup>12</sup> It was no coincidence that this figure was rendered as the spitting image of a bipedal cornstalk. The youth's name is Mondamin, and he offers to wrestle Hiawatha; if Hiawatha can defeat him in the contest, Mondamin promised that he would make good on Hiawatha's prayers. To make a very long story short, Hiawatha triumphs in his ordeal over

Mondamin, and the divine messenger rewards Hiawatha with a set of instructions that Euro-

American readers would have recognized as the procedure for planting corn. The wrestling was then a metaphor for the labor required in the planting, growing, and harvesting *mandaamin*, the Anishinaabemowin word for maize. In Longfellow's telling, Mondamin had freed Hiawatha and his people from their slavish reliance on the fickle seasons through the invention of agriculture.

Dewey scoffed at the Herbartarian suggestion that passages like these might help students imagine how Chippewa people planted corn through vivid prose or poetic meter. Dewey believed that, contemplated in isolation from history, the pedagogical utility of literature like *Hiawatha*, pleasing though it may be to read as poetry, was limited. To the contrary, Dewey's interest was

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha* (New York: Maynard, Merrill & Co., 1899), 67.

piqued by how Longfellow's story dramatized historical problems in the past, such as the Chippewa invention of agriculture. "History as simplified social life gives a proper foundation for teaching the literature of any period," Dewey wrote. "*Hiawatha* or the *Iliad* should only be given in connection with a study of the social life of the people represented in the respective poems."<sup>13</sup> For Dewey, the food shortages experienced by the Chippewa were a problem of social organization. This was, after all, what Jeremiah and Frederick Riggs had attempted to correct in their work as federal Indian farmers in Michigan. In his relationship with Frederick, Dewey had mistakenly learned that Michigan's Indigenous people had, in fact, failed to invent the adequate agricultural basis to sustain themselves. Consequently, Dewey felt that the problem that Indian people seemed to have solved through the adoption of agriculture was something worth exploring in the Laboratory School classroom.

Dewey felt his students could best learn from how the Chippewa had taken their first steps out of "savagery" through the adoption of agriculture if he could use *Hiawatha* to help recreate the social occupations of "primitive" society: "[Social occupations] more than any other one study, more than reading or geography, story-telling or myth, evoke and direct what is most fundamental and vital in the child; that in which he is the heir of all the ages, and through which he recapitulates the progress of the race."<sup>14</sup> What Longfellow fancifully described as a "wrestling match," Dewey could reframe as a question about how corn was planted, harvested, and used by Chippewa people. Herein lies the difference between the Herbartian's and Dewey's use of *Hiawatha*: instead of conjuring the past through simply reading *Hiawatha*, Dewey's Laboratory School could use *Hiawatha* as a guide to reconstruct the experience of Indian people in the

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<sup>13</sup> John Dewey, "The University School" (1896), *Early Works*, 5:441-42.

<sup>14</sup> John Dewey, "The Place of Manual Training in the Elementary Course of Study" (1901), *Middle Works*, 1: 234-36.

actions of his students. For Dewey, Hiawatha was a figure who could help students not only grease the wheels of imagination, but actually learn the lesson imparted by Mondamin (or Riggs, for that matter) through their own experience. To best accomplish that, students need to relive this history themselves. Instead of learning *about* Indians, the Laboratory School offered students a way to think *like* Indians.

As Dewey's curriculum was built around his students' re-enacting of "savage" subjectivity, I will argue in this chapter that Indians were therefore a central concern to Dewey's innovations at the Laboratory School. Dewey used racial recapitulation to shape a highly sophisticated variation of what scholars in Indigenous studies call Playing Indian, a wider cultural practice whereby Euro-American people appropriated the imagined subjectivity of Indigenous people for all sorts of purposes through performative play. I argue that Dewey's Laboratory School history curriculum was an idiosyncratic variant of this wider cultural practice known as Playing Indian, which I dub Re-playing Indian. I will show that rather than an inchoate scheme of wearing feathers or adopting pseudo Indian names, this re-play of the psychological history of humanity served a very specific pedagogical function. Re-playing Indian functioned to align linear historicism and genetic psychology with Dewey's emerging experimental method. This was accomplished when Laboratory School teachers organized their fourth grade classes into a "tribe" and encouraged them to play in a sandbox intended to re-create the world in miniature. With a curriculum designed to re-play the psychological history of humanity in the course of an academic term, Dewey's students would actually experience the mental state of Indians. But this would prove to be a liminal experience; at the end of the fourth grade, Dewey's students ceased Re-playing Indian and re-inhabited their supposedly modern, civilized subjectivity. This interpretation of the Laboratory School curriculum allows us to understand

Dewey's use of racial recapitulation as an idea rooted in the frontier discourse which merged with the wider cultural practice of Playing Indian and make a connection rarely made between Indigenous studies and education history at the center of Dewey's emergent philosophy of education and democracy.

### **Savagery at the Laboratory School**

The history of the Laboratory School and its role in propelling Dewey to the status of leading philosopher of education is well documented elsewhere. For our purposes, a few narrative beats should suffice. In 1894, the Deweys left the relatively pastoral Ann Arbor for the expansive metropolis of Chicago.<sup>15</sup> Most Dewey scholars cite the influence of Chicago's boisterous and growing urban population and his relationship with Jane Addams and her settlement house organization at Hull House as the inspiration for his school.<sup>16</sup> However, the most immediate need that such a school would serve was the education of Dewey's own children. When they arrived in Chicago, the Deweys struggled to find a school. This need was compounded by Dewey's impression of public schooling in Michigan, where nearly a decade spent as an inspector in the state's public schools "had convinced him that much current educational practice was at variance with what psychology taught about learning processes."<sup>17</sup> This need, combined with his evolving thinking about education, led Dewey to an oft-quoted realization: "I sometimes think I will drop teaching phil[osophy]—directly, and teach it via *pedagogy* [original emphasis]," as Dewey wrote to his wife Alice in a November 1894 letter. "There is an image of a school growing up in my mind all the time; a school where some actual and literal constructive activity shall be the centre and source of the whole thing. I can see,

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<sup>15</sup> William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton: 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 316-30; Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 96-110.

<sup>17</sup> Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 78.

theoretically, how the carpentry etc involved building a model house should be the centre of a social training on one side, and a scientific on the other.”<sup>18</sup>

Dewey spent much of 1895 clarifying what such an approach would look like. In his role in the Department of Pedagogy (later renamed the Department of Education) at Chicago, he taught courses such as “Educational Psychology,” “Educational Methodology,” and “Evolution of Educational Theory,” among others.<sup>19</sup> It was in this context that Dewey began to think about Hiawatha. In one of his 1895 lecture on Herbartianism, Dewey even included an exercise for his students to consider “criteria for determining amount of attention to be given to North American Indians in primary education.”<sup>20</sup> By 1896, he thought he had an answer for himself. In January of that year, Dewey opened the University Elementary School at the University of Chicago, which became known as the Laboratory School, or simply the Dewey School.<sup>21</sup> As the name suggests, the experimental school would make Dewey famous as a leader in the field of progressive education.<sup>22</sup> He worked there in partnership with many other educators—many of whom were women—helping to design a school with an enrollment that would grow to over 140 students overseen by twenty-three teachers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Dewey to Alice Chipman Dewey and children, November 1, 1894, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 87.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey, “Lecture IV. The Herbartian Theory of Unification” (1895), *Early Works*, 5:299.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that Dewey’s school was hardly a product of ideas exclusive to his genius. The name which the school eventually became known as—the Laboratory School—was made at the suggestion of Dewey’s collaborator, Ella Flagg Young. Two of the teachers who taught at the school, Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, wrote a book they titled *The Dewey School*. They explained the title was “not because Mr. Dewey as its head ever exercised any of the dominance too often evident in a ‘One man’s school.’ Mr. Dewey was never dominating.” Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, *The Dewey School: The Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, 1896-1903* (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1936), v.

<sup>22</sup> Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 319-30.

<sup>23</sup> Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 320; Jay, *The Education of John Dewey*, 203. On the many progressive women educators who worked with Dewey or taught at the Laboratory School, see Kathleen Cruikshank, “In Dewey’s Shadow: Julia Bulkley and the University of Chicago Department of Pedagogy, 1895-1900,” *History of Education Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 373-406; Anne Durst, *Women Educators In the Progressive Era: The Women Behind Dewey’s Laboratory School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Visitors to the Laboratory School were struck by the school's novel features. The school had opened "Monday morning with twelve children in attendance, and twice that number of parents and visitors," reported one observer in early 1896. On that first day, the new students were led around the building, its playground, garden, and kitchen.<sup>24</sup> Afterwards, they each constructed boxes out of cardboard to house their pencils, followed by a story and physical exercise.<sup>25</sup> "The visitor is impressed, first of all, with the freedom and unconstraint everywhere," wrote Harriet A. Farrand in her 1896 account of the school. When Farrand visited, there were about sixty pupils at the school, aged five to thirteen. The student body was divided up into "groups according to age, ability, or acquirements."<sup>26</sup> Farrand followed students around the school, where she observed them in the classroom, at play, and in lessons on the grounds. Farrand noted in wonder that she might as well have "stumbled into a very big family, where every one was having the happiest kind of time."<sup>27</sup>

However, it did not take long before observers at the Laboratory School began to report another strange sight: young children acting quite like Indians. "None of the children seemed to have any books as they came up," one visitor remarked. Instead, "a small boy was carrying a large Indian blanket."<sup>28</sup> Another observed how "the study of history is preceded by that of primitive culture. The children are told of the savages who dwelt in cave, hut, or wigwam. They are shown pictures and models in illustration, and questioned as to the natural resources upon which savages must depend."<sup>29</sup> On one occasion, Farrand observed some students in the

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<sup>24</sup> The school changed locations around Hyde Park over the course of its institutional life. See Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, FN: 59, 348 for a list of the various locations.

<sup>25</sup> "The Model School," *University of Chicago Weekly*, January 16, 1896, 107, cited in Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 88.

<sup>26</sup> Harriet A. Farrand, "Dr. Dewey's University Elementary School," *Journal of Education* 48 (1898), 172.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Laura Runyon, "A Day with the New Education," *The Chautauquan* 30, no. 6 (1900): 589.

<sup>29</sup> H. M. Hodgman, "A New Departure in Education," *Education*, 21 (December 1900): 235.



basement, where there was a carpentry shop. She noticed how the boys were tasked with making “their respective pieces of work.” While one student was making a model of a block house “such as the New England settlers used for a refuge in times of war,” she noticed a second boy “manufacturing a weapon like those supposed to have been used in prehistoric times, to be exhibited in the history class.”<sup>30</sup> All of this was somewhat disconcerting, leading a visiting educator to express concern that such things would only “inflame the minds of our little civilized Aryans with the ideal of a savage Indian life.”<sup>31</sup>

Just what, exactly, was happening inside the Dewey School?<sup>32</sup>

The boy who was creating a weapon in Dewey’s shop class was hardly whittling away his time in an errant pursuit. Instead, he was enacting Dewey’s unique history curriculum at the Laboratory School. Determined to recover the historical function of shared social occupations, Dewey had created a curriculum that would set his students on a re-enactment of human history. When seven-year-old children became students at Dewey’s Laboratory School, they began a curriculum where they would study “the historical development of industry and invention—starting with man as a savage and carrying him through the typical phases of his progress upward, until the iron age is reached and man begins to enter upon a civilized career.” Fourth grade was the appropriate age to begin such study, Dewey felt, because seven-year-olds corresponded with the adult capacities of the “savage mind” of Indian people. “There is certain nearness, after all, in the child to primitive forms of life,” he proffered. “They are much more simple than existing institutions.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Farrand, “Dr. Dewey’s University Elementary School,” 172.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Blow to William Torrey Harris, June 12, 1896, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the historiography on the Laboratory School, see Anthony J. Dosen, “The influence of John Dewey’s educational philosophy on the curriculum of the University Laboratory School, 1905-1928.” PhD diss., Marquette University, 1997.

<sup>33</sup> John Dewey, *The School and Society* (1899), *Middle Works*, 1:63.

This approach was consistent with Dewey's emerging method of pragmatism. As Henry Cowles notes in his history of the scientific method, when Dewey began the Laboratory School, he was already in the midst of a stream of British empirical and American pragmatist philosophers from Charles Darwin to Herbert Spencer to William James who were puzzling out the contours of scientific method by invoking the psychology of "savage" people. During this period, "the 'savage' and the 'scientist' were not as far apart as some might have hoped," Cowles writes. "Put simply: being a good scientist meant being 'savage,' too. Intuition, spontaneity, and the ability to throw out solutions to problems—these were the stuff of 'savage intellect,' but they were also essential to abstract scientific theorizing."<sup>34</sup> As the United States' resident "savage" thinkers, Indians therefore represented to Dewey a ready-made and enticing way to illustrate how experimentalism had emerged out of human history. For this reason, Indians and re-enactment of their experience became an important pedagogical tool at the Laboratory School.

As Phil Deloria argues in his book of the same name, *Playing Indian* is the cultural phenomenon of mostly non-Indian Euro-Americans imagining themselves as Indians in order to activate a number of cultural associations they affixed to Indian people, including but not limited to their perceived physical vitality, freedom from political authority, and essential distinction from European peoples as children of the New World. Deloria argues that time and time again throughout American history, Euro-Americans have turned to feathers, headdresses, buckskins, dream catchers, and multi-syllabic Indian-sounding names as means to accomplish their own various cultural critiques through their appropriation of representations of Indian people. *Playing Indian* is, as Deloria notes, a uniquely Euro-American cultural appetite "to savor both civilized

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Cowles, *The Scientific Method*, 140.

order and savage freedom at the same time.”<sup>35</sup> Rather than make such a performance impossible, Deloria argues that “the contradictions embedded in noble savagery have themselves been the precondition for the formation of American identities.”<sup>36</sup> Whether to signal their political defiance of Great Britain, critiquing the forces of modernity, or seeking an “authentic” connection with nature, Playing Indian offered Euro-Americans a peculiar way to perform rituals of American distinction. This has made Indian Play a reliable expression of a national “self-identity” for Euro-Americans long after the time of the American Revolution.

In particular, Deloria argues that the fin-de-siècle period when the United States seemed to cross an invisible threshold into modernity became a particularly popular time for Playing Indian. Euro-Americans found that, beginning in the 1890s with the closure of the frontier, imagining themselves as Indians opened a path for them to traverse the alienating terrain of a changing social landscape marred by industrialization, urbanization, and technological innovation to recover a sense of American authenticity. As Indigenous people presumably disappeared before the advance of the modern United States, Euro-Americans came to believe that Indians had become worthy subjects of emulation in order to memorialize and preserve anti-modern attributes that were under threat by modernity. Trachtenberg calls such late nineteenth century performances as pageants, parades, and woodcraft movements “institutional forms of mimesis.”<sup>37</sup> By the time Dewey opened the Laboratory School, a new era of Playing Indian had reached fever pitch.

One of the reasons why scholars have overlooked the Laboratory School as a stage for Playing Indian is because it is typically framed as a kind of performance. Material props—

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<sup>35</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 245.

feathers, buckskin, headdresses, war paint, moccasins, etc.—are the hallmarks of Playing Indian. “The donning of Indian clothes moved ideas from brains to bodies,” notes Deloria. “There, identity was not so much imagined as it was performed, materialized through one’s body and through the witness and recognition of others.” Students at the Laboratory School may not have sported feathers or buckskin in the classroom (at least as the few surviving photographs can reveal) but they were explicitly engaged in a form of play that was intended to make Indian subjectivity come to life. As Deloria notes, “Play was powerful, for it not only made meanings, but made them *real*.”<sup>38</sup> This power of play was precisely why Dewey eschewed the Herbartian’s use of *Hiawatha* in favor of his own sense of play.

To render what happened at the Laboratory School as a variation of the wider phenomenon of Playing Indian, I call Dewey’s history curriculum a form of pedagogical Playing Indian. I use the term pedagogical to orient the attention of scholars of all disciplines to the ways in which “Indianness” as an imagined subjectivity has often been adopted by Euro-American students at the behest of their teachers in order to serve some learning objective. By using this technical term for teaching and learning, I mean to draw a distinction between *children* participating in the cultural phenomenon of playing Indian versus *students* Playing Indian as a part of a given curriculum in an educational setting. Whether it be a classroom, school, theater, or summer camp, the emphasis on pedagogy is important; after all, Playing Indian itself has deep roots in an association between savagery and childhood psychology. For this reason, Dewey should not be entirely exempted from the assumptions of this broader phenomenon. Indeed, like many of his contemporaries, Dewey found that “archaic Indianness served incorporative,

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<sup>38</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 184.

progressive impulses.”<sup>39</sup> Deloria again: “To be modern, one acted out a heuristic encounter with the primitive. Indian Others, constructed firmly outside American society and temporality, represented this break not only historically, but also racially, socially, and developmentally.”<sup>40</sup> Looking forward required looking back. By locating the origins of experimentalism in civilized thinking surpassing “savage” psychology, Dewey was convinced he could use the Laboratory School to chart the future of experimental education.

Beyond embodying racial recapitulation theory’s genetic psychology, many adults believed that children had a unique capacity to grasp Indian authenticity through mimicry. As Alan Ryan notes of the Laboratory School, racial recapitulation “meant in schools ... that the curriculum was supposed to be governed by the individual child’s gradual movement from an infant in which he or she mimicked the mental and social relations of primitive people to an adult life in which he or she was a full member of a fully civilized society.”<sup>41</sup> Yet Ryan’s treatment does not quite render Dewey’s curriculum in full. Students were not just mimicking Indians, they were attempting to embody them in experience. Deloria underscores this perspective from Indigenous studies to suggest how progressive educators “grounded in ethnographic detail” came to believe that “children imitated the meanings locked into Indianness, one of which was the idea that a person could make significant connections with the world by mimicking it.”<sup>42</sup> While Dewey would have disputed the characterization of his Laboratory School curriculum as a form of mimicry, the presumed power of childhood mimesis was an important factor for the appeal of Playing Indian to educators during this period. “Mimesis was not simply the copying of something Other,” Deloria notes. Instead, pedagogical Playing Indian “imitated and appropriated

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<sup>39</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 100.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>41</sup> Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 140.

<sup>42</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 117-120.

the Other viscerally through the medium of their bodies.”<sup>43</sup> In the case of the Laboratory School, it was the medium of the body *and* mind.

### **Setting the (Savage) Stage: Racial Recapitulation through Social Occupations**

By the time he opened the school in 1896, Dewey had settled on a way to use racial recapitulation to structure its curriculum. In fact, the general structure of the school was derived from two major premises Dewey derived from racial recapitulation. As Dewey wrote, “Now, if there is anything at all in the doctrine of recapitulation, it indicates the probability, first, that we shall find the child a reservoir of motor energy, urgent for discharge upon his environment; and, second, that this will be likely to take forms akin to that of the social occupations through which humanity has maintained and developed itself.” First, Dewey surmised that genetic psychology offered a blueprint for how children were reproducing the progress of mankind’s evolution, then students moving through the savage state represented problem-solving beings suited to learn maximally from the various dilemmas of lived experience. By encountering, experimenting, and overcoming such obstacles as Indians-as-savages had once experienced, children would grow, progress, and develop—just as humanity seemed to have done along a linear timeline from savagery to civilization. The trick would be to re-create in the classroom of the Laboratory School the problematic situations that had once confronted Indians.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, Dewey believed that the process could be organized through a curriculum that anticipated the historical “social occupations” that human societies had created in order to live in

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>44</sup> In building a curriculum that would re-create the problematic situations of savage life, Dewey thought that he could also finally put to bed the debate over student motivation: “If the subject-matter of the lessons be such as to have an appropriate place within the expanding consciousness of the child, if it grows out of his own past doings, thinkings, and sufferings, and grows into application in further achievements and receptivities [sic], then no device or trick of method has to be resorted to in order to enlist ‘interest,’” he wrote. Dewey, “Child and Curriculum” (1902), *Middle Works*, 2:288.

various environments. If these social occupations could be recreated in the classroom, they could be made ready for students to inhabit in their own recapitulation of human development.

Referring to occupations within racial recapitulation, Dewey wrote, “If there be any measure of truth in these conceptions, then the forms of occupation, constructive work, manual training which are employed in the school, must be assigned a central position.”<sup>45</sup> As Laboratory School teachers Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camps Edwards attested, “The main hypothesis [of the school] was that life itself, especially these occupations and association which serve man’s chief needs, should furnish the ground experience of the education of children.”<sup>46</sup>

Dewey’s emphasis on these social occupations was often misconstrued by other educators and scholars to be an endorsement of vocational education. As Herbert Kleibard rightly notes, “Dewey took pains to disabuse his readers from believing that the primary purpose of introducing active occupations in the curriculum of the school was anything but educational and social.”<sup>47</sup> Emphasizing racial recapitulation was one way that Dewey tried to signal that his intentions were serving his naturalism, not vocational education. As Kleibard observes of the Laboratory School, “Typical ‘occupations’ included raising a pair of sheep, building a clubhouse, and growing and preparing food. Dewey was not preparing children to become shepherds in the middle of Chicago or, for that matter, woodworkers or farmers or chefs.”<sup>48</sup> Instead, Dewey was using social occupations that had been developed over the course of human history to “bridge the gap that typically separates knowledge from action in schools.”<sup>49</sup> As Joel Spring writes, “Dewey felt that a community had existed in America’s past because the

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<sup>45</sup> John Dewey, “The Place of Manual Training in the Elementary Course of Study” (1901), *Middle Works*, 1:234-36.

<sup>46</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, vi.

<sup>47</sup> On Dewey’s place in the debate over vocational education, see Herbert Kleibard, *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and American Curriculum, 1876-1946* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 232-36.

<sup>48</sup> Kleibard, *Schooled to Work*, 232.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

individual had been aware of the total industrial process, and this awareness joined people into a community through a sense of working together.”<sup>50</sup> For Dewey, racial recapitulation was a solution to this problem. In 1901, Clara Mitchell clarified this idea as it would structure the history curriculum of the Laboratory School: “The history lessons will begin a comparison of the industries of the aboriginal Americans, *contrasting their conditions with those of the early colonists* [my emphasis]. It is hoped that the view of these primitive beginnings may help the children to a better understanding of industries of our own time.”<sup>51</sup> In this fashion, Indian occupations were meant to be understood as foils to modern ones.

Furthermore, racial recapitulation pointed the way for how Dewey and his teachers might extract abstract problematic situations from historical concreteness. This was an important way to convert Dewey’s naturalism into the classroom—or, as Dewey wrote to Alice, to “drop teaching phil[osophy]—directly, and teach it via *pedagogy*.” Robert Westbrook notes that such “Deweyan pedagogy” as it was first defined at the Laboratory School held that knowledge “was the product of man’s efforts to solve the problems which confronted him in experience, but, as a formal body of knowledge, it had to be abstracted from the problematic situations that originally occasioned its development.”<sup>52</sup> According to Westbrook’s treatment of the Laboratory School, “the subject matter of the curriculum was the embodied experience of the human race, and, as such, it was that toward which the immature experience of the child pointed.”<sup>53</sup> Fallace offers a more refined interpretation, characterizing Dewey’s use of racial recapitulation as a means to demonstrate that “the historical unraveling of the innovations of the race was the most effective

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<sup>50</sup> Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1985* (New York: Longman Inc., 1986), 174.

<sup>51</sup> Clara I. Mitchell, “Fifth Grade,” in *The Elementary School Journal* 1, no. 6 (February 1901): 558. Among a slew of Smithsonian Bureau of Ethnology reports from the 1880s, Mitchell cited Hubert Howe Bancroft’s *Native Races*, Lewis Henry Morgan’s *League of the Iroquois*, and George Catlin’s *North American Indians* as foundational texts for the Laboratory School curriculum.

<sup>52</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 100.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



way to organize content, not because it necessarily made learning inherently easier, but because the growth of the race and the growth of the individual occurred through the same stages of consciousness when faced with similar environmental and social problems.”<sup>54</sup>

Dewey underscored this particular iteration of racial recapitulation as distinct from the Herbartian’s cultural epoch theory. As Dewey noted in 1896, “It does not seem to me that the upholders of the theory have clearly recognized that if the correspondence is not exact, the standard, educationally, is the sequence in the child, not in the race. It is a question of psychology, of child-study, not of race history. To study first the race side, and finding certain epochs then to conclude to the same in the child is unjustifiable.”<sup>55</sup> He further clarified his critique of Herbartianism’s cultural epoch theory in a series of lectures at Brigham Young Academy from November 1901 to May 1902. While Dewey warned against the absurdity of a literal translation of racial recapitulation into the classroom, he did not disavow the utility of racial recapitulation to structure curriculum at the Laboratory School:

Many educational philosophers say that the child is, so to speak, a sort of savage originally, and that just as the race goes step by step from the lower to the higher plane, so the child must go through similar stages of evolution. I think that if this idea is carried out too literally it becomes absurd. [Students] have to remember time, especially when they get to staying too long in some of the primitive phases. The thing is rather absurd if we take it too literally; but in a certain sense, the child’s original interest in all these studies must be developed gradually, like the race’s interest in them.<sup>56</sup>

To illustrate what he felt was the appropriate role of racial recapitulation in shaping curriculum, Dewey offered an extended example by way of the production of textiles at the Laboratory School.<sup>57</sup> Students would best understand the process and issues of modern textile

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<sup>54</sup> Fallace, “Repeating the Race Experience,” 394.

<sup>55</sup> John Dewey, “Interpretation of the Culture-Epoch Theory” (1896), *Early Works*, 5:233-36.

<sup>56</sup> Dewey, “Educational Lectures Before Brigham Young Academy” (1901), *Later Works*, 17: 238.

<sup>57</sup> Dewey drew his examples in works such as *The School and Society* from the Laboratory School. As he told his audience of those who had assembled to hear lectures from which the book was adapted, “I have taken the liberty of

production if they themselves re-experienced what Dewey called “a sort of panorama of the historical progress of the world in that direction.” Starting around age six, a student at the Laboratory School might be taught about sheep—where the animals lived, what they needed to survive, and why they produced wool. Then, an instructor could invite the student to examine a sample of wool and imagine what would need to be done in order to shear and clean it. Once the wool had been gathered, Dewey suggested that the student would then be tutored in how wool was first processed into yarn. Using contemporary anthropological evidence, an instructor would re-create the means by which Indian people produced yarn so that the student could reinhabit this savage psychology and the phase in the psychological development of mankind that it represented. “It is surprising to see what excellent yarn little children of six or seven would succeed in spinning with their fingers, or from simple devices such as the savage tribes still use,” Dewey remarked to his audience.<sup>58</sup> Dewey went so far as to remark that in the course of this activity at his Laboratory School, “Each child made a design kindred in idea to those of the Navajo blankets, and the one which seemed best adapted to the work in hand was selected.”<sup>59</sup>

Dewey suggested that the next step was for students to weave “using the looms which are still actually in use by uncivilized people; next taking the more complicated devices, those which involve hand and foot power, and getting an insight into conditions of colonial civilization in this country and the methods of spinning and weaving of the sixteenth or seventeenth century.”

Through leading a student through the transition from the “simple devices ... in use by uncivilized people” such as the Navajo to foot-powered looms of colonial America, an educator

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introducing a great deal of illustrative matter from the work of the University Elementary School, that in some measure you may appreciate the way in which the ideas presented work themselves out in actual practice.” Dewey, *The School and Society*, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Dewey, “Group IV. Historical Development of Inventions and Occupations,” 223-224.

<sup>59</sup> Dewey, *The School and Society*, 31.

could guide a student upon the historical path of the development of clothing which led to their own time.

The construction of looms also afforded boys an opportunity to learn the basics of carpentry by constructing their wooden foot looms themselves. “I saw the other day a very good reel which a boy of twelve had invented in order to reel several skeins of yarn at the same time,” Dewey related. “I do not suppose he could patent it, but so far as he was concerned it was an invention which he had worked out with his own head.” In this way, Dewey believed that the child had learned to construct it as if human beings were inventing it for the first time. While the boy could not patent the loom (as such devices had already been invented), its construction *would* be an original breakthrough in the child’s individual experience. This curriculum would deposit students in the present, along with some insights regarding biology, history, and carpentry acquired along the way in the course of humanity’s progress from savagery to civilization.<sup>60</sup>

While this sentiment may appear to verge on romanticization of the past, Dewey did not idealize these occupations as artifacts of a bucolic, premodern life; instead, the loom activity illustrated how the U.S. settlement of the frontier had provided a nationwide course in the cultivation of social intelligence, the growth from a mode of accommodation to control of one’s environment. “The industrial history of man is not a materialistic or merely utilitarian affair,” Dewey insisted. “It is a matter of intelligence. Its record is the record of how man learned to think, to think to some effect, to transform the conditions of life so that life itself became a

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<sup>60</sup> The Laboratory School’s social occupations may have been rendered with an eye to the past, but they do not appear to have been to be strictly policed by gender norms associated with premodern life. The Laboratory School seems to have channeled a “primal, ahistorical” brand of gendered labor. The boys cooked, wove, and did laundry alongside the girls (the boys alone did seem to make furniture and work in carpentry, however). When these gendered boundaries were policed, they seemed to conform to Euro-American norms about gender, not those of the imagined savages the students were emulating.

different thing.”<sup>61</sup> This is why the loom activity began with students weaving like the Navajo but ended with their acquaintance with steam-powered manufactories of cities like Chicago. The social occupations of American Indian people were an evocative antecedent iteration of how clothing had been made, which had simply been surpassed by that of the modern United States.

In aligning the use of wool or clay pots with a certain psychological stage in the Laboratory School curriculum, Dewey was careful not to take racial recapitulation too far. “It should also be noted that the use of material from primitive life does not mean that it is supposed to have any pre-ordained or exclusive value in reference to this period of child life,” he conceded. There was no psychological teleology in his formulation, he insisted; his curriculum of social occupations was historicism in action, or at least history on re-play: “It is simply one of many possible modes of approach, selected chiefly because its greater simplicity gives a means of analyzing *present* life [original emphasis],” Dewey wrote.<sup>62</sup> Nor was re-creating the transit from from savage to civilized experience merely a cheap trick to capture the attention of children with novelty of changing social occupations: “The child who is interested in the way in which men lived, the tools they had to do with, the new inventions they made, the transformations of life that arose from the power and leisure thus gained, is eager to repeat like processes in his own action, to remake utensils, to reproduce processes, to rehandle materials,” Dewey argued.<sup>63</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that Dewey’s plan for social occupations at the Laboratory School rendered his critique of the Herbartarian’s cultural epoch theory hypocritical. Lawrence Cremin saw hypocrisy: “In the ordered progression of theme activities from preliterate man to

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<sup>61</sup> Dewey, “History for the Educator,” 194.

<sup>62</sup> Dewey, “Group IV. Historical Development of Inventions and Occupations,” 223-24.

<sup>63</sup> Dewey, “History for the Educator,” 194.

modern society there were patent vestiges of the very recapitulation theory Dewey attacked.”<sup>64</sup>

Laura Runyon, who wrote her master’s thesis on the history curriculum at the Laboratory School, tried to square Dewey’s circle when she wrote that its students “have been taken though the history of the development of the race, not because a child necessarily lives through these stages in his development, but because in passing through these stages he can most easily gain the acquired inheritance of the race.”<sup>65</sup> But from the point of view of Indigenous history, the lesson Dewey gleaned from racial recapitulation is anything but hypocrisy. What Dewey objected to in Herbartarian cultural epoch theory was the use of literature such as *Hiawatha* as a medium for the reconstruction of the experience of savage life; he never objected to the pedagogical utility of savage life for producing civilized boys and girls in the first place. In fact, due to his immersion in the Great Lakes’ frontier discourse, he came to embrace it.

Of course, Dewey made a distinction between re-enactment and simulation. Dewey did not want children to learn how to feed themselves by throwing them into the woods and expecting them to invent hunting to satiate their need to eat, or to go cold in the winter in order to stimulate a need for wool and a loom. Insofar as racial recapitulation theory could guide the curriculum, Dewey maintained that “in one important respect, however, there is a fundamental difference between the child and primitive man. Necessity, the pressure of getting a living, was upon the savage. The child is, or should be, protected against economic stress and strain.” Rather, Dewey imagined that the Laboratory School could re-create this historical experience through a kind of

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<sup>64</sup> Lawrence Cremin, *Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage, 1964), 141, cited in Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 140.

<sup>65</sup> Laura Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” *The Elementary School Teacher* 3, No 10 (June 1903), 694-705. See also Fallace, “Repeating the Race Experience,” 395.

simulated play. “The expression of energy takes in his case a form of play—play which is not amusement, but the intrinsic exhibition of inherent powers so as to exercise and develop them.”<sup>66</sup>

In this way, Dewey understood play as a mode of activity by which Laboratory School students could embody the subjectivity of Indian people in a fashion that would facilitate their learning. In an essay on mental development in 1900, Dewey offered an account of play drawn from his observations at the Laboratory School. Play, Dewey wrote, was a chance for children to take spontaneous action in creative ways. Unlike labor or some other directed sort of activity, what made play unique is that it was an end unto itself, what Dewey called “its own motive and justification.” For this reason, Dewey theorized a shared node between play and art, the power of creation and make-believe. Both fostered a kind of creativity within certain boundaries of possibility. At the same time, Dewey acknowledged that play was never purely original. Children’s play could be simple acts like fiddling with a toy or making a kind of sound that passed for music, but other forms of play—such as playing house or hide and go seek—were constrained by images derived from cultural surroundings. Though Dewey conceded that play was a process by which images from popular discourse could enter the imagination of children, he remained confident that children were the ultimate arbiter of their expression. “Others may guide the play, may model or introduce imagery, but whatever image is added must become the child’s own in order for it to have any possibility of further suggestion,” Dee Russell explains of Dewey’s account of play. “Through the play activity, the child builds the storehouse of connections and interactions that will provide richness and depth to future thought.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Dewey, “The Place of Manual Training in the Elementary Course of Study,” 234-36.

<sup>67</sup> Dee Russell, “Cultivating the Imagination in Music Education: John Dewey’s Theory of Imagination and Its Relation to the Chicago Laboratory School,” *Educational Theory* 48, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 193-210.

Dewey made this point about the tension between pure imagination and cultural limitations in the nature of play, ironically, by making reference to Indians: “The play of imagery therefore has certain limits within which it must work,” Dewey noted. “In certain games, as playing Indians or soldiers, etc. a quite complex variety of image content may be introduced.”<sup>68</sup> The game of “cowboys and Indians” was itself one such “image content” of childhood play. Rather than interrogate how the frontier discourse might supply students with such images for play in the first place, Dewey was instead fascinated that when children played such games as “cowboys and Indians,” their creative energies were invested fully in their activity. “The child’s only want is to do what he is doing to the full,” Dewey wrote. “If it is to build a house, it is to build as high a one as possible; if it is playing soldier, to have as much parade and display as possible; if hunting Indians, to have the maximum of sanguinary destruction.”<sup>69</sup> In this statement, Dewey’s use of the term “sanguine” clearly means red or red-blooded, which is not only a reference to Indigenous people’s racialization as “red men,” but also stands in for both the vitality and exuberance of youth.<sup>70</sup> When Dewey thought about play, Indians were never far from his mind’s eye.

Meanwhile, as Dewey was writing this philosophy, designing curriculum, and observing the Laboratory School, instructors like Mayhew and Edwards were busy realizing it in their teaching. In their roles as instructors, they were clear-eyed about the use of racial recapitulation as the basis for what would become Re-playing Indian. “It could be said that the child is like the savage in ability but not in capability, for behind the former lies the great heritage of civilization,” they wrote. “It follows that the activities of primitive peoples are in line with the

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<sup>68</sup> John Dewey, “Mental Development” (1900), *Middle Works*, 1: 212.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>70</sup> Dewey, “Mental Development,” 212.

child's interests and under wise direction this study can provide the avenues for his best effort."<sup>71</sup> As Laboratory School teachers clearly articulated, play was the essential mode for history instruction at the school. "'Play' is the mode of attack," explained Runyon.<sup>72</sup> It is to that mode of attack that we can now turn, when Dewey combined racial recapitulation and the frontier discourse to produce a pedagogical practice which I term Re-playing Indian.

#### **Fourth Grade History Curriculum**

Amongst the surviving records of the Laboratory School, teachers Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards have provided the clearest window into the centrality of Re-playing Indian to the curriculum at Dewey's school. The two not only taught at the Laboratory School, but published some of their firsthand accounts in their 1936 book, *The Dewey School*. Westbrook called it a "full account ... filled with evidence of the considerable success Dewey and his colleagues achieved in translating his theories into practice."<sup>73</sup> However, scholarly treatments of their book rarely notice that Mayhew and Edwards' book also captures the many explicit instances that students were enjoined to Play Indian at the school.

The epicenter of the Re-playing Indian at the Laboratory School was the fourth-grade history curriculum. According to Mayhew and Edwards, it was here that Dewey and his educators at the Laboratory School explicitly used racial recapitulation theory to create curriculum for students to reinhabit the psychic lifeworld of "savage mind." In particular, when students reached the age of seven years old, they began a year-long exercise in the study of "Primitive Life." This was a kind of performance that asked children to imagine themselves as Indians, based on Dewey and the Laboratory School's belief that children actually exhibited a

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<sup>71</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 99.

<sup>72</sup> Runyon, "Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School," 694-96.

<sup>73</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 102.



psychic state akin to that of savage people. As Mayhew and Edwards asserted, “It could be said with truth that the fundamental interests of a child at this stage of growth and of a savage are the same.”<sup>74</sup> Dewey’s child-centered curriculum, made famous by the Laboratory School and a hallmark of his progressive education, began as a form of Playing Indian.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to note that the category of savage in fourth grade history curriculum was fungible. It changed based on the preference of the teacher. In their 1936 account of the school’s history, Mayhew and Edwards explained that while “the study of primitive life was always present in the curriculum at this stage of growth, by reason of its imaginative nature it varied widely from year to year.” The re-enactment of history meant that students would play the part of savage people, most often rendered as American Indians. “Indian, Eskimo, African savage tribes” were all tried.<sup>76</sup> However, Dewey and his Laboratory School instructors came to feel that “better results might to obtained by attacking the subject-matter of greater unity and broader dimensions, and one which furnished types of life that would be more universal.”<sup>77</sup>

This finding is worth parsing. What Mayhew and Edwards concluded was that the Laboratory School history curriculum seemed to work best when it imagined the history of humanity in an almost abstract way, a tale told through “pre-historic cave men” set vaguely upon some stretch of planet Earth. This is underscored by the fact that the text they read to the children throughout their re-enactment was Stanley Waterloo’s *The Story of Ab: A Tale of the Time of the Cave Man*, a novel that imagined a Stone Age boy and his adventures. As they noted, “Some classes preferred the *Story of Ab* as told by the teacher; others demanded the book be read in

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<sup>74</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> See Fallace, “Repeating the Race Experience,” 394-98; Fallace, “John Dewey on History Education and the Historical Method,” *Education and Culture* 26, no. 2 (2010): 20-35.

<sup>76</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 100, FN 3.

<sup>77</sup> Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” 698.

serial fashion.”<sup>78</sup> Through their sandbox version of human history, Mayhew and Edwards explained that “though constant dramatization of imagined situations and behavior, these children had an early glimpse into the beginnings of the social organizations of tribal life, in its various stages of development.”<sup>79</sup> Despite the geographically abstract and “pre-historic” setting, the cavemen of the distant past tended to blur with Indians of the more recent distant-past. In Clara Mitchell’s 1902 class, for example, she taught students “stories of earliest weaving” by exhibiting “mats, curtains, and baskets among cave men and Indians.” As far as Dewey was concerned, Stanley Waterloo’s “pre-historic” setting and Longfellow’s epic wilderness were fungible within the Laboratory School history curriculum: “The literary idealizations of such life—like Ab and Hiawatha—are used not as the basis and end of the work, but as means of developing and vivifying the personal realization of some of its features,” Dewey clarified.<sup>80</sup> As we shall see, it did not take long before American Indians crept back into the scheme; imagining themselves as Indians was too irresistible to teachers and students alike.

Re-playing Indian began when Mayhew and Edwards inaugurated the fourth grade history curriculum by asking their students to imagine themselves going backwards in time: “The journey back to the long ago was made by the old, old road of ‘Let’s pretend,’ dropping along the way, one by one, all the comforts and conveniences of present foods, clothing, and shelter.”<sup>81</sup> It was at this early juncture that Laboratory School teachers might employ *Hiawatha* to give their students a little inspiration as they began to “pretend.” Katherine Camp later specified how she used *Hiawatha* to assist her students by priming their imaginations and as a guidepost for Re-playing Indian: “The secondary reason for selecting [*Hiawatha*] is that only in this way—that is,

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<sup>78</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 103, FN 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

<sup>80</sup> Dewey, “Group IV. Historical Development of Inventions and Occupations,” 223-24.

<sup>81</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 100.

through the use by the child of his experience—can he become conscious of that experience, and rationalize what otherwise would be in danger of becoming a very complex and confused succession of impressions.”<sup>82</sup>

Mayhew and Edward took their first step towards Dewey’s method when they traded literature like *Hiawatha* for Re-playing Indian when, first, they organized the class into a “tribe.” This tribe was then dispatched a sandbox about four feet by four feet. This was the canvas upon which the ancient world would be rendered in miniature.<sup>83</sup> “The class is his tribe, and the sandbox its habitat, which moss from the greenhouse can convert into the pastures of a river valley, or stones and clay into a mountain region where caves form a nature shelter.”<sup>84</sup> As a group, these students began to re-play the history of mankind. They were first given materials associated with savage life, mostly sticks and stones. “Much time ... was spent in experimental work with the materials which primitive peoples would use, and then the children more easily originate and dramatize the story side of the study,” a teacher noted.<sup>85</sup> The teachers then led students through a discussion of fire, making weapons, heating stones, finding refuge from storms in caves—all the while suggesting something about the nature of combustion, geology, and weather. “First the interest is only in the story,” explained Mayhew in 1903. “Gradually the children identify themselves with the persons concerned, and their interest becomes more dramatic. The story is continued by the children, with occasional help from the teacher.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Katherine Camp, “Primitive History in Primary Groups of the Laboratory School,” *Elementary School Journal* 3, no. 10 (1903): 668.

<sup>83</sup> Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” 695.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>85</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 101.

<sup>86</sup> Camp, “Primitive History in Primary Groups of the Laboratory School,” 674.



Figure 3.2. *Map project at Dewey Laboratory School, ca. 1896-1903*, John Dewey Photograph Collection, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.

Pursuant to Dewey's philosophy, such problems as the invention of fire offered Laboratory School teachers a way to use the re-enactment to present problematic situations to the students to collectively solve. As Runyon notes, "The conditions of the environment must be made to yield means of subsistence, therefore, if this tribe were to continue. How this could be done was the first problem given to children."<sup>87</sup> For example, hunting animals for food offered the students what Dewey later dubbed a "problematic situation." Teachers prodded the students to brainstorm how their tribe might find food in such an environment. The children decided that their tribe would find sustenance in "berries, fruits, roots, and animal food" that they imagined

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<sup>87</sup> Runyon, "Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School," 696.

might populate the world of the sandbox.<sup>88</sup> Foraging for berries, fruits, and roots was one thing, but catching an animal? The tribe was asked to resolve that difficulty. “The first inventions suggested were improvements in weapons.”<sup>89</sup> Members of the tribe were then given flint, granite, and limestone, and asked by their teachers to experiment with each to see which might hold an edge. As Runyon notes, “The stick and stone united by a thong may make the spear the first invention and provide a weapon for attack and defense.”<sup>90</sup> Then, archery was examined “and its advantages for the tribe which possessed it.”<sup>91</sup> By such promptings of their teachers, “the children passed imaginatively through different stages of living,” as if they themselves had invented the spear, the bow, and the arrow themselves, thus solving the problematic situations posed by the environment.<sup>92</sup>

These acts of invention were not limited to technological artifacts. When the tribe agreed to move to an area in the sandbox that simulated the Great Plains, Mayhew and Edwards showed how this change in environment could lead to the development of greater social cooperation: “The necessity of hunting the mastodon was suggested by the children as the reason for a combination with a tribe near-by.”<sup>93</sup> If they were to create a new kind of social organization, the teachers asked the students how their new tribe would organize themselves. Who would lead them?

According to Mayhew and Edwards, the students stumbled here. So far in the “history” of this imagined tribe, Mayhew and Edwards had framed their re-enactment of a distant and remote pre-history. For this reason, the students seemed to struggle to conjure up the name of a familiar

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<sup>88</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 101.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” 696.

<sup>91</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 102.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

“cave man” who might lead their tribe. In the end, Mayhew, Edwards, and their students resolved the problem not by turning to Waterloo’s story to populate their imagined history; the students and their teachers instead resorted to their own knowledge of Indian people in the present. “As they had no suggestions ready, they were told the story of how people would be named in those days,” reported Mayhew and Edwards. To assist their students, “they were told the story of how each young Indian earned his name by what he had done.” Inspired by the concrete reference to Indian people, the students quickly adopted the name of an Indian person as their leader: “Instead of suggesting a name for their leader from the exploits of one of their tribe, they promptly transferred the name of a young Indian to their leader.”<sup>94</sup> While we will never know which contemporary American Indian person was selected by the Laboratory School “tribe” to lead them on their journey to civilization, we do know that Mayhew and Edwards continued their re-creation of history in ways that further caught up to American Indian people in the present.

For instance, when the tribe encountered a need for the storage of food and water, Mayhew and Edwards prompted the students to consider that they had encountered a river on their way to their new simulated Great Plains hunting grounds. What materials might they use from this feature of the landscape to solve their problem? “One child suddenly recalled the fact that he himself had found clay in the banks overhanging a small river,” Mayhew and Edwards wrote. The two educators encouraged the idea and used the occasion to engage the students in a number of “experimental activities incident to this phase of the study.” These included geometry in the design of pottery, the procedure for making ceramics, and studying “the source of the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 104.

black used by the Navajo Indians.”<sup>95</sup> Much to Mayhew and Edward’s apparent delight, the clay exercise also activated the students to connect their activities to the previous lesson about Indian naming conventions: “They frequently discussed the individuals they were impersonating, some choosing names for themselves. One called himself Clay-finder.”<sup>96</sup> Clay in the sandbox was not the only occasion when the product of the student’s labor was modeled explicitly on American Indians. Beyond the sandbox activity, Clara Mitchell attested that “there will be modeling and baking of primitive dishes like those once made by the Indian tribes of this region,” she wrote. “These will be decorated with paints in original designs.”<sup>97</sup>

Before long, teachers like Mayhew and Edwards would populate the sandbox with other virtual tribes. When they were asked to exchange the fruits of their labors with their imagined neighbors via trade and barter, the Laboratory School tribe’s provincial world expanded. Soon, they realized that their neighboring tribes had been producing different kinds of material culture based on the various environments that their teachers had imagined at the edges of the sandbox. Mayhew and Edwards explained that a tribe which had “selected a fertile plain” might have invented agriculture and metallurgy by growing wheat and using a chimney to bake bread. This was juxtaposed by another tribe that had chosen “a valley with grazing plains and made a study of textiles and the sources of clothing.”<sup>98</sup> Students then “invented” the domestication of animals for transportation, along with canoes for use along waterways. Other elements were added to this role-play, including musical instruments. Dewey, Mayhew, and Edwards asserted that their students learned about musical composition “as they listened to the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom

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<sup>95</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 105.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Clara I. Mitchell, “History Lessons for Fourth Grade, Correlated with Study of Local Conditions,” *The Elementary School Journal* 1, no. 1 (July 1900): 240.

<sup>98</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 111.

and caught the meaning of a metrical succession of notes all on one pitch.”<sup>99</sup> The re-enactment of history in this school year ended with “a dramatic summing up in the story form of the social organization of the Bronze Age.”<sup>100</sup>

For all the talk of cave men, the days of the “tribes” of Israel, and the dawn of the Bronze Age, Dewey and his teachers could not escape the frontier discourse that shaped their own re-play of the past through contemporary Indigenous people. Their curriculum of re-enactment may have imagined life as it was in a prehistoric period, but they populated that world of make-believe with ideas about Indians forged in 1903. This was, in part, intentional: “Through being actors in their own retelling of the probable story of civilization they had gained a background of experience for the next year’s continued study of the actual records of specific peoples,” Mayhew and Edwards wrote with satisfaction.<sup>101</sup> References to Navajo weaving, the imagined rites of Indigenous naming, and even allowing the students to nominate a contemporary Indian person as their fictional tribe’s leader were all examples of how the present broke through.

### **Indians Beyond the Sandbox**

As the seven-year-old students phased out of the sandbox reenactment that “imagined and dramatized story of man’s long climb to better ways of living,” teachers like Mayhew and Edwards still kept them on a steady diet of references to American Indian people.<sup>102</sup> For example, Mayhew and Edwards described how Laboratory School students who had left the sandbox were then taught about North American history through their study of the history of Chicago. “The study of the child’s own country best serve the aim of the work,” Runyon

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



explained, “and in his own country his own locality first.”<sup>103</sup> As a result, Laboratory School students learned about such events as “the hostility between the Iroquois Indians and the French, the locality of the Five Nations, and the diminished fur trade.”<sup>104</sup> Here Indians make a cameo appearance in the Laboratory School’s narrative of the city’s development—present at the beginning of its history, only to be replaced by Euro-American settlers. Once the Indians were disposed of, students learned about “explorers” like La Salle and missionaries like Marquette, whose appearance augured the beginning of the study of what Mayhew and Edwards called “the log-cabin age.”<sup>105</sup>

This narrative of American history, composed with the founding of the city of Chicago, the state of Illinois, and the United States, seemingly set Indians on a path to oblivion. “An attempt was made,” begins Mayhew and Edwards, “to get the children . . . to realize how it would seem to live in America without a single railroad, steamboat, or road of any kind except Indian trails.”<sup>106</sup> The students were then prompted to consider the arrival of the first English settlers in what would become the thirteen colonies: “Naturally the first question is how the people in the new land can be kept alive, since they could not live as the Indians did, independent of the civilization from which they have come.”<sup>107</sup> Runyon noted that “the children are thus interested in discovering that the English did not know how to plant corn until John Smith compelled an Indian to teach them.”<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, Mitchell wrote that in fifth grade, students would learn to “weave in the Navajo style; make miniature long house and stockade; dress an Indian doll; and draw, paint, and

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<sup>103</sup> Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” 34-50.

<sup>104</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 147.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>107</sup> Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” 38.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

model to illustrate Indian life, myths, and literature.”<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, in her study of the school, Manke notes that teachers introduced students to the dwellings of the Iroquois and Sioux, and that school records indicate that “students were fascinated with the cultural tradition of Native Americans putting ‘pictures on their robes and wigwams of whatever they wanted the tribe to remember.’”<sup>110</sup> It was at this juncture that Mitchell’s instruction might have veered into the kind of Playing Indian with which most scholars are familiar. “Indian myths will be read, studied, and possibly dramatized,” she wrote of the Laboratory School curriculum. “Scenes illustrating Indian life will be represented by the children as the lessons and discussions develop. The class which is to entertain other people may choose a story they have studied, discuss the method of giving it, plan staging and costumes, and write dialogue.”<sup>111</sup> Mitchell was convinced that if students were taught about “Indian art and myth” in the fifth grade, then the Laboratory School history curriculum could most effectively offer “some sense of the Indian’s thought about his own life and of his feeling toward nature.” As she wrote of one activity: “To get an insight into the religion and mythology of the Indians, the children will be asked to give their own ideas as to how the Indian must have felt toward the great phenomena of nature: the thunder, lightning, storm, rain, snow, frost, heat; the sun, moon, stars, wind, earth, air, plants, and animals. They will be encouraged to make pictures to illustrate their own ideas of these possible myths, and to write them as stories.”<sup>112</sup> In so doing, students could make such Indian stories their own.

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<sup>109</sup> Clara I. Mitchell, “Fifth Grade,” *The Elementary School Journal* 1, no. 7 (March 1901): 643.

<sup>110</sup> “Autumn 1899,” University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. Work Reports, Box 2, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, cited Krysten Manke, “Welcome to the Club: An Archival Inquiry into the Dewey Laboratory School as Rhetorical Education” (PhD diss., University of Rhode Island, 2019), <https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/dissertations-theses/welcome-club-archival-inquiry-into-dewey/docview/2212230105/se-2?accountid=14667>.

<sup>111</sup> Mitchell, “Fifth Grade,” 643.

<sup>112</sup> Mitchell, “Fifth Grade,” 558.

Still, the culmination of the history curriculum with the founding of Chicago marked a pedagogical shift in the way the Laboratory School approached teaching the past. After fourth grade, historical reenactment gave way to more formalized historical study.<sup>113</sup> Eight-year-old students left the sandbox and entered the classroom. The challenge was noted by Runyon, who wrote, “History now becomes less empirical and more a matter of authentic record, so that the question of a definite recall of what has been studied comes more into the scheme,” she explained. “The attack upon subject-matter is different; it is not so much a question of how a people *might* meet a problem of conditions as a question of *fact* and why it happened.”<sup>114</sup> Play time was over.

Despite the pedagogical paradigm shift, Indians remained central to the Laboratory School curriculum. “The question of contact with the natives in America gave an opportunity to review and enlarge concepts formed in the preceding year’s study,” Runyon declared. The Replaying Indian in the sandbox had served its purpose to establish “the way in which Indians had worked out their degree of civilization.”<sup>115</sup> Lest readers fear that the Laboratory School had simply resorted to the transactional pedagogy of the lecture, Mayhew and Edwards wrote that “the aim of the study of the period of American colonization was not to cover the ground, but to give children of this age some knowledge of social processes.” Runyon also explained that “the study of colonial history ... furnished only ‘the carrying medium’ for the deeper and more universal study of the adaptation of a civilized people to the primitive conditions of a new

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<sup>113</sup> One observer documented the classroom history instruction: “In the kindergarten and first three grades the directed activities, imitative to a great extent, center in turn about the home, the immediate neighborhood, the farm, an Indian tribe, shepherd life, the Vikings, and early Chicago, with community life as the main theme.” Arthur F. Barnard, et al., “The Course in Community Life, History, and Civics in the University Elementary School, The University of Chicago,” *The Elementary School Journal* 17, no. 6 (February 1917): 397.

<sup>114</sup> Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” 36.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

environment.”<sup>116</sup> Mayhew and Edwards emphasized that in conjunction with this lesson, “there was also weaving of Indian mats on the looms that had been constructed in the shop.”<sup>117</sup>

Yet, variants of Re-playing Indian could sometimes occur beyond the walls of the sandbox. In fact, the utility of Re-playing Indian bled into another one of the Laboratory School’s innovations, the field trip. In 1897, Laboratory School students visited the Chicago Field Museum, where they drew “Esquimau and Indian boats and fishing implements.” When they returned to Hyde Park, they practiced writing sentences on the blackboard: “We made boats. People made boats. Indians made boats.”<sup>118</sup> Viewing the artifacts of salvage anthropology such as at the Field Museum was perfectly compatible with Mitchell’s lesson plan for fifth grade history. Inspired by such field trips, her students made “baskets woven of fiber willows and Indian wood splits.”<sup>119</sup> “Taking the Iroquois tribe as a type of the hunter Indian,” Mitchell invited her students to imagine themselves as Iroquois to speculate a reason that might account for what she called their “impossibility of advance in culture.”<sup>120</sup>

Mayhew and Edwards documented another such field trip. “In art,” they recalled, “some of the best work of the school grew out of the group’s visit to the monument in memory of the Fort Dearborn Massacre.” The monument in question was a bronze sculpture completed in 1893 by Carl Rohl-Smith. It had been mounted on a pedestal to memorialize the violence at Fort Dearborn as an important origin story for the city of Chicago’s history. Commissioned at the behest of railroad magnate George Pullman, *The Fort Dearborn Massacre Monument* depicts an incident in 1812 that became an important part of the city’s settler colonial memory. The statue

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>117</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 176.

<sup>118</sup> “The University of Chicago School, January 20, 1897,” *University Record* 1, no. 42 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1897), 540.

<sup>119</sup> Clara I. Mitchell, “Industrial Art, as Illustrated in Textile Fabrics,” in *The Elementary School Journal* 1, no. 1 (July 1900): 54.

<sup>120</sup> Mitchell, “Fifth Grade,” 558.



Figure 3.3. Linal Taliaferro Helm, *Fort Dearborn Massacre*, 1912, Wikimedia Commons.

portrays one tomahawk-wielding Indian as an anonymous “hostile” figure bent on murder of “founding mother” of Chicago, Margaret Helm, a White woman. At the same time, another Indian, this one the “friendly” Black Partridge, maneuvers to nobly protect Helm—a symbol of White maternalism—by forestalling the attack of his savage brethren. “The protective arm of the friendly Potawatomi chief, Black Partridge, intervenes to save her life,” reads a sanitized description of the statue by the

Smithsonian Museum of American Art. “The small child at the Indian’s feet is a symbol for the twelve children killed in the massacre.”<sup>121</sup>

Rohl’s 1893 sculpture is a cultural production that captures the contradictory Euro-American imagery of Indians within the frontier discourse. “Methinks the place is haunted,” recorded one journalist who visited the sculpture. “A subtle spell woven of dead men’s bones attracts to the scene of the massacre the present representatives of a system doomed to vanish like that of the redskins before the advancing civilization of the new social era.”<sup>122</sup> But Mayhew and Edwards took the statute to be a representation of Indians born not from this discourse, but from actual history, and so they took the Laboratory School students to see it as a history lesson.

<sup>121</sup> “The Fort Dearborn Massacre Monuments,” Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed May 29, 2021, <https://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&profile=ariall&source=~!siartinventories&uri=full=3100001~!7916~!0#focus>

<sup>122</sup> Theodore J. Karamanski, “Monuments to a Lost Nation,” *Chicago History*, Spring 2004.

They then had the students re-create the statue as an example of fine art in their own artistic productions: “Three children posed as the figures of Mrs. Helm, her Indian assailant, and Black Partridge, the rescuer,” Mayhew and Edwards note, while the rest of the class sketched these models.<sup>123</sup>

In bringing their students to the statute and having them reenact it, Mayhew and Edwards seemed to give credence to one *Chicago Herald* writer, who wrote of the statue that “the race of American aborigines is rapidly melting away, and the time will come when groups of statuary carved after typical specimens will be permanent objects of great value and interest.”<sup>124</sup> “Public art such as the ‘Fort Dearborn Massacre,’” concludes Theodore Karamanski, “played a major role in transforming the very real image of the ‘vanishing Indian’ of the turn of the century into an enduring symbol of regional identity.”<sup>125</sup> Such convergences were lost on Dewey, however. Dewey’s reliance on the frontier discourse had one very large unintended consequence: it made his work at the Laboratory School particularly interesting to the pedagogues who ran the Indian School Service.<sup>126</sup>

### **Estelle Reel and the Laboratory School**

Dewey’s tenure at the Laboratory School from 1896 to 1904 was the first period in his career when other educators began to attempt to translate his ideas into the Indian school system. On some occasions, Dewey’s contemporaries connected the dots between the Indian School Service and the Re-playing Indian at the Laboratory School. For instance, in 1897 an unidentified donor realized that the products of student work from the Indian School Service

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<sup>123</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 154.

<sup>124</sup> Karamanski, “Monuments to a Lost Nation.”

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the ideological function of sculptures and the logic of Native erasure, see Lisa Blee and Jean O’Brien, *Monumental Mobility: The Memory Work of Massasoit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

could be used to improve the verisimilitude of the history curriculum at the Laboratory School. When University of Chicago Professor Julia Bulkley was sent such “drawings and samples of manual work” from “an Indian school in Oklahoma,” they were given to the students at the Laboratory School as a source of inspiration for their own Re-playing Indian. Dewey’s enamored students “decided upon pieces of work which they could do and send in return.”<sup>127</sup> However, most of the time the pedagogical exchange flowed from the Laboratory School to the Indian School Service.

As she set out to update the federal government’s industrial Indian school curriculum, Superintendent Estelle Reel had become interested in Dewey’s work at the Laboratory School by 1900. Historians have remarked upon Reel’s tenure as superintendent of Indian schools as affecting the consolidation of a curriculum of proletarianization, racial essentialism, and cultural erasure in the Indian School Service. Reel, like many educators in the early twentieth century, was increasingly interested in “traditional” arts and handicrafts of ethnic groups. Whereas those educators such as in the Finnish folk schools sought to preserve folkways in handicrafts thought to be vanishing, Reel saw Indian crafts as an important source of economic productivity for otherwise impoverished Native people. In her 1905 report, Reel observed in particular how weaving blankets offered Native training in a skill with immediate practical value in their lives. After touring the Albuquerque Industrial Indian School in New Mexico, Reel saw “that a number of girls were utilizing chair legs as looms upon which they were weaving small blankets and imitating their mother’s work.” Estimating that the Diné people earned \$150,000 from the sale of blankets in 1904, Reel pushed for the inclusion of the production of arts and crafts in many industrial Indian schools. Her interest in Indian handicrafts was less in the preservation of

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<sup>127</sup> “The University of Chicago School, March 17, 1897,” *University Record* 1, no. 51 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1897): 610.

endangered lifeways than in the economic potential these curios represented when sold to non-Native consumers. Nevertheless, Reel became a leading—and sometimes lonely—advocate for the use of federal resources in teaching students the skills that could sustain Indigenous arts and crafts (albeit within the narrow scope she had intended) within the Indian School Service.<sup>128</sup>

To bolster the pedagogical credentials of her arts and crafts proposal, Reel turned to Dewey. In her annual report to the commissioner of Indian Affairs of 1905, Reel cited a bulletin by the Bureau of Labor, which asserted that “weaving on hand looms has been introduced into the curricula of various industrial schools and other educational institutions. It is now being taught to some extent even in elementary schools. Among those mentioned in the report are the Hampton Institute, Hampton, Va.; the Teachers’ College, New York City; Newcomb College, New Orleans, and the Dewey School in Chicago.” By citing the Laboratory School and Dewey’s preoccupation with Navajo blankets, Reel could cite Dewey’s cutting-edge experiments in education as proof of concept for her arts and crafts curriculum in federal Indian schools. Reel concluded her report by stating that “it is earnestly recommended that the teaching of native industries be introduced at schools where practicable, varying the instruction according to the distinctive arts of the tribes represented.” In a strange twist, Dewey’s Re-playing Indian had left a vivid impression on the government’s leading educator of actual Indigenous children.<sup>129</sup>

But the inspiration that Reel found in Dewey’s Laboratory School did not end there. From 1900 to 1909, Reel worked with Indian educators—such as Robert A. Cochran, later the superintendent at the MPIIS—to launch the Indian Department at the National Education Association. Reel’s aim was to broadly translate the developments in progressive education for the

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<sup>128</sup> Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 15-16; on the concept of a “racial safety zone” in federal Indian schools, see Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 1-15.

<sup>129</sup> “Annual Report of the Indian School Superintendent” (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 16.



Indian School Service, while bolstering the professional profile of Indian education.<sup>130</sup> In so doing, many of the group's interests either paralleled Deweyan themes or were only separated from the pragmatist by a single degree of affiliation. For example, in 1903, Clark University president and Dewey mentor G. Stanley Hall addressed the group; in 1908, Dewey's collaborator at the Laboratory School, Ella Flagg Young, spoke to the Indian Department. In particular, Young was excited to endorse Dewey's sandbox method as one expression of a new pedagogy with relevance for the Indian School Service. "The old education assumes that the teacher knows first what the learner needs to know," she told the assembled Indian educators. "The new education acts on the assumption that a teacher makes such an environment in school that the mind of the learner is stimulated to use its own experience."<sup>131</sup> Young arrived at this conclusion in part by merging the Laboratory School curriculum with the frontier history of the United States.

After her tenure at the Laboratory School, Young became the superintendent of the Chicago Public School District. It was there that Young adapted Dewey's sandbox as a form of experiential education and converted it into a reenactment of the frontier history of Chicago. In 1915, Dewey complimented the history curriculum she instituted based on the Laboratory School:

The history in the younger grades is taught largely by means of sand tables. The children are perhaps studying the primitive methods of building houses, and on their sand table they build a brush house, a cave dwelling, a tree house, or an eskimo [*sic*] snow hut. Sand tables are used in the same way by a third grade in their study of the early history of Chicago. They mold the sand into a rough relief map of the neighborhood and then with twigs build the forts and log cabins of the first frontier settlement, with an Indian encampment just outside the stockade. They put real water in their lake and river, and float canoes in it. Other grades do the same thing with the history of transportation among the first settlers in this country, and with the logging and lumber industry.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 104.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>132</sup> Dewey, *The Schools of To-Morrow* (1915), *Middle Works*, 8: 261.

In its reconstruction of the landscape in miniature, Young's sandbox lesson plan was virtually identical to the one described by Mayhew and Edwards. However, Young's version dispensed with Re-playing Indian at the scale of world history and instead substituted the settler colonial history of the city of Chicago. Fellow Laboratory School teacher Runyon documented this phase of the sandbox history: a student "must therefore 'play' farmer, ranchman, miner, etc. and in his small way perform the occupations he would comprehend—not with imaginary materials, but with real ones, though his farm be but a 4 × 4 sand-box," she related. "His farmhouse, barns, fences, etc. must be real, though they are constructed of thin wood, blocks, or paper."<sup>133</sup> Young took the same Laboratory School curriculum and simply pushed the hands of the clock of history forward, beginning with Euro-American settlement of Chicago. As racial recapitulation theory placed savage psychology in the past, historical instruction in Young's public schools told a story of Native vanishing in the present.



Figure 3.4. *Method of Teaching English by Use of Sand Table, No. 27 Day School, Pine Ridge, 1903*, Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Affairs, Washington, DC.

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<sup>133</sup> Runyon, "Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School," 695.

Reel worked to incorporate elements of Dewey and Young's sandbox history curriculum in Indian Schools. Reyhner and Eder note that by 1903, Reel came to embrace the sandtable for Indian schooling: "An interesting educational approach supported by Reel was sand tables for primary school children, which were used extensively in one-room BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] day schools on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations in South Dakota."<sup>134</sup> The 1903 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs chronicles this curricular innovation, complete with a photograph of Indigenous students at Pine Ridge Day School 27 using a sandtable.<sup>135</sup> Reel's version took Dewey and Young's innovations and transformed them for the purposes of schooling for incorporation. Reel imagined that the sandbox was a medium for Indian pupils to learn to take up their station as "auxiliary citizens" in the United States through allotment. What Dewey's sandbox had rendered as a history of mankind, Reel's sandbox played out as the future of an Indian homestead.

In Reel's Indian school version of the sandtable, older students became teachers. In turn, they taught the younger students to speak English using the material objects of the homestead farmer. "The table is arranged like a home with irrigating ditch, ridge, fence posts made out of clothespins, house, etc. The pupil teacher says to the class, say 'the horse,' then 'the horse runs,' etc."<sup>136</sup> J. J. Duncan, day school inspector, reported that the "sand table with its varied uses" was highly effective, especially as an instrument of teaching English to the students using the accoutrements of allotment—plows, horses, fences, etc.<sup>137</sup> In this fashion, the sandtable was intended as a means to inure Indian students to the modifications of their land that would be

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<sup>134</sup> Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 106.

<sup>135</sup> Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1903, 375.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 376-377.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

required by a federal policy of allotment. Through Reel, Dewey's Laboratory School innovation had become an extension of the federal program of Native dispossession through schooling.

Reel's ultimate purpose in citing Dewey's Laboratory School activities went beyond weaving or sandtables. Reel cited Dewey's curriculum at the Laboratory School as a way to disguise her rudimentary vocational program for Indian schools as a form of robust industrial education. For example, when Reel wrote a new curricular handbook for the nation's Indian industrial schools in 1901, she made it clear she was familiar with Dewey's work.<sup>138</sup>

Specifically, Reel's *Uniform Curriculum* refers to Dewey's Chicago innovations in its section on culinary training for Indigenous girls. Cooking is depicted by the *Uniform Curriculum* as the "most important department in the school" for Indian girls, as it was intended to "equip her with the ability to prepare appetizing meals from ordinary material, to enable her to make the home comfortable and attractive, to establish habits of neatness, promptness, and order, and to teach lessons of economy in the use of fuel." It was, in other words, the ideal place for the indoctrination of Victorian-era gender normative expectations for Indigenous girls through vocational education.

Reel continued to use a Deweyan vocabulary of everyday experience to give Indian schooling the veneer of progressive pedagogy. Cooking curriculum, she insisted, "should be occupied with work as nearly as possible like the familiar events of daily life in the home."<sup>139</sup> Here, Reel explicitly cited the Laboratory School: "In Dr. Dewey's school the cooking of cereals is taught first, as this is probably the very simplest article of food to put into the hands of the small child to cook," she wrote. She emphasized how Dewey's students learned biology for

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<sup>138</sup> K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "Estelle Reel, Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1898-1910: Politics, Curriculum, and Land," *Journal of American Indian Education* 35, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 5-31.

<sup>139</sup> Estelle Reel, *Uniform Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 90.

understanding the organic origins of the food, math for dividing ingredients into increments, and chemistry to learn the chemical process of cooking or baking as they planted, grew, and harvested their crop from start to finish. Reel believed this approach was well suited for federal Indian education. She deliberately depicted her curriculum for Indian schools as very similar to Dewey's lesson plans at the Laboratory School:

Have the child measure the amount of cereal to use and the exact amount of water necessary to cook it. She will thus learn to handle fractions in a most familiar way and understand their significance. The child must be taught to plan a meal for one, for two, or for three, or any given number, multiplying the amount for one by the number to be cooked for. Later the child will be able to write recipes, showing the amount of material to be used, the quantity of water to be added, and the length of time required to cook the material thoroughly. She thus learns unconsciously to tell time. The student must be taught the relation of fire, air, and water to life and to cookery.<sup>140</sup>

After she sent him the draft manuscript, W. T. Harris complimented Reel. "It seems to me that your connecting of the study of natural science with the study of soil and plants and other things relating to the farm is a happy thought."<sup>141</sup>

Back in Michigan, when the superintendent of MPIIS received his copy of the *Uniform Curriculum*, he found Reel's interpretation of Dewey's pedagogy in line with his own approach for the Indian students of that state. "For centuries the race has been trained in memorizing," Spencer pontificated. "Nearly all of its knowledge has consisted of isolated and disconnected facts. Rote teaching, then, must be especially detrimental to Indian work."<sup>142</sup> As a result, Spencer embraced Reel's interpretation of Dewey when he put nearly 150 Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadmoi girls to work in the school's kitchen every year, laboring in the mold of domestic helpers for Euro-American heads of household. The result was the opposite of Dewey's ideal of

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> W. T. Harris to Estelle Reel, June 19, 1901, cited in Reel, *Uniform Course of Study*, preface.

<sup>142</sup> Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 375, in Annual Reports 1905, 1924-1925, Mt. Pleasant Indian School Collection, 1865, 2003, Box 1, Clarke Historical Library.

school as a democratic community. Mary Peters, an Odawa student at MPIIS, remembered: “I’d go to school mornings for one whole month and work in the afternoons. They’d call out your name and where you’re supposed to go to work—kitchen, sewing room, domestic science, laundry house, housework and hospital.” Peters described the way these details were assigned: “They called my name. I got up and it’s just like in prison.”<sup>143</sup>

Between the sandtables, the weaving, and the cooking, Dewey’s curriculum offered Reel a way to seize the mantle of progressive education for the Indian School Service without attending to much else in Dewey’s philosophy of education and democracy. When Reel held up the Laboratory School in her annual reports, she was advancing curriculum that sharply diverged from Dewey’s stated learning objectives. And yet, the reason Dewey and the Laboratory School curriculum could be so easily co-opted by the likes of Reel was that both she and Dewey trafficked in ideas about Indians that had been proffered by the frontier discourse. While the Laboratory School recreated the history of humanity’s development from nomadic hunter-gatherers to landed agriculturalists in the sandbox, the Indian School System was enacting the same premise not as pedagogy, but as actual federal Indian policy in the form of allotment. What Dewey imagined was a curriculum of experiential learning based on the re-creation of Indian experience, Reel regarded as a model for shaping the future experience of actual Indigenous children. The former has been remembered by scholars as part of Dewey’s most remarkable, if not proudest, contributions in the history of education; the latter has been largely forgotten. Rarely have they been considered as mutually reinforcing.

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<sup>143</sup> “The Voices of Ottawa Women in Western Michigan History,” in *Grand River Valley History* 12 (1995): 10-12.

## The Problems of Re-playing Indian

It is most likely that Dewey was unaware that he and his school had become an inspiration for Estelle Reel and the federal Indian School Service. The same could not be said for those closer to home, however. The local community of parents, teachers, and observers in Hyde Park proved to be quite sensitive to the fact that their Euro-American students spent much of their school day pretending to be Indians. Of course, Dewey and his teachers were not shy about what they were doing; to the contrary, they were exceptionally proud of their innovations, describing their history curriculum at length in forums such as *The Elementary School Journal*. In one sense, this advertising paid off. One visitor to the Laboratory School clearly understood the pedagogical utility of Indians to Dewey's project: "The study of American Indians ... is taken up ... for the purpose of utilizing that identity of interests which anthropologists tell us exists between the child and primitive man."<sup>144</sup>

However, some worried that the Laboratory School's reenactment of Indian experience was perhaps a little *too* effective. Part of the anxiety of having children engaged in such behavior was that most students were the children of the faculty at the university. "A large proportion of the pupils are the children of the university professors," Farrand noted on her visit.<sup>145</sup> These students were "not quite members of the leisure class," remarks Fallace, "but far from poor."<sup>146</sup> But more than class sensibilities, it was Dewey's insistence that students think like racialized Indians-as-savages to maximize their learning potential that was a cause for concern. In particular, popular connotations of violence that came with associations with savagery made

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<sup>144</sup> Olive Hyde Foster, "An Experiment in Education; Professor Dewey's Theories and Methods as Exemplified in a School Conducted by the Pedagogical Department of the University of Chicago," *The Sunday Times-Herald Chicago*, June 3, 1900, 1.

<sup>145</sup> Farrand, "Dr. Dewey's University Elementary School," 172.

<sup>146</sup> Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race*, 35.

Dewey's Re-playing Indian a cause of concern for some stakeholders in the Laboratory School. The Indian tomahawk at the *Fort Dearborn Massacre* statue which Dewey believed had hewn in favor of experiential learning now seemed to cut the other way.

One such skeptic was Susan Elizabeth Blow, a Herbartian educator who took issue with Dewey's approach to Playing Indian. "Chicago is an electric center for all sorts of educational heresies," Blow wrote to Dewey's mentor and U.S. Commissioner of Education William Torrey Harris. Blow rejected wholesale Dewey's premise of re-creating the savage mind through re-playing Indian. "I saw Dr. Dewey's School," she wrote with disappointment, noting that "the whole principle they were working on seemed wrong." Blow remarked on the alarming verisimilitude that Dewey and his instructor's use of the history curriculum had achieved in re-creating savage mind in their students. "Their purpose for why we should inflame the minds of our little civilized Aryans with the ideal of a savage Indian life I can't see," she worried. Encouraging Euro-American children to run about the school as savages was not only scandalous to Blow's pedagogical sensibilities, but she was confident it would be an affront to the student's sense of racial propriety as well. "In general the way they work on the imagination will I think nauseate the children," she wrote. However, it was not all bad news. Evidently, Blow had encountered one friendly Indian at the Laboratory School of whom she approved. "I saw repeatedly exercises given with Hiawatha as core," she noted approvingly, "so Hiawatha may not blight them."<sup>147</sup>

Blow's comments are worth parsing, for they represented a pedagogical dispute unconsciously framed by the frontier discourse. Interpreted through Herbartianism, Blow had

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<sup>147</sup> Susan Blow to William Torrey Harris, June 12, 1896, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1. Blow would again cross paths with Dewey in 1905 when she studied at the Teachers College at Columbia University. Unlike Dewey, her Hegelian commitments had still not waned, leading her to remark, "In Dr. Dewey I am disappointed." Susan Blow to William Torrey Harris, April 30, 1905, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.



implied that Longfellow's Hiawatha was an Indian quite friendly to Euro-American learning. As Longfellow's epic American poem represented Indians as the figures of a bygone age, the character of Hiawatha was of great literary facility to Euro-American children's learning by offering a character study of the noble savage. In Blow's view, such Indians as the characters populating America's legends were of little present danger to Euro-American children. To the contrary, Blow regarded Dewey's Laboratory School Indians as hostile to the educational welfare of the children. Indian savagery did not belong in contemporary Chicago, let alone in the minds of its next generation. By re-creating savage psychology in the minds of Euro-American children on the south side of early nineteenth-century Chicago, Dewey's curriculum had made Hiawatha into a menace. Of course, in her critique of the Laboratory School history curriculum, Blow said nothing about actual Indians. Rather, she was critiquing a product of the frontier discourse using the same logic of the frontier discourse.

Regardless, Blow was certainly not alone in her concerns about Re-playing Indian. This was evidenced in part by Dewey and his educator's dogged defense of their curriculum. Dewey noted Re-playing Indian was not intended to glorify Indian people or their culture, nor revel in wanton savagery as Blow seemed to imply. To the contrary, Dewey insisted that "the object of the study of primitive life is not to keep the child interested in lower and relatively savage stages, but to show him the steps of progress and development, especially along the line of invention, by which man was led into civilization." While he might feel that Indians were the perfect means to re-create history, Dewey clearly understood the anxiety of educators and parents who were concerned he was glorifying savage people. "By throwing the emphasis upon the progress of

man, and upon the way advance has been made, we hope to avoid the objections that hold against paying too much attention to the crudities and distracting excitements of savage life.”<sup>148</sup>

Mayhew and Edwards were even more explicit about such concerns: “The dangers attendant upon an unwise use of the primitive life approach were fully recognized,” they wrote.<sup>149</sup> To diffuse this concern, the teachers emphasized how the temporary the adoption of Indian subjectivity would be required for their students to grasp the lesson of primitive psychology. They were confident that under their paternalistic guidance, “it was not difficult for these children to doff their roles as members of a primitive tribe and don their parts as children of a Chicago school in 1900,” Mayhew and Edwards promised.<sup>150</sup> In this fashion, the Laboratory School’s history curriculum was consistent with the wider phenomenon of Playing Indian and its deliberately liminal quality. Indian Play was always based on a performativity that emphasized the actors’ ability to step in and out of this state as they saw fit. Whether it was through the donning of war bonnets or the habits of mind, Euro-Americans who played Indian sought to inhabit the subjectivity of Indigenous people only for a time.

Dewey squarely addressed the concern voiced by Blow that a curriculum that employed Re-playing Indian risked elevating the state of savagery: “The aim is to avoid a mere excitation and indulgence of this interest, without regard to the motives lying behind them, the stimulus given to farther advance, or the ways in which men have got out of savagery into civilization,” he assured his audience. To signal his true investment in Indians, Dewey emphasized how Re-playing Indian was ultimately also a lesson in the deficit of Indigenous psychology. “The effort is to lay hold of this interest in such a way as to use it as a projective—to bring out its defects as

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<sup>148</sup> Dewey, *The School and Society*, 63.

<sup>149</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 99.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

well as its dramatic incidents, to see how and why men worked their way out of it.” Dewey wanted his Laboratory School students to inhabit the psychological state of Indian people so they might learn to think their way out of it. Dewey’s hope was that in imagining themselves as Navajo weavers, students would ultimately surpass the psychological stage of actual Diné people.<sup>151</sup>

Mayhew and Edwards also assuaged the concerns of stakeholders in the school that part of their rationale for Re-playing Indian was for students to understand firsthand the backwardness of Indigenous people: “The dramatic use of its incidents utilized the interest of the child in the primitive way of living so as to minimize the sensational or merely picturesque features and bring out its defects.” In so doing, children would “realize the motives that otherwise lie hidden from the modern civilized child, and the hard conditions of primitive life that forced men to work their way to a better and better life of a kind that gave a sense of peace and security,” they asserted. “When the child realizes the reality of primitive problems, he wants to rediscover and reinvent for himself the better ways and means of living. He thus finds the secret of advance which has resulted for the race in an upward spiral of progressive action.”<sup>152</sup> Under the scrutiny of those who believed Re-playing Indian remained a danger to the students, Mayhew and Edwards retreated to the blockhouse of Dewey’s naturalistic method to support their curriculum: “The advantages apparent in the results of repeated experiment with such a study seemed far to outweigh [*sic*] its disadvantages,” they curtly concluded.<sup>153</sup>

For all its utility, Dewey’s Re-playing Indian also presented other challenges. While some teachers had tried to frame the sandbox activity as explicitly a re-enactment of the history

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<sup>151</sup> Dewey, “Group IV. Historical Development of Inventions and Occupations,” 223-224.

<sup>152</sup> Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 99.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

of their immediate environment in the city of Chicago, Mayhew and Edwards believed that America's Indigenous people's history sometimes complicated the version of Dewey experimentalism that the school was trying to impart on its students. "The choice of subject-matter for this year had been, as for all years, the result of much experimentation in order to find the type of civilization which possesses a progressive quality, an ongoing, out-flowing, and developing way of living which gave a 'go' to the story, linked it with the previous study, and carried it on to the next step," they wrote. As the frontier discourse rendered American Indians as unchanging primitives doomed to vanish before the closing frontier, Indians seemed to refute Dewey's philosophy of social occupations. In this sense, Re-playing Indian was not enough to instill experimentalism in the Laboratory School students. "In one year a detailed study of the American Indians, their inventions and customs, was followed by a study of the discovery of the Indians by the white men," the teachers reported. "Then came some of the explorations which made known the form of the earth and its larger geographical features and forces. While satisfactory in some respects, the Indian civilization is so highly static in its type that an advance into the next era of culture was not easily made."<sup>154</sup> Re-playing Indian seemed like it was a great way to bring experimentalism to life, but human-history-as-Indian-history proved to be "too static" to illustrate how humans moved from savagery to civilization. After all, Indian premodern history had to be surpassed by modern U.S. history. There were therefore limits to Re-playing Indian.

Nevertheless, Re-playing Indian left a lasting impression on Laboratory School students. As Manke details in her study of the school, as the students grew older and organized themselves into clubs, one group recalled their time Playing Indians in the sandbox during fourth grade.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 118.

They petitioned their teachers to build a clubhouse in the style of a longhouse. “For the Educational Club, members felt that they needed an official space, like the Haudenosaunee longhouses, to conduct the business of their community,” Manke documents.<sup>155</sup> That the need for a clubhouse was expressed by students invoking the Iroquois longhouse must have pleased Dewey. By putting themselves in the figurative moccasins of the Iroquois, the students had articulated their need for a place of community organization in the present by channeling what they had learned about how Indians had resolved problematic situations in the past. Hiawatha had come to life in the minds of his students, not through their imagination of a world through literature, but in their immediate experience.

This was perhaps best epitomized when Mitchell reported that she had her second-grade students read an excerpt from Longfellow’s poem about Hiawatha’s discovery of corn.<sup>156</sup> She read the “Fasting of Hiawatha” not only because it was an example of fine literature, but because it was preparation for the Laboratory School’s sandbox re-enactment of history. Katherine Camp wrote with great precision about how Longfellow’s poem was used at the Laboratory School as the epitome of Dewey’s entire method: “Observation of the child’s natural interests has brought about the utilization of many of the spontaneous activities of children,” she wrote. “*The present use of Indian life is an illustration of change due to this outside influence* [my emphasis]. This has been helped, perhaps, by the convenience to the teacher of Longfellow’s literary expression of this life in Hiawatha.”

Longfellow had written an imaginative and metaphorical account of how the Chippewa came to plant corn. In reality, it had been federal Indian farmers like Jeremiah and Frederick Riggs who had attempted to compel Michigan’s Anishinaabe people to farm on prescribed lands.

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<sup>155</sup> Manke, “Welcome to the Club,” 152.

<sup>156</sup> Clara I. Mitchell, “Second Grade,” *The Elementary School Journal* 2, no. 7 (March 1902): 533-37.

Yet in its allusions to the Chippewa's adoption of corn agriculture, *Hiawatha* offered Laboratory School instructors a case study in how "savage" Indigenous people might be lifted out a state of savagery: by the machinations of those who had already achieved civilization. In so doing, Dewey and Camp mistook federal coercion for federal instruction. She was confident, however, that *Hiawatha* could be used in a way that was commensurate with Dewey's method: "In the summary of primitive history, through occupations from the side of invention and discovery, through imitation is introduced what might be legitimately called experimentation," she concluded proudly.<sup>157</sup>

### **Lessons from the Pedagogical Playing Indian**

Scholarly treatments of Dewey's Laboratory School have increasingly noted the many references to American Indian people at the Laboratory School. The most compelling recent work has been accomplished by Thomas Fallace and Krysten Manke. Drawing on the Laboratory School's administrative records, Manke argues that such references to Indigenous people—such as the boy Farrand spied carving a spear—contributed to the school's ethnocentric character. In addition to its rudimentary references to African history and the dim view of Black people in the United States, Manke concludes that the Laboratory School's curriculum was defined by racism: "The School's racism inhibited the most promising elements of the Laboratory School curriculum," she argues.<sup>158</sup> Likewise, Fallace interprets such references to Indian people as evidence of Dewey's views about race: "Dewey's history curriculum was based entirely upon his own refashioning of the anthropological-sociological psychological theory of recapitulation."<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Katherine Camp, "Elementary Science Teaching in the Laboratory School," *The Elementary School Journal* 4, no. 1 (September 1903): 2.

<sup>158</sup> Manke, "Welcome to the Club," 170.

<sup>159</sup> Fallace, "Repeating the Race Experience," 382.

In this view, Indians are just one manifestation of a larger category of “uncivilized” people that Dewey made reference to on the basis of race. Accordingly, Dewey’s invocation of Indians at the Laboratory School represent at best a form of ethnocentrism and at worst a form of racism.

If we approach the Laboratory School’s legacy strictly through the lens of how Dewey thought about race, we might mistakenly speculate that the numerous references to Indigenous peoples like the Navajo, the Iroquois, or “Illinois Indians” at the Laboratory School actually made Dewey and his Laboratory School teachers particularly attentive to American Indian people. This sort of trap is laid when teachers like Clara Mitchell wrote of her Laboratory School classroom in 1902 that it was “by means of the Indian myths the children will learn that which is beautiful in the life of the Indian.”<sup>160</sup>

However, if we instead center these representations of Indian people in a wider analysis of Dewey’s immersion in the Great Lakes frontier discourse, we can see Dewey’s relationship to race and racial recapitulation in a new light. Perhaps the most well documented feature of the curriculum at the Laboratory School was its history curriculum, where references to Indians abounded. But more importantly, the history curriculum was an embodiment of Dewey’s argument with the Herbartians over the best use of *Hiawatha*. The history curriculum at the Laboratory School sought to employ Indians as tools for the re-creation of history, not through literary depictions of the past, but rather in the firsthand experience of students. This was to be accomplished through Dewey’s concept of play, whereby children were prompted by teachers to imagine themselves as Indians in order to encounter and solve problems of the past. Resolving such problematic situations would lead to growth, the essence of learning—and demonstrate how

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<sup>160</sup> Clara Mitchell, “Second Grade,” *Elementary School Journal* 2, no. 5 (January 1902): 451.

humanity had marched from savagery to civilization. This signals Dewey's engagement not just with race, racism, or racial recapitulation, but with the frontier discourse.

In so doing, I interpret the Laboratory School history curriculum's true significance not as an expression of racial recapitulation but instead as a variant of the cultural phenomenon of Playing Indian. The pedagogical expression of Playing Indian that I call Re-playing Indian was a convenient means for Dewey to combat the dualism between thought and action that he felt plagued modern education. Re-playing Indian allowed Dewey to gesture towards what he felt was humanity's first steps towards experimental intelligence. Racial recapitulation's linear historicism and genetic psychology simply offered a model for this process. Re-playing Indian became a central feature of the curriculum at the Laboratory School and helped to cement Dewey's association of savagery with Indigenous people.<sup>161</sup>

Look no further than Dewey's employment of *Hiawatha* at the Laboratory School. Longfellow's story of how the Chippewa invented corn agriculture in *Hiawatha* was of particular utility to Dewey: it offered him a way to cast his Laboratory School teachers as the pedagogical equivalent of Indian farmers like Frederick Riggs, agents of civilization meant to speed students through savage social occupations on to agricultural ones and therefore embrace the method of experimental intelligence all in a single school year. In this way, Re-playing Indian at the Laboratory School paradoxically made "Indianness" a central component of Dewey's school,

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<sup>161</sup> In a happy coincidence, this very point is illustrated by the fact Runyon's account of her first visit to the Dewey School was published in the literary journal *The Chautauquan*, which ran her account of the school in 1900 next to an excerpt from Chicago-trained historian Edwin Erle Sparks' *The Expansion of the American People*. Readers of that issue would have encountered Runyon's account of the Laboratory School "class in primitive life where the children spent some weeks in working out, with the aid of the teacher, what the earliest people must have done when they had no clothing, or food, or shelter," followed by Sparks' assertion not two pages removed that "it is now possible to study not only the growth by the influence of the frontier in America since it has passed on forever." To support the claim, Sparks cited "Professor Turner, of the University of Wisconsin, in the Report of the American Historical Association for 1893." Edwin Erle Sparks, "The Expansion of the American People," *The Chautauquan* 30, no. 6 (1900): 593.



while simultaneously rendering actual Indigenous people invisible to himself, his teachers, and his students. If it was the frontier discourse of the Great Lakes that primarily shaped Dewey's vocabulary of savagery, then writing the curriculum of Re-playing Indian at the Laboratory School made him an author of Native elimination.

This Native elimination was not rendered by Dewey's racism, but instead smuggled into one of the most innocent-appearing inventions of the new education, the pedagogical utility of play. But such play was always rooted in power. In his analysis of *Playing Indian*, Deloria concludes that "what might have been a serious consideration of the inequities that came with American nation building was harmonized as it was cloaked in the powerful, liberating frivolity of play."<sup>162</sup> As Laboratory School teacher Laura Runyon told her students, Re-playing Indian had to come to an end at some point: "In getting land from the Indians the same methods were used that have prevailed through the ages when a people with a superior weapons and brains, in sufficient number, meet an inferior people."<sup>163</sup> Runyon's account suggests how Re-playing Indian in the Laboratory School ended not with any kind of solidarity for the contemporary political situation of American Indian people, but rather in a justification for the ongoing processes of settler colonialism. Indian re-play gave way to settler colonial power.

Susan Blow's anxieties about Re-playing Indian both confirm the centrality of Indians to the Laboratory School and suggest the extent to which Dewey's use of Re-playing Indian was a live ideological question. Whether or not Indians were safe for the classroom was an open question for educators in the late nineteenth century who taught their Euro-American students in the shadow of Indian "breakouts" such as at Wounded Knee in 1890 and the so-called Battle of Sugar Point between Anishinaabe warriors and Minnesota militias in 1898. In fact, it was the

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<sup>162</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 184.

<sup>163</sup> Runyon, "The Teaching of Elementary History in the Dewey School," 49.

U.S. government's urgent need to deploy schooling for the purposes of incorporation that led Estelle Reel to embrace Dewey's curriculum of experiential learning in the federal Indian School Service.

Led by Estelle Reel, federal Indian schools found inspiration in Dewey's Laboratory School. Citing the Laboratory School's weaving, cooking, and sand tables as sanction for her curriculum of proletarianization, Reel unquestionably misinterpreted Dewey's broader philosophy in support of her racialized vocational training. Indeed, Dewey scholars today could easily dispel Reel of her mistake. But I believe we should be cautious to run into the breach and correct Reel on Dewey's behalf. Dewey himself was silent on the issues of Indian education; we ought to let that silence speak.

In the silence, we perhaps no longer need to strain in order to hear a strange irony echoing from the past. By citing Dewey's experiential curriculum at the Laboratory School in her *Uniform Curriculum*, Reel gave her half-and-half curriculum the patina of Dewey's burgeoning reputation as a progressive educator. This was precisely the curriculum that organized the Morris Industrial Indian School against which Corbett Villeneuve protested in 1900 and was rejected by the school superintendent on the grounds that such schooling was appropriate for Indian children. At the same time that non-Native children at Dewey's Laboratory School were being taught to think like Indians, Native children at Reel's schools were being taught to think like White children. Such were the ironies of the origins of progressive education at the crossroads of settler colonialism.

In the end, Dewey may have walked away from the Laboratory School, but he never relinquished his association between savagery and American Indian people. Re-playing Indian at the Laboratory School foreshadowed the ways in which Dewey would continue to view

Indigenous people as premodern savages living in the past, rather than as contemporaries struggling with the consequences of modernity on their own lives and communities in the United States. Dewey's acrimonious departure from the Laboratory School and the University of Chicago is well documented.<sup>164</sup> Despite its renown, disagreements over the administration of the school proliferated. By 1902, President William R. Harper pushed Dewey to find his own funding for the Laboratory School, and at the same time others complained of Alice Dewey's leadership as principal of the newly enlarged school. When Harper made it known that he expected Alice to resign, the Deweys beat him to the punch. Alice resigned as principal of the Laboratory School and John from his position as director of the School of Education and as professor in the Department of Philosophy. Harper tried to repair the relationship and retain Dewey, but Dewey was uninterested. Soon after, he found a new position at the Teacher's College at Columbia University. On May 2, 1904, Columbia announced its newest hire—and with that, John Dewey was on his way to New York.<sup>165</sup> As it would turn out, while Dewey might have been moving away from the Great Lakes, he carried with him the presumptions of the frontier discourse into the very heart of America's so-called melting pot.

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<sup>164</sup> Michael Knoll, "John Dewey as Administrator: The Inglorious End of the Laboratory School in Chicago," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 203-52.

<sup>165</sup> Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 331-33.

## CHAPTER 4:

### Intelligence: Charles A. Eastman as Instrumental Indian, 1902-1916

On February 2, 1905, Dewey took up his new post at Columbia University. Robert Westbrook characterizes Columbia by the turn of the century as “a backwater college” with grand ambitions. Dewey’s recruitment came on the heels of his widely heralded innovations at the Laboratory School, which had raised his profile as a pedagogue considerably.<sup>1</sup> The Columbia trustees noted that Dewey was by then “one of the two or three most distinguished students and teachers of philosophy now living,” a reputation that would help make Columbia’s teaching efforts “the most effective and most distinguished to be found in any university in the world.”<sup>2</sup> Despite Columbia’s aspirations, Dewey’s arrival might have come as something of a relief. Relocation to New York was a means to put distance between the family’s personal and professional trials in Chicago. The disputes with William R. Harper and their consequent departure from the Laboratory School had been acrimonious. To make matters worse, in the winter of 1904, his son Gordon had died while on a family trip in Europe. The loss was deeply felt by both John and Alice, a shock that would reverberate long after the funeral they held at Chicago’s Hull House. The Great Lakes chapter of their lives appeared to be closed.

But John Dewey could not so easily shake the intellectual inheritance from his formative years in Ann Arbor and Chicago. One emphasis that survived the family’s move from Chicago to

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<sup>1</sup> In December of 1904, Dewey was made president of the American Philosophical Association. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 118.

<sup>2</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 117-20. See also Jay, *The Education of John Dewey*, 228-38.

New York was Dewey's increased focus on education. His philosophy of education, begun in his 1895 *Psychology of Number*, would come to culminate in the publication of *Democracy and Education* in 1916, a book which stands as Dewey's definitive statement of not only his synthesis of education and democracy, but his entire method of experimentalism. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey posed a question to his readers: "Why does a savage group perpetuate savagery, and a civilized group civilization?" He acknowledged that "doubtless the first answer to occur to mind is because savages are savages." Anticipating this racially essentialist line of reasoning, Dewey brought his naturalistic method to bear instead: "Careful study has made it doubtful whether their native capacities are appreciably inferior to those of civilized man. It has made it certain that native differences are not sufficient to account for the difference in culture."<sup>3</sup> So what explained the difference?

Dewey suggested that the contrast between American Indians-as-savage and their civilized successors in the United States was not a difference of racial essentialism, but rather of historical psychology. Specifically, Dewey believed that savage groups were those who accommodated their psychology to their surroundings, whereas civilized people could control that same environment. This control came through more sophisticated relationships to their surroundings. "The advance of civilization means that a larger number of natural forces and objects have been transformed into instrumentalities of action, into means for securing ends," he wrote. "We start not so much with superior capacities as with superior stimuli for evocation and direction of our capacities. The savage deals largely with crude stimuli; we have weighted stimuli."<sup>4</sup> While this acknowledgment of the fundamental equality of psychic capacity between Indians and Euro-Americans (also known as universalism) may strike contemporary readers as

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<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Middle Works*, 9: 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

anti-racist, this formulation was perfectly consistent with Dewey's ethnocentric theory of racial recapitulation. After all, both relied on a common vocabulary of savagery that conflated Indians with the primitive mind.<sup>5</sup>

Rendered as primitive and savage people through the prism of the frontier discourse, American Indians proved to be a useful tool for Dewey to illustrate his emerging method of experimentalism. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Dewey found great utility in references to Indian people because their status as "savages" was a rich vein of illustration for communicating his ideas about experimentalism. On the one hand, treating Indians as savages was the currency of the realm of early twentieth-century cultural anthropology. By invoking American Indian people, Dewey could speak more concretely about the history of the United States to his Euro-American audience who regarded Indians as the United States' domestic "savage" people. On the other hand, Dewey found Indian individuals and societies to be useful in his work not only because they represented humankind's psychological past living in the present, but also because they marked what civilized Euro-American problem-solvers had surpassed. The frontier discourse—with its ready-made juxtaposition between savage Indians and civilized pioneers—offered Dewey a history of the development of experimental intelligence that had been cultivated in the United States in particular. Rendered through the frontier discourse, savage mind offered Dewey a useful foil to civilized psychology.

In particular, Indians would prove particularly useful to the articulation of Dewey's singular concept of experimental intelligence. Dewey's schema for experimental intelligence hinged on deepening one's relationship to the environment. As one came to new understandings of one's environment through the accumulation of individual experience (growth) and the

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Fallace, "The Paradox of Race and Culture in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*," *The Journal of Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 16 (2017), 473-87.

transmission of collective experience (education), new ways of acting in the world would proliferate. This multiplicity of ends would subsequently require deliberation in order to organize one's experience from habit to action. Whether through personal trial and error or guided through educative experiences by teachers, Dewey asserted that people eventually came to develop a faculty for sorting experience into new modes of action. Dewey called this intelligence.

Dewey's use of the term *intelligence* is not to be confused with intelligence as a property of mind to be measured by an emerging regime of I.Q. testing rooted in eugenic science; rather, Dewey intended it to mean the kind of knowledge cultivated through experience. Rather than a descriptive quality of an individual trait, intelligence was a resource for deliberation born from the relationship between an agent and its environment.<sup>6</sup> As Dewey later explained in *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, intelligence was “a shorthand designation for great and ever-growing methods of observation, experiment and reflective reasoning.”<sup>7</sup> Through cultivating intelligence, people could more develop more complex relationships with their environment, eventually coming to “intelligently” direct it in ways that (ostensibly) benefited humankind. As we have considered at the Laboratory School, Re-playing Indian allowed Dewey to re-create the problematic situations experienced by supposedly primitive people so that civilized students could appreciate the historic nature of intelligence not only as an individual inquiry, but a social one.<sup>8</sup> As a group, Indians represented an early form of human problem-solving. Though Euro-

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<sup>6</sup> “Mind is not a name for something complete by itself,” Dewey wrote in *Democracy and Education*. “It is a name for a course of action insofar as that is intelligently directed; insofar, that is to say, as aims, ends, enter into it, with selection of means to further the attainment of aims. Intelligence is not a peculiar possession which a person owns.” Dewey, *Education and Democracy*, 138-39.

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Middle Works*, 12: 259.

<sup>8</sup> Active reflection, inquiry, reconstructed rationality—these are various Deweyan terms later combined in his matrix of inquiry that I am gathering together under the term experimental intelligence. Steven Fesmire offers a useful definition of Dewey's concept of intelligence in his glossary: intelligence is “humanity's experimental instrument

American pioneers shared in the same mental capacities as Indians, their civilized lives had led to experience of more sophisticated problems associated with more advanced social occupations. Dewey smuggled into his experimentalism a hierarchy embedded not in race but in the complexity of problems provoked by the history of the settlement of the frontier.

It was in this vein that Dewey came to cite Lakota author Charles A. Eastman and his 1902 book *Indian Boyhood*. In fact, excerpts from Eastman's book appear several times in Dewey's 1908 textbook *Ethics*, coauthored with James Tufts. Their citation of Eastman's *Indian Boyhood* remains the only occasion within Dewey's entire corpus where the pragmatist explicitly referenced an Indigenous contemporary. As a result, Dewey's exegesis of Eastman's book merits a close reading.

Eastman's book was an autobiography of his childhood growing up in a Dakota community. In writing for a Euro-American audience, Eastman engaged in a complex form of cultural politics. His activism attempted to explain and elevate Dakota lifeways to many dismissive Euro-Americans. I argue that it was Tufts, not so much Dewey, who was particularly enamored with Eastman's account of his childhood.<sup>9</sup> Primed as he was to interpret Eastman's *Indian Boyhood* as an autobiographical account of his racial development from savage boy to civilized man, Eastman's text played right into Dewey's association of Indians with savagery. In this fashion, Dewey fundamentally mistook the line of action in Eastman's book. Despite the inclusion of Eastman's *Indian Boyhood* in *Ethics*, Dewey never considered Indigenous people like Eastman as a constituency who might be amenable to his method of experimentalism.

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for dealing with perplexing situations. In Dewey's terminology intelligence replaces the old notion of a universal Reason that transcends culture, historical context, social relations, embodiment, and emotion. Dewey's own examples highlights *combined individual efforts* [original emphasis], as with the joint development of maps and other navigational technologies." Fesmire, *Dewey*, 252.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Tufts was a closer reader of Eastman than Dewey, going so far as to review *Indian Boyhood* in 1904.



Instead, Dewey wrote of Indian people as if they had all dropped out of modern American history. The consequence of this instrumentalization was that Dewey failed to acknowledge Indigenous people's position at the forefront of the conflict over education and democracy in the United States.

Dewey's treatment of Eastman's *Indian Boyhood* is indicative of his long-standing habit of drawing on the frontier discourse when thinking about American Indian people. Long after Dewey left the Great Lakes behind, Dewey continued to conflate North American Indians with savages in ways that were distinct from his writing about African Americans. Though scholars have debated experimentalism's potential as an anti-racist method, more broadly, there is no denying that Dewey slowly began to use his station as one of America's leading philosophers to advocate on behalf of the political rights and human dignity of Black people in the United States.<sup>10</sup> In his philosophical writings, speeches, and activism in New York, Dewey began to act during the early part of the twentieth century in ways that suggest he had increasingly extracted African Americans from the category of "savage."

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<sup>10</sup> The same claim is complicated by Dewey's regard for the Black people he encountered outside the United States. He wrote about his observations of Black people in places like South Africa and Jamaica with sometimes cringe-worthy descriptive language. At the same time, his observations were always filtered through his own philosophical interest. "The Jamaicans, especially women folks are straight and fleximble [sic] in carriage as were the natives in Honolulu years ago, and as they are in So. Africa still where everything is carried on the head and the hands are left free," he wrote in a 1949 letter. At the same time, he was hardly a completely oblivious observer of racial dynamics. In the same letter, he notes, "The color situation is complicated and difficult; there was a time when intermarriage was the rule—aside from unions not blessed by state or church and there all colors—those with the least dark blood draw the line on the others. A local lawyer—speaking beautiful English—speaks disparagingly of the 'niggers' although his little daughter is several shades darker than he is, and he is not exactly blonde." John Dewey to Boyd H. Bode, March 2, 1949, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3. For a survey of the broader critiques of Dewey, race, and Blackness in particular, see Cornel West, *Evasion of Philosophy*; Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race*; Shannon Sullivan, "(Re)construction Zone: Beware of Falling Statues" in *In Dewey's Wake: Unfinished Work of Pragmatic Reconstruction*, ed. William J. Gavin (Albany: University of New York Press, 2003), 109-28; Frank Margonis, "John Dewey's Racialized Visions of the Students and Classroom Community," *Educational Theory* 59, no. 1 (2009): 17-39; Michael Eldridge, "Challenging Speculation about Dewey's Racialized Visions," *Educational Theory* 60, no. 4 (October 2010): 503-17.

For example, Dewey spoke at the 1909 National Negro Conference in New York, where he insisted “there is no inferior race, and the members of a race so-called should each have the same opportunities of social environment and personality as those of the more favored race.”<sup>11</sup> That same year, Dewey “played a minor role” in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>12</sup> In 1932, he spoke at the 23rd NAACP conference in Washington, DC.<sup>13</sup> And when the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union took on the case of Odell Waller, a Black sharecropper who acted in self-defense but was convicted of murder in the death of a White landlord, Dewey was moved to speak out. At the behest of Pauli Murray, Dewey wrote an op-ed on behalf of Waller in the *New York Times*. When the Supreme Court declined to hear Waller’s appeal in 1942, Dewey amplified the message of the Double V Campaign, concluding that “colored people regard this unexplained refusal as just one more evidence that when white people speak of fighting to preserve freedom, they mean freedom for their own race.”<sup>14</sup> At no time in his career did Dewey offer similar advocacy for American Indian people. This suggests that Dewey’s esteem for Black people and Indigenous people in the United States—once conjoined by racial recapitulation as “savage” peoples—was increasingly disassociated.

Between 1904 and 1916, Dewey drew heavily on anthropological reports from the Smithsonian’s Bureau of Ethnography for evidence of “savage” lifeways. It is laudable that Dewey’s commitment to experimentalism, empiricism, and scientific knowledge compelled him to consult such ostensibly “scientific” literature about Indigenous people, rather than purely

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<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, “Address to National Negro Conference” (1909), *Middle Works*, 4:157, cited in Fallace, *Origins*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Westbrook, *Dewey and Democracy*, 167.

<sup>13</sup> Sam F. Stack Jr., “John Dewey and the Question of Race: The Fight for Odell Waller,” *Education and Culture* 25, no. 1 (2009): 23.

<sup>14</sup> John Dewey, “The Case of Odell Waller” (1949), *Later Works*, 15:357-59; Stack, “John Dewey and the Question of Race,” 23.

speculate as other philosophers had done. Yet Dewey and the researchers at the Smithsonian were equally informed by the frontier discourse of the late nineteenth century. Propelled by the same premises of Indian vanishing extolled by the frontier discourse in the Great Lakes, researchers in the Bureau of Ethnology deployed themselves across the United States in a harried attempt to “preserve” Indigenous cultures from Indigenous people themselves. Such ethnographers in the late nineteenth century were feverishly engaged in what would come to be known as salvage anthropology, which presumed Indian people to be unworthy stewards of their own material culture. The legacy of salvage anthropology predominantly among North American Indigenous peoples remains a central feature of the violence of settler colonialism in U.S. history.<sup>15</sup>

In particular, in his 1908 textbook *Ethics* written with James Tufts, Dewey was careful to cite a number of early anthropologists in the United States who conducted fieldwork in American Indian communities. Dewey and Tufts widely cited the amateur ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan and his *The League of the Iroquois* (1851), *Ancient Society* (1877), and *Houses and House-life of the American Aborigines* (1881).<sup>16</sup> The two authors further cited “papers on various cults of North American Indians in reports of the Bureau of Ethnology,” including reports by

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<sup>15</sup> On Smithsonian and Bureau of Ethnology and their targeting of American Indian communities in particular, see Curtis Halsey, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in Victorian America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994). On the critiques of anthropology of this era, see Richard G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991) and Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995). On recovering the Indigenous informants in this discipline who ought to be considered as both a part of and surpassing this tradition, see Margaret M. Bruchac, *Savage Kin: Indigenous Informants and American Anthropologists* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> John Dewey and James Tufts, *Ethics* (1908), *Middle Works*, 5:595, 573. To be sure, the first edition of *Ethics* cited cultural anthropology produced by Euro-Americans in Australia, Polynesia, South Africa, Japan, and China. Dudley Kidd’s 1906 *Savage Childhood: A Study of Kafir Children* figures prominently. However, even though the Bureau of Ethnology was a hub for many reports of cultural anthropology around the world, it was also engaged in a particular brand of salvage anthropology in the United States. On Lewis Henry Morgan’s hold on the Bureau of Ethnology, see George W. Stocking Jr., *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 116-20; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 286-87.

John Wesley Powell on the mythology of the Ute people in 1879, James Own Dorsey on Omaha and Siouan languages in 1881 and 1889, Jesse Walker Fewkes' 1893 reports from various Pueblo nations, and Alice C. Fletcher (major proponent of the General Allotment Act of 1887) and her work with the Omaha in 1900. In their discussion of prayer in *Ethics*, Dewey and Tufts even excerpted Matilda Coxe Stevenson's reports on Zuni Pueblo people and their rites. To cap it off, Dewey also made sure to cite Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and his *Indian Tribes*, a collection of stories from Anishinaabe people in Michigan, which had formed the backbone of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*.<sup>17</sup>

For these reasons, I have dubbed Dewey's frequent practice of invoking Indians-as-savages in an effort to define his experimentalism as the Instrumental Indian. Dewey's repeated invocations of Indians-as-savages were not just passing references at opportunistic moments, but are instead evidence of a habitual and sustained engagement with references to American Indian people. Such Instrumentalized Indians then became a foundational—but largely forgotten—feature of his philosophy. I aim to show how Dewey distorted Eastman's sophisticated cultural politics and adapted it as evidence for his argument in *Ethics*. Eastman did not challenge Dewey's reliance upon Instrumental Indians; instead, he became one.

### **The Indigenous in Intelligence**

Between the founding of the Laboratory School in 1896 and the publication of *Democracy and Education* in 1916, Dewey began to refine his concept of experimental intelligence. In so doing, he also began invoking Instrumental Indians as a part of this articulation. In this section, I follow the many references Dewey made in this period to Indians-as-savages or foiling Indian psychology against its civilized counterpart.

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<sup>17</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics* (1908), *Middle Works*, 5:73.

Most scholarly accounts locate the origins of Dewey's concept of experimental intelligence in his 1896 "The Reflex Arc in Psychology." In that essay, Dewey argued that the prevailing paradigm in psychology of stimulus and response—like that of a billiard ball or a Newton's cradle—failed to capture the way human psychology worked. Dewey argued that the relationship between thought and action was more like an arc. Humans did not encounter the world and *then* begin to respond; encounter and response were fused together in a circuit. As Fallace writes, this "circuitous theory of learning" was the basis for Dewey's early accounts of experimentalist teaching and learning.<sup>18</sup> It was continuity, not rupture, that defined human thinking and conduct. It was not enough, however, for Dewey to show how thought moved circuitously; he wanted to show how this pattern of thought had also emerged in the history of human evolution and social development. One consequence of this scheme was that Dewey effectively placed experimental inquiry into the stream of experience: "The elaborate systems of science are not of reason but of impulses at first slight and flickering; impulses to handle, move about, to hunt, to uncover, to mix things separated and divide things combined, to talk and to listen."<sup>19</sup> In so doing, Dewey made science less of a noun and more of a verb. People had been "sciencing" as soon as they tinkered with objects, migrated across the planet, or began to hunt animals. With this approach, Dewey then began to translate his map of experimental psychology into experiential pedagogy, which in turn produced his philosophy of education.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, such accounts rarely note how often Dewey illustrated his functional psychology through Instrumental Indians. Dewey's impulse to reach for Indians to develop

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<sup>18</sup> Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race*, 50-54.

<sup>19</sup> John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Middle Works*, 14:36.

<sup>20</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 67-70; Campbell, *Understanding Dewey*, 213-23; Ryan, *John Dewey and High Tide of American Liberalism*, 124-32; Jay, *The Education of John Dewey*, 186-203; Menand, *Metaphysical Club*, 324-30; Fesmire, *Dewey*, 18-24, 173-85; Cowles, *The Scientific Method*, 240-49.

experimental intelligence was a result of not only his familiarity with racial recapitulation, but his immersion in the frontier discourse. For example, in his 1894 review of Lester Ward's *Psychic Factors of Civilization*, Dewey saw historicism, not racism, as a means to develop a naturalistic account for his brand of experimental thinking. Drawing on an example from Ward, Dewey wrote that "when the savage makes a bow and arrow, his ultimate aim, indeed, is still gratification of appetite; but for the time being his attention must be taken up with a purely objective adjustment—with perception of relations of general utility, not of simple personal profit. In this way intelligence gradually, through the mediation of invention, works free from subjection to the demands of personal desire." For Dewey, this was an important step on the path towards a more sophisticated experimentalism: "It sets up its own interest, its own desire, which is comprehension of relations as they are. Scientific discovery and speculative genius are simply farther steps on this same road."<sup>21</sup> By 1902, with "Interpretation of Savage Mind," Dewey had sketched out how the scientific and civilized mind had developed from the savage mind. According to Dewey, the question of how to introduce civilization to a savage thinker was really a question of:

How the purely immediate personal adjustment of habit to direct satisfaction, in the savage, [becomes] transformed through the introduction of impersonal, generalized objective instrumentalities and ends; how it ceased to be immediate and became loaded and surcharged with a content which forced personal want, initiative, effort and satisfaction further and further apart, putting all kinds of social division of labor, intermediate agencies and objective contents between them.<sup>22</sup>

To earn his assertion that savage mind offered a great deal of insight to "modern" psychology, Dewey insisted that "mind has a pattern, a scheme of arrangement in its constituent elements, and that is the business of a serious comparative psychology to exhibit these

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<sup>21</sup> John Dewey, "The Psychic Factors of Civilization" (1894), *Early Works*, 4:207-8.

<sup>22</sup> John Dewey, "Interpretation of Savage Mind" (1902), *Middle Works*, 2:17.

patterns.”<sup>23</sup> For Dewey, “savage mind” was then one of several forms of “psychic morphology.” If savage mind was a result of history, not race, then Dewey believed anthropology, sociology, and psychology might finally achieve a truly naturalistic method, demonstrating how “savage mind” was a window in the premodern version of modern psychology.<sup>24</sup> After his 1902 essay, Dewey’s engagement with the vocabulary of savagery continued—and became even more explicitly fixed to North American Indigenous people.

In 1910, Dewey gathered many of the ideas he had learned from the Laboratory School and his interpretation of savage mind and applied them in his account of psychology, *How We Think*. Most treatments of *How We Think* suggest that it was in this book which Dewey gave an account of what he had called in 1902 the “ground pattern” for inquiry. This process of resolving problematic situations hinged on the cultivation of experimental intelligence. For Dewey, intelligence was experimental capital, and it was used to increase, change, and re-imagine one’s situation in a given environment. In other words, *How We Think* spelled out the means by which savage people had resolved problematic situations (such as those Dewey had recreated in the sandbox at the Laboratory School). Intelligent control of one’s environment was the hallmark not only of modernity, but of experimentalism. Dewey’s sequence of experimental inquiry would come to be regarded by many in the United States as the very definition of the procedure of the scientific method.<sup>25</sup>

Because the short book is littered with Instrumental Indians, it is surprising that few scholars who have treated this important work have paused to consider just whose thinking Dewey intended to explore. In *How We Think*, Dewey boldly declared that just as intelligence

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>24</sup> Fallace, “John Dewey and the Savage Mind,” 344.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Cowles, *The Scientific Method*, 260-71.

“makes the difference between savage man and brute, so this trait makes the difference between civilized man and savage.” What follows is a clear example of Dewey’s foiling:

A savage who has been shipwrecked in a river may note certain things which serve him as signs of danger in the future. But civilized man deliberately makes such signs; he sets up in advance of wreckage warning buoys, and builds lighthouses where he sees signs that such events may occur. A savage reads weather signs with great expertness; civilized man institutes a weather service by which signs are artificially secured and information is distributed in advance of the appearance of any signs that could be detected without special methods. A savage finds his way skillfully through a wilderness by reading certain obscure indications; civilized man builds a highway which shows the road to all. The savage learns to detect the signs of fire and thereby to invent methods of producing flame; civilized man invents permanent conditions for producing light and heat whenever they are needed. The very essence of civilized culture is that we ... deliberately institute, in advance of the happening of various contingencies and emergencies of life, devices for detecting their approach and registering their nature, for warding off what is unfavorable, or at least for protecting ourselves from its full impact and for making more secure and extensive what is favorable.<sup>26</sup>

In this passage, Dewey foils a category of psychology (the savage), those who yielded to a psychology of environmental accommodation, to a category of people (the civilized) who wielded a psychology of environmental control.

Unlike many racial essentialists of the era, Dewey had no problem imagining that savage people had the inherent capacity for the cultivation of experimental intelligence. The difference between savage and civilized mind was one of degree, not of kind. Recalling the Laboratory School history curriculum, Dewey maintained in *Democracy and Education* that savages lived in a world of immediate experience which had, over time, ossified into social habit. Only the interpolation of external factors kick-started experimental intelligence. “The scope of personal, vitally direct experience is very limited. If it were not for the intervention of agencies for representing absent and distant affairs, our experience would remain almost on the level of that of the brutes,” Dewey wrote. “Every step from savagery to civilization is dependent upon the

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<sup>26</sup> Dewey, *How We Think* (1910), *Middle Works*, 6:193-94.



invention of media which enlarge the range of purely immediate experience.” Surpassing this savage state through developing experimental intelligence through school was the road to modernity, and that road passed through the classroom.<sup>27</sup>

But for all the historicism in Dewey’s version of racial recapitulation, he employed Instrumental Indians to draw remarkably bright lines between “savagery” and “civilization.” For Dewey, savage people could not engage in fully experimental thought until they could overthrow their “primitive credulity”: “When there is no directly appreciable reaction of the inference upon the security and prosperity of life, there are no natural checks to the acceptance of wrong beliefs,” Dewey explained in *How We Think*. “Conclusions may be generated by a modicum of fact merely because the suggestions are vivid and interesting; a large accumulation of data may fail to suggest a proper conclusion because existing customs are averse to entertaining it.” In other words, to properly establish facts that could be the basis for intelligence, there had to be a way to resort to a method of verification rather than take the first explanation that came to mind.

Dewey foiled a savage and civilized pattern of thinking through the vocabulary of savagery embedded in the frontier discourse. “The difficulty savages have of discriminating ideas from facts is a common place of ethnology,” Dewey wrote from Michigan in 1890. He went on to equate “savage” psychology to that of children: “The absence of contradictory facts retained in the mind leads us to take everything we dream as real, while we dream it. The savage continues to think of it as real when he awakes; it is only something that happened in another region of experience, when the soul sallied forth from the body. The idea, having no other body of ideas over against which it is set, is taken, as in childhood, for a fact.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 241-42.

<sup>28</sup> John Dewey, “The Logic of Verification” (1890), *Early Works*, 3:85-86.

Even by 1910, Dewey still felt that Indians-as-savages had yet to dispel their child-like psychological indulgences. Dewey characterized savage life as a mode of life where “dreams, the positions of stars, the lines of the hand, may be regarded as valuable signs, and the fall of cards as an inevitable omen, while natural events of the most crucial significance go disregarded. Beliefs in portents of various kinds, now mere nook and cranny superstitions, were once universal. A long discipline in exact science was required for their conquest.”<sup>29</sup>

The importance of the Instrumental Indian to Dewey’s project continued in Dewey’s 1910 contribution to *Cyclopedia of Education*. In his entry on “Adaptation,” Dewey sought to explain the difference between accommodating and controlling one’s environment and the critical role this played in learning. “The maintenance of life requires an adaptation of the organism to its surroundings, of the human individual to the natural and social medium in which he is placed.” Dewey rejected Herbert Spencer’s rendition of evolution as an exogenous force that acted to improve individual beings towards a final, superior state. For Dewey, Spencer’s account was flawed because it was passive, static, and ultimately ahistorical.

To the contrary, Dewey explained how experimental intelligence meant the invitation to action, innovation, and trial and error. “Lower forms of life have only a limited power to adjust themselves to changes in their surroundings; if their conditions vary markedly or suddenly, they die.” Animals that failed to make a nest, build a dam, or accommodate to a drought by relocating faced annihilation in the race to survive and pass on their genes. Their ability to grow and respond to a situation meant that adaptation was ongoing negotiation of an environment. “Continued growth means that the individual does not accommodate himself to his environment, but takes the initiative in modifying it to make it over into accord with his own desires and

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<sup>29</sup> Dewey, *How We Think*, 197.

purposes.” So too was it with humans: “All invention and discovery are cases of active adaptation.” In other words, adaptation was one’s ability to intelligently control, direct, and influence the environment. Dewey defined this control as “the subordination of the environment to the life functions of individuals.”<sup>30</sup> Such was the pragmatic version of social Darwinism.

To help illustrate his concept, Dewey needed an example of two societies that were emblematic of dispositions of accommodation and control. The situation was ripe for the use of the Instrumental Indian and its foiling against Euro-American pioneers: “The North American Indians accommodated themselves to their surroundings on our Western plains and deserts, and the result was a low and precarious culture,” Dewey asserted. In contrast, “Civilized man employs migration, machinery, means of transportation and communication; and by adapting these same surroundings to his own ends controls the environment instead of having his development controlled by it.” Indigenous nations on the Great Plains represented to Dewey a people who had failed to adapt to their environment; the environment instead acted upon them. Without a psychology of control, they were largely helpless to do otherwise.

In a historical irony, had Dewey cared to more closely examine the same Indigenous nations he invoked, he would have found that such Plains equestrian nations were rather a textbook example of the very kind of adaptation for which he was so enthusiastic. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Plains peoples such as the Lakota, Dakota, Cheyenne, Shoshone, Arapaho, Comanche, and others incorporated the horse into their lifeways to create an entirely new social pattern existence. These equestrian nations (if not empires) were the result of Indigenous adaptation to the rippling effects of colonialism. In so doing, they experimented with an entirely new pattern of relationship to the environment—a vast steppe increasingly pressured

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<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, “Contributions to a Cyclopedia of Education Volumes 1 and 2” (1911), *Middle Works*, 6:365.

by depleted bison herds culled by market hunters, soil exhaustion from intensive agricultures, and invasive grasses introduced by cattle grazing.<sup>31</sup> Their equestrian lifeways were by any indication a gambit which proved immensely successful for removed, dislocated, and otherwise pressured tribal nations. Yet immersed in the frontier discourse, Dewey could not see it. Whereas the civilization of the United States was capable of great feats of environmental control, Indigenous people could only accommodate to theirs—and thus be overcome by the sweep of history. “Herein lies the difference between stationary and progressive societies, between civilization and savagery, between higher and lower forms of animal life,” Dewey insisted.<sup>32</sup>

### **Accommodation vs. Control**

As Dewey’s interest in education and democracy began to dominate his philosophy between the 1890s and the 1910s, his use of Instrumental Indians intensified. One reason that Dewey foiled the psychology of Indians with pioneers was a result of his understanding of the distinction between education and schooling. Dewey came to regard schools themselves as a hallmark of societies of control. Dewey conceded that education happens in the day-to-day life of a hunting village: “When community life is simple, the function of transmission is performed by personal contact and intercourse and by the sharing of the young and old in common activities.” For much of human history, this was a satisfactory means for social reproduction. Yet this form of teaching and learning had been eclipsed by the needs of modern life. “As associated life becomes more complex, it becomes more and more impossible to secure the requisite continuity of institutions by such informal means,” Dewey wrote. “As the tribal traditions

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<sup>31</sup> On the irony of Dewey’s oversight of these equestrian nations as a form of experimental living, see Donald Warren, “American Indian Histories as Education History,” *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (August 2014): 255-85.

<sup>32</sup> Dewey, “Contributions to a Cyclopedia of Education Volumes 1 and 2,” 365.

become richer and fuller, and the technique of the arts, industrial, military and magical, more elaborated, division of labor occurs, and certain persons are set aside, as it were, to attend particularly to these things and to their perpetuation.”<sup>33</sup> Dewey’s apparent presumption that Indigenous communities lacked schools underscored their own primitive nature. “The need of special instruction going along with specialized legends and activities is probably the chief motive force in compelling self-conscious reflection upon naïve and customary experience.”<sup>34</sup> Without such a need presented by the social environment, Indian people simply accommodated and failed to develop along the stadial evolution of linear historicism towards civilization.

With this view, instead of inculcating the proclivity for environmental control, savage societies simply reproduced accommodation as habit. In these kinds of communities, “the whole aim of education is to reproduce as a habit of the individual the customs of the group to which he belongs; all deviations are looked upon as immoral or even sacrilegious.” Dewey was confident that “in the savage and barbarian societies ... the entire educational procedure falls within the scope of this category.”<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, curriculum in the schools for the civilized citizens of the United States was framed by Dewey in 1911 as a kind of mental immunization against regression along the continuum of stadial evolution: “Geography, history, arithmetic, grammar, physics, etc., do not exist as studies simply for the sake of affording material of discipline or of intellectual improvement or general culture to pupils, nor because knowledge is inherently desirable in the abstract, but because there are certain values, activities, purposes, and beliefs currently existing in social life which absolutely must be transmitted to the succeeding and immature generation if social life itself is not to relapse into barbarism and then into savagery,”

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 397-98.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 399.

he insisted.<sup>36</sup> While this is not an argument that most educators would associate with John Dewey, in the first decades of the twentieth century, foiling of savage and civilized mind played a central part of his philosophy of education. It also directly shaped Dewey's denigration of Indigenous systems of knowing and learning. And it is a key part of his silence on anti-democratic education in Indigenous lives.

After all, Dewey was quite clear that the function of the school was to curate educative experience. To do so, schools had to be designed to prompt students to adapt to new circumstances. This meant supplying them with problematic situations where they might hone their experimental intelligence: "Control of direction of growth must take place indirectly through selecting and loading, as it were, the stimuli which evoke responses and hereby determine habits," Dewey wrote in his description of the experiential classroom. While this kind of teaching and learning was vital to the new education, it was also particularly relevant to the schooling of Indians. "In simple, savage groups, the existing habits of the elders are enough to give such direction; direct participation and reproduction in play suffice for the required development," Dewey asserted. "As a society gets more complex, and its arts more elaborate, a special environment has to be provided, and the school as a special institution comes into existence."<sup>37</sup> In Dewey's view, without schooling, it was difficult for children raised within a society of accommodation to achieve the psychological escape velocity required to free themselves from the habit of savage mind.

While "Interpretation of Savage Mind" underscored the utility of Instrumental Indians as a tool to illustrate Dewey's account of experimental intelligence in psychology, their utility did not end there. Dewey also put Instrumental Indians to work in his ethics. As early as his 1891

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 339-440.

essay “Moral Theory and Practice,” Dewey held that ethical thinking was also a product of experimental intelligence. “For any *act* (as distinct from mere impulse) there must be ‘theory,’” Dewey wrote. In ethics, that ‘theory’ was reflective deliberation on conduct: “It was Socrates who initiated the movement, when he said that ‘an unexamined life is not one to be led by man.’ Whatever may be the case with savages and babes, the beginning of every ethical advance, under conditions of civilized existence, must be in a further ‘examination of life.’” Anything less failed to reach the threshold of philosophy.<sup>38</sup>

Dewey then refined this naturalistic account of moral systems in his 1908 *Ethics*, co-written with James Tufts. *Ethics* was intended as a textbook. But the book also had a clear intervention: the two argued that the social sciences could empirically render morality as a system of communal living that developed over time—and could therefore be studied historically. As human societies developed into ever more sophisticated webs of social relationships, premodern tendencies would no longer suffice. The ethical systems under which these earlier societies had once relied were no exception: “For the new conditions of city life, the new sources of disease, the new dangers which attend every successive step away from the life of the savage, demand all the resources of the sciences.”<sup>39</sup> Consequently, it should come as no surprise that Instrumental Indians stalk the pages of *Ethics*. What “Interpretation of Savage Mind” had done for the study of psychology, Dewey hoped *Ethics* could achieve for the study of morality.

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<sup>38</sup> John Dewey, “Moral Theory and Practice” (1891), *Early Works*, 3:96.

<sup>39</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 155.

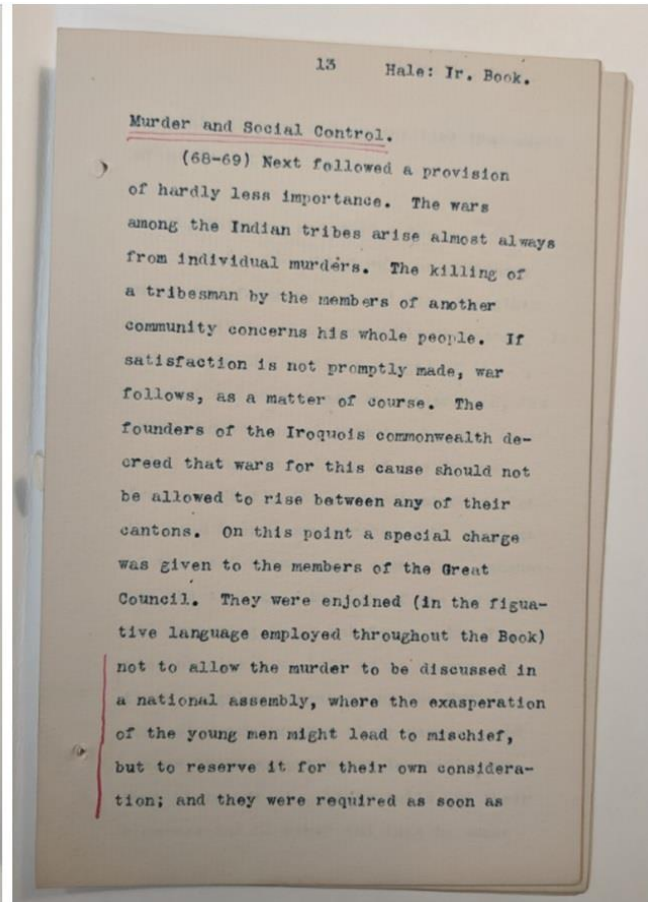
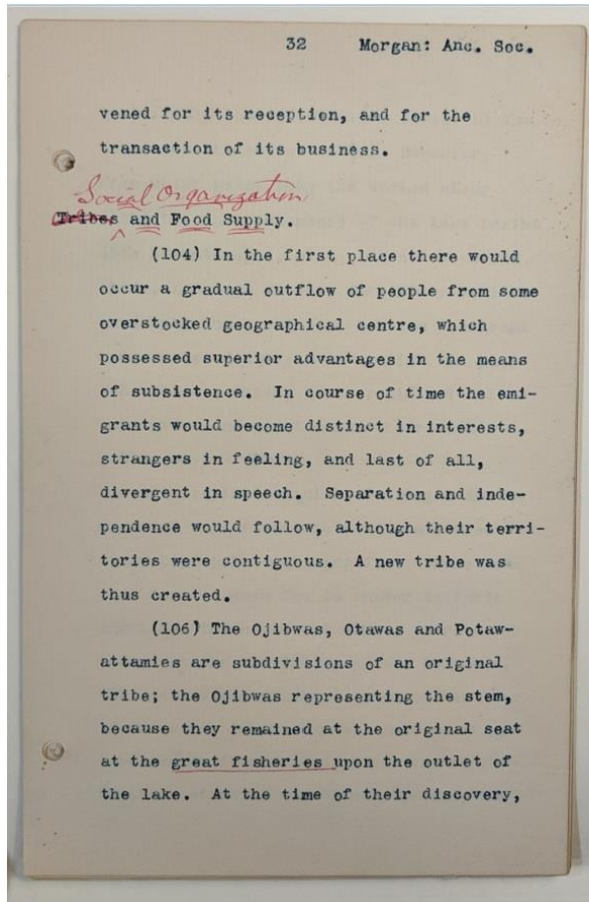


Figure 4.1. Dewey's notes from Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) and Horatio Hale's *Iroquois Book of Rites* (1883), in Boxes 37 and 36, respectively, John Dewey Papers, Morris Library Special Collections, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois. Photographs by the author.

Dewey and Tufts argued that modern ethics developed as a part of sociocultural development akin to individual psychology. Both individuals and social groups shared a kind of three-part sequence of thought: from instinctive activity, to attention, and then to habit. Dewey posited that people acted in various ways that were instinctive; then, when these strategies inevitably failed to address new circumstances, a conflict would arise. In response, individuals had to think for themselves, to find new solutions to new problems. Only then, when they had succeeded to produce an innovation that could smooth out the wrinkle of a problematic situation, would these innovations become consolidated as a new habit, or the practiced employment of



that new strategy that no longer required reflection. Not only was Dewey's story for individual thought, but it was an account of how people and societies moved from prereflection to reflective thought en masse. "Where the original equipment of instincts fails to meet some new situation, when there are stimulations for which the system has no ready-made response, consciousness appears," they wrote. This accumulation of reflective experience, converted into new habits for conduct, was experimental intelligence.

But as a matter of ethics, this was very abstract. Dewey and Tufts needed an example to help them translate their psychological intelligence into ethical intelligence. Fortunately, they had one readily available in the Instrumental Indian. The two scoured for scholarly sources on Indians because they wanted to evoke a sense of premodern historical origins for many contemporary elements of American life. The 1908 edition of *Ethics* contains references to "savages," "primitives," "Indians," "North American Indians," and some particular Indigenous nations, such as the Iroquois, Omaha, and Zuni. As he imagined Indians as more impulsive than their civilized Euro-American contemporaries, Dewey suggested that even the most basic instruction in arts and crafts could embody a lesson in civilization. In one section in *Ethics* extolling the function of arts and crafts as a form of moral training, Dewey and Tufts concluded that "savages," like children, were too impulsive to be expected to conform to moral laws: "To govern action by law is moral, but it is too much to expect this of the savage and the child as a conscious principle where the law opposes impulse."<sup>40</sup>

Their equation of savagery and psychological adolescence continued: "The habits formed at one age of the individual's life, or at one stage of race development, prove inadequate for more complex situations," Dewey and Tufts wrote in their book. "The child leaves home, the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

savage tribe changes to agricultural life, and the old habits no longer meet the need. Attention is again demanded. There is deliberation, struggle, effort. If the result is successful new habits are formed, but upon a higher level. For the new habits, the new character, embody more intelligence.” Dewey and Tufts made it clear that such experimental intelligence was synonymous with scientific thinking. “The great achievement of the eighteenth century in the intellectual development of the individual was that the human mind came to realize the part it was itself playing in the whole realm of science and conduct,” Dewey and Tufts argued. “Man began to look within. For of a sudden it was dawning upon man that, if he was then living upon a higher level of knowledge and conduct than the animal or the savage, this must be due to the activity of the mind. It appeared that man, not satisfied with ‘nature,’ had gone on to build a new world with institutions and morality, with art and science.” The progress of civilization was therefore a story of the invention of experimental intelligence, pragmatism’s scientific method.<sup>41</sup>

Other elements of the frontier discourse cast a long shadow on *Ethics* as well. On one occasion, Dewey almost seemed to connect the dots between his own method and Andrew Blackbird’s critique of settler colonialism’s perversion of citizenship as a vehicle for the fundamental promise of protecting individual civil rights. Underscoring his account of democracy as a culture, Dewey emphasized the importance of aligning the apparatus of government with the social community. Dewey warned that should government drift from the social realities of the communities it governed, even democratic societies like the United States could be hollowed out, rendered unable to deliver justice for all members of the polity. “It is only a few years since Chief Justice Taney’s dictum stated the existing legal theory of the United States to be that the negro ‘had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.’ Even

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<sup>41</sup> For an extended treatment of this development and Dewey’s place in it, see Henry Cowles, *The Scientific Method*, 62-143.

where legal theory does not recognize race or other distinctions, it is often hard in practice for an alien to get justice,” he noted. In passages like these, Dewey recognized that race could make some members of the community into “Others,” which impacted their ability to harvest the fruits of U.S. democracy.

But Dewey and Tufts could not (or would not) label the federal government’s policy of Indian education as one such case. In fact, in one of the rare explicit mentions of Indigenous people in the United States, Dewey and Tufts come quite close to explicitly sanctioning federal Indian education: “As the American Indian accepts land in severalty, the old group life, the tribal restraints and supports, the group custom and moral unity that went with it, are gone. He must find a new basis or go to pieces.”<sup>42</sup> Neither Dewey nor Tufts mentioned the role federal schools like the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School played in this purposeful destruction of Indigenous cultural integrity. Nor did they closely consider their claim of whether or not Indigenous nations had really “accepted” land in severalty. And Dewey and Tufts certainly had not cultivated any Indigenous interlocutors with whom they might consult to interrogate whether American Indian people really did have to acquiesce to modernity or “go to pieces.” Instead, they simply cited Charles A. Eastman.

### **Charles Eastman’s *Indian Boyhood* (1902)**

Charles Eastman (Santee Dakota) was born as Hakadah in 1858 in Minnesota. He later gained the name Ohíye S’a during his adolescence. This was a period he defined as the first fifteen years of his life marked by living with an uncle in a Dakota village. Caught up in the Dakota War of 1862, his father had made for the Canadian border but was apprehended and held in the concentration camp at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. When he returned to his son, Ohíye S’a

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<sup>42</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 83.

found that his father spoke English, had become a Christian, and believed that his boy should attend an American school. Eastman soon departed for a mission school and then went to Kimball Union Academy, followed by a string of colleges, including Beloit, Knox, Dartmouth, and finally Boston University Medical School, where he became a physician. Rather than consider his choice of profession exclusively as part of an individual career, Eastman considered how his schooling might be a means to serve his own people. Upon certification, he traveled to South Dakota to the Crow Creek Agency, where he worked as a doctor. It was there that he received some of the first reports of the massacre of Dakota men, women, and children at Wounded Knee by the U.S. Army in 1890, only a year after Dewey had returned to Michigan from Minnesota. In this way, Eastman had a first-row seat to the violence of the so-called frontier and the discursive formations that swirled in its wake.<sup>43</sup>

Doctoring was not the only means by which Eastman hoped to serve the welfare of his people; he put his education to work for the YMCA, as a school official at Carlisle, and as a collaborator with the Boy Scouts.<sup>44</sup> But more than anything else, Eastman used his education to begin a second career as a writer. Eastman wrote a number of works, including *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* in 1916, a memoir of the 1862 Dakota War that included an account of the violence against his people at Wounded Knee.<sup>45</sup> As Brenda Child testifies, Eastman the author demonstrated how Indigenous intellectuals could “speak, write, and relate to a public, non-Indian

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<sup>43</sup> Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race, and Reform* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 130; Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 122-23; Kiara M. Vigil, *Indigenous Intellectuals: Sovereignty, Citizenship, and the American Imagination, 1880-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 34-100; David Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Maddox, *Citizen Indians*, 130.

<sup>45</sup> Brenda Child, “Introduction,” in *The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation*, Charles A. Eastman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), xii.

audience about American Indian subjects.”<sup>46</sup> Unlike Oglala Lakota writer Luther Standing Bear, Eastman positioned himself as “a representative American Indian,” an authorial mode for a “pan-Indian consciousness for which [his] specific Sioux identity provided authentication.”<sup>47</sup>

Eastman’s 1902 *Indian Boyhood* was a means to indicate the worthiness, value, and sometimes incommensurate nature of Indigenous ontology to his Euro-American audiences. While Eastman wrote the book ostensibly for his son, he was well aware that the book would also be read by non-Native people.<sup>48</sup> As a result, Eastman intentionally crafted the book to suggest why his Euro-American readers ought to hold Indigenous ways of knowing and being in similar esteem to their own. Eastman wrote about his childhood with deep respect for his people’s spiritual traditions, lifeways, and community life. Understanding the grip of the frontier discourse on his Euro-American readers’ impression of Indians, Eastman sometimes mobilized a strategic essentialism to describe Dakota culture in ways that met his non-Native readers’ expectations of Indian people. “Charles Alexander Eastman ... and many others also wanted to become bridge figures, using antimodern primitivism to defend native cultures against the negative stereotypes left over from colonial conquest,” writes Phil Deloria.<sup>49</sup> For an Indigenous person to be heard through the deafening clamor of the frontier discourse and its representations of Indian people authored by Euro-Americans was no small task. While Eastman converted to Christianity (a decision influenced by the federal crackdown on the Dakota after 1862), married a Euro-American woman, Elaine Goodale Eastman, and extolled the power of his American education, his writings such as *Indian Boyhood* cannot be dismissed as simply reflecting

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<sup>46</sup> Child, “Introduction,” xiv.

<sup>47</sup> Maddox, *Citizen Indians*, 127.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Eastman, *Indian Boyhood* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1902).

<sup>49</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 122.

“assimilated” politics. Rather, Eastman’s political strategy is better understood as an Indigenous counter discourse, talking back to civilization on its own frequency.

In his book *Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought*, David Martinez argues that Charles Eastman was nothing short of an Indigenous philosopher. “While Eastman’s collected works are not typically spoken of in the same breath as those of William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, or John Dewey, if only for the reason that he was an ‘Indian’ who wrote for a wide audience as opposed to an Anglo American philosopher writing by and large for other philosophers, they nonetheless hold the distinction of influencing the way countless readers in several languages perceived and thought about American Indians,” Martinez insists. Following in the footsteps of Deloria’s and Martinez’s framework, I argue that we could go further and suggest that Eastman was an Indigenous pragmatist.<sup>50</sup>

Like Andrew J. Blackbird, Eastman proved deft at drawing on experience in ways that were congruent with Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism but in a decidedly Indigenous context. For example, as Lucy Maddox notes, Eastman was caught between two predominant cultural scripts for the representation of Indian people in modern America during the turn of the century period when the frontier discourse was particularly intense: portraying Indians either as a holdover of the vanishing race or as evidence of a successful transformation from savagery to civilization. Both scripts, it should be noted, were framed by Euro-Americans. As they navigated how to engage with these elements of the frontier discourse, Indigenous people such as Eastman experimented to see which sorts of strategies might work to advance Indigenous interests. This led Frederick Hoxie to describe Eastman and many of his cohort of Indigenous contemporaries as “pragmatic.” As characterized by Deloria, Eastman and his cohort’s pragmatism lay in

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<sup>50</sup> David Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher*, 3.

“claiming connection to the appealing antimodernity of the old ways, yet also bold, literate, and astute in seeing the benefits of explaining traditional pasts in terms of modern concerns.”<sup>51</sup>

Understood as such, we might re-imagine Hoxie’s purely descriptive use of the term “pragmatic” to argue that Eastman something of a pragmatist thinker himself. As Phil Deloria notes, Eastman was engaged in a form of cultural politics which was fundamentally an experimental way of being in the world for Indian people in the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> Take, for example, when Eastman spoke extensively on the U.S. lecture circuit, often in what advertisers were eager to dub “full-dress costume of a Sioux chief.”<sup>53</sup> Deloria, Lucy Maddox and Kiara Vigil have argued this was a sophisticated form of cultural politicking. “When Eastman donned an Indian headdress, he was connecting himself to his Dakota roots. But he was also—perhaps more compellingly—imitating non-Indian imitations of Indians,” Deloria writes. “As he reflected an American image back at American youth, he simultaneously challenged and redirected other, negative stereotypes about Indians.”<sup>54</sup>

This was something of a tightrope act.<sup>55</sup> “Eastman’s Indian mimicry invariably transformed his construction of his own identity—both as a Dakota and as an American,” Deloria concludes. In so doing, Eastman’s own identity was changed: “He lived out a hybrid life, distinct in its Indianness but also cross-cultural and assimilatory.”<sup>56</sup> Despite the superficial ambiguity of this kind of performative politics, Eastman’s line of action was clear: he tried to offer a positive account of Indian identity through what he believed was the appeal of Indigenous

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<sup>51</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 122.

<sup>52</sup> On this brand of representation politics, see also Vigil, *Indigenous Intellectuals*, 1-33.

<sup>53</sup> Maddox, *Citizen Indian*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 123.

<sup>55</sup> On reading Charles Eastman as what Gerald Vizenor calls a “double other,” see David Martinez, “‘The Greatest Sioux of the Century’: Eastman and the Pursuit of an Indigenous Philosophy,” in *Dakota Philosopher*, and Philip J. Deloria, “Four Thousand Invitations,” *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 25-43.

<sup>56</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 123.

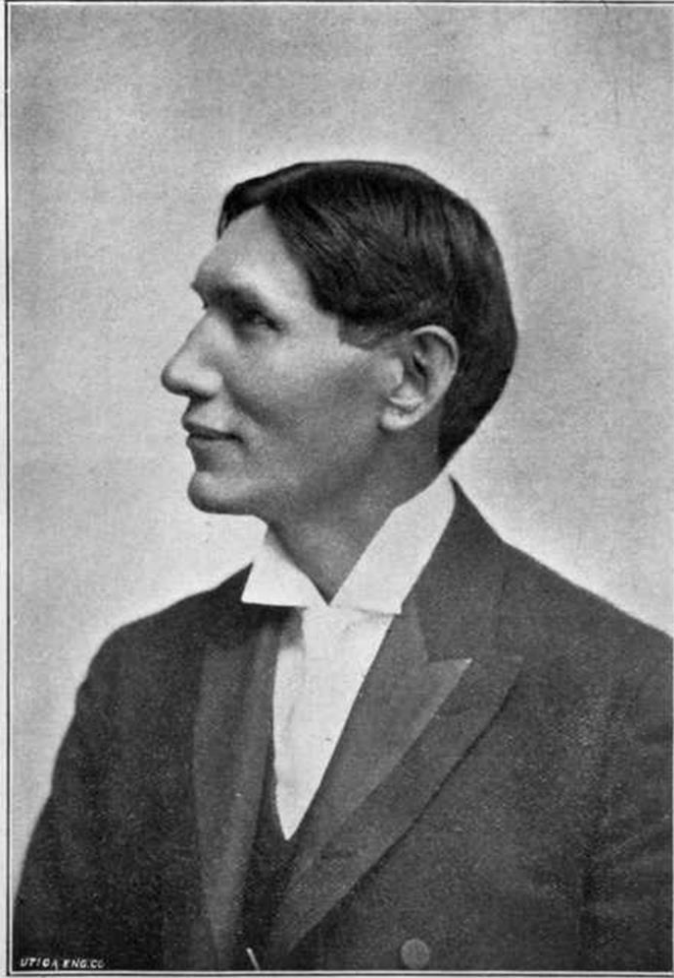


Figure 4.2. Dr. Charles A. Eastman, 1904, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

lifeways to the primitive anti-modernists and ethno-romanticists among Euro-Americans who might be enlisted as political allies. Though the means to accomplish these political ends may not have been of his choosing, Eastman's ends certainly were. Writing *Indian Boyhood*, speaking on the lecture circuit, and joining the Society of American Indians were all urgent political imperatives for Eastman. In these various activities, Eastman sought to articulate the worthiness of Dakota lifeways, appeal to Euro-Americans to take Indian people seriously, and work with other

Indigenous people to chart their political future. As such, Eastman's politics were rooted in the experience of his community, were highly experimental, and were keen to make sense of what U.S. democratic principles could accommodate for Indigenous people.

The sophistication of Eastman's cultural politics is important to note, especially in light of the fact that it may have largely failed—at least among his intended audience of non-Native contemporaries. In performing Indian back to non-Indian audiences at a time when non-Native people had their own concerted cultural agenda for Playing Indian, Eastman ran the risk of reinforcing the very ideas, images, and stereotypes he sought to humanize. As Deloria wonders,



“On an intercultural level, did non-Indian readers focus on subtle pleas for understanding or on the familiar Indian stereotypes that ... Eastman [and others] attempted to refigure?”<sup>57</sup> In other words, had the frontier discourse set a trap for Eastman’s cultural politics? If the appearance of Eastman’s work in the book of John Dewey is any indicator, the answer may be yes.

Dewey and Tufts leaned on Eastman to corroborate a variety of their assertions about human social human development. In the section of *Ethics* titled “Group Morality,” the two asserted that “the economic motive frequently prompts an individual to leave the tribe or the joint family.” To support the assertion, they referenced Eastman by name: “There was constant tendency, Eastman states, among his people, when on a hunting expedition in the enemy’s country, to break up into smaller parties to obtain food more easily and freely.”<sup>58</sup> When Dewey and Tufts asserted that “it is the ridicule or scorn of both men and women which forbids the Indian to marry before he has proved his manhood by some notable deed of prowess in war or chase,” it was their interpretation of Eastman’s account that had supplied the evidence.<sup>59</sup> Of Dakota lifeways, they asserted that “while there was not in primitive life the extensive exchange of goods which expressed the interdependence of modern men, there was yet much concerted work, and there was a great degree of community property.” When Dewey and Tufts contemplated the nature of social cooperation, they excerpted text from *Indian Boyhood* where Eastman had testified, “A hunting bonfire was kindled every morning at daybreak at which each

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<sup>57</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 61-62.

<sup>59</sup> Abraham Edel and Elizabeth Flower studied the differences in the first edition of *Ethics* in 1908 and the second edition in 1932. They argued that Dewey and Tufts made two major revisions to their textbook. First, the 1932 edition rejected the linear model of racial recapitulation in both individuals and racial groups. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny was out. Second, “The other defect in the theory of moral evolution—the assumption that primitive mentality was different from modern—gave way,” they conclude. Nevertheless, Charles Eastman is still cited in the 1932 version, and their treatment of explicit citations of *Indian Boyhood* in this version is largely the same as it is in the 1908 edition. Abraham Edel and Elizabeth Flower, “Introduction,” in John Dewey, *Ethics* (1932), *Middle Works*, 7:viii-xxxvi.

brave must appear and report. The man who failed to do this before the party set out on the day's hunt was harassed by ridicule."<sup>60</sup>

While Tufts was likely the one most responsible for the citation of Eastman, Dewey had no problem fitting *Indian Boyhood* into his experimental method. In fact, Eastman's biography is used in *Ethics* to ground many of the themes Dewey would refine in his 1910 *How We Think*.<sup>61</sup> In particular, one important device was Dewey's paradigm of the situation. For Dewey, a situation was a mental frame by which people made concrete experiences out of the flow of experience. Situations frame up the various flows of experience into something legible for action, often as problems to be solved. In other words, they shape our mental horizons. Dewey explained that moral situations were born when people encountered dilemmas of human welfare. The problematic nature of this dilemma lay in the seemingly overwhelming possibilities for conduct. What could organize experience such that we could make the right moral choices?

In *Ethics*, Dewey articulated how an ethical situation could be framed—using Eastman, now the personification of his tendency to instrumentalize Indians. Dewey suggested that situations become moral when we begin to see ourselves as agents. As moral agents, we must evaluate ends and means based on their outcomes. When moral outcomes are in conflict with one another, some criterion for choosing amongst them is required. As an experimentalist, Dewey applied his scheme of intelligence from his epistemology to his ethics. Accordingly, Dewey argued that when people's original aims were confronted by the challenge of experience, they

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<sup>60</sup> Charles Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, 214-15, cited in Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 47. Dewey proved to be a poor interpreter of what seemed to be the basics of Eastman's account that he and Tufts cited, such as the Dakotas' regular nature of the lighting of a hunting bonfire in the morning. In a 1914 lecture, Dewey was reported to have professed that "savages have a great aversion to routine. If necessary they add song and dance to their labors in order to add the emotional element. External pressure and the hope of reward take the place of this in civilized life—with results that are not altogether good. The emotional side is likely to leak out in vices." *Union Alumni Monthly* 3 (1914): 309-26, in John Dewey, "Reports of Dewey's Addresses" (1914), *Middle Works*, 7: 399.

<sup>61</sup> This latter text would become a pillar of the new psychology and as Henry Cowles argues a major moment of consolidation for what counted as "the" scientific method. See Cowles, *The Scientific Method*, 260-67.

shifted from acting habitually towards reflection. “Suppose a person has unhesitatingly accepted an end,” Dewey imagined. “Then, starting to realize it, he finds the affair not so simple. He is led to review the matter and to consider what really constitutes worth for him. The process of attainment calls for toil which is disagreeable, and imposes restraints and abandonments of accustomed enjoyments.” In so doing, Dewey believed that moral agents moved from instinctual conduct to ethical conduct. To dispel the abstraction, Dewey and Tufts offered an example to illustrate how situations come to be moral by way of Charles Eastman’s biography:

An Indian boy, for example, thinks it desirable to be a good rider, a skillful shot, a sagacious scout. Then he “naturally,” as we say, disposes of his time and energy so as to realize his purpose. But in trying to become a “brave,” he finds that he has to submit to deprivation and hardship, to forego other enjoyments and undergo arduous toil. He finds that the end does not mean in actual realization what it meant in original contemplation. Are not other results, playing with other boys, convivial companionship, which are reached more easily and pleasantly, really more valuable? The labors and pains connected with the means employed to reach an end, have thrown another and incompatible end into consciousness. The individual no longer “naturally,” but “morally,” follows the selected end, whichever of the two it be, because it has been chosen after conscious valuation of competing aims.<sup>62</sup>

Dewey and Tufts depict Eastman as a kind of ideal type for a boy born into a society where becoming a brave was the highest honorable end he could imagine. In Dewey’s example, a young Eastman clings to the ideal that he should become a warrior, an ideal suggested to him by the custom of his social environment—in this case, a savage one. In the course of starting down the path to become a warrior, however, Dewey suggests that Eastman’s experience is modified by the sheer difficulty of that end. This difficulty invites Eastman’s increased scrutiny of that end. Undergoing such reflection, Eastman’s potential alternative ends proliferate. Instead of being a warrior, why not choose to “play with other boys”? Suddenly, the young Eastman must decide if becoming a warrior is the end he really wishes to pursue. Perhaps, in Dakota

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<sup>62</sup> Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 192-93.

society, it might very well be the case. But that world was rapidly disappearing. Instead, Dewey and Tufts seemed to imply that Eastman's story was evidence that any such Indian boy that wanted to be a brave was, by the twentieth century, also acting prereflectively when he began to pursue this end-in-view. After all, yearning to become a brave in 1908 seemed to be little more than anachronism, following an antiquated social occupation to its dead end. In effect, Dewey suggests that abandoning his cultural ideal to become a warrior and electing to go to a Euro-American school, Eastman had come to further extend a measure of experimental intelligence to resolve a moral situation. In so doing, Eastman became not only a moral agent but an experimental one and took a first step towards civilization.

In this fashion, Eastman was cited as an ideal informant into the savage mind. "Dr. Eastman has the double advantage of both an Indian's and a white man's education, and so is able to tell of Indian life not only from the inside but from the outside," extolled Tufts in his 1904 review of *Indian Boyhood*. On the one hand, Eastman was an Indian, which the frontier discourse had primed Dewey to regard as psychologically primitive. On the other hand, as Eastman was speaking about his "Indian boyhood," his account was the closest thing Dewey could cite as a direct window into the childhood psychology as rendered by his racial recapitulation theory. In other words, Eastman's *Indian Boyhood* was a Deweyan two-for-one: a window into the childhood psychology of the most child-like people. Eastman was a particularly useful Indian.

Dewey and Tufts were arguably most indebted to *Indian Boyhood* for its account of Eastman's dilemma between choosing the life of a warrior or a schoolboy. Dewey regarded Eastman as engaged in an ethical situation in confronting a choice between ends that required his reflective engagement. But due to the frontier discourse, Dewey and Tufts added an additional

valence to his biography: they treated Eastman's choice not only as an ethical situation, but as a choice between a premodern and modern social occupation. Eastman concludes *Indian Boyhood* with a trip to Flandreau, South Dakota, and the final line of the book: "Here my wild life came to an end, and my school days began. THE END."<sup>63</sup> While Eastman's conclusion could denote a rupture between his youth and his adolescence, Dewey's interpretation fundamentally mistook what Eastman was trying to do in narrating this part of his life story. In *Indian Boyhood*, Eastman wrote about how he had grown up with every expectation that he would live into adulthood in Dakota Village. As an adolescent, he embraced his future as a warrior. However, when the U.S. army violently suppressed his people, sending his father into exile, then to a concentration camp, and back again as a converted Christian, Eastman's line of action had to change to resolve a new situation. Whereas Dewey believed that conditions of modernity had produced this problematic moral situation, Eastman told how the encroachments of U.S. settler colonialism upon the Dakota had forced the issue. Furthermore, by writing *Indian Boyhood* in the first place, Eastman had put to bed the seeming binary choice between "brave" and "schoolboy" that Dewey's treatment had affixed to his dilemma. In a way that was lost on Dewey, Eastman had in fact become a warrior after all. In writing, Eastman had embraced a new mode of being a warrior for his people, transforming an older social occupation into something new. Where Dewey saw in *Indian Boyhood* the end of a social occupation, Eastman was busy writing its future into existence.

The citation of Eastman's *Indian Boyhood* by Dewey and Tufts in *Ethics* is, as far as my research has revealed, the only occasion Dewey ever directly cited an Indigenous person in his work. Yet the outcome of his citation was functionally the same as all the other Instrumental

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<sup>63</sup> Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, 289.

Indians that Dewey employed: never as a constituency for his ideas, but rather as evidence for them. Scholars in Indigenous studies have written about how Eastman's strategy to enlist elements of antimodern primitivism to defend Native culture to Euro-American audiences was a gamble. It made his testimony vulnerable to appropriation and misrepresentation. In citing *Indian Boyhood*, Dewey and Tufts drew on Dakota boyhood and its warrior ontology and reduced it to evidence for their naturalistic method. In so doing, Dewey failed to grasp Eastman's narration of his boyhood journey from a warrior for his people to a scholar—and back to a warrior again. “Or better yet,” Martinez suggests, into “a scholar with the heart of [a] warrior.”<sup>64</sup> To the contrary, Dewey and Tufts turned Eastman into an Instrumental Indian.

### **Indian Foiling in Dewey's Magnum Opus**

In the broadest stroke, Dewey's 1916 *Democracy and Education* articulated the relationship between education and democracy. It was also the definitive statement of his experimental method, which had increasingly coalesced around Dewey's account of experimental intelligence rooted in “experience,” which he once described as a “double-barreled word.”

We use the word “life” to denote the whole range of experience, individual and racial. In precisely similar fashion we speak of the life of a savage tribe, of the Athenian people, of the American nation. We employ the word “experience” in the same pregnant sense. And to it, as well as to life in the bare physiological sense, the principle of continuity through renewal applies. With the renewal of physical existence goes, in the case of human beings, the re-creation of beliefs, ideals, hopes, happiness, misery, and practices.

However, his concept of experience was commonly misinterpreted by contemporaries, who did not grasp his experimental method, as sharing the more common meaning of experience

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<sup>64</sup> Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher*, 11.

within the tradition of British empiricism.<sup>65</sup> As a result, Dewey spent a good deal of effort trying to nail down his idiosyncratic use of the term “experience,” and he enlisted the Instrumental Indian to help illustrate his point.

The first Instrumental Indians appear in *Education and Democracy* to illustrate the distinction between education and schooling. Just as individual people recreated the progress of the race as depicted in racial recapitulation, so too did Dewey believe that education was the means by which community life endured beyond the lifespan of a single person. “Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life,” Dewey wrote. “Every one of the constituent elements of a social group, in a modern city as in a savage tribe, is born immature, helpless, without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards. Each individual, each unit who is the carrier of the life-experience of his group, in time passes away. Yet the life of the group goes on.”<sup>66</sup> Experience was both the concrete experience of individual members of community life and the sum total of the community life itself. “Even in a savage tribe, the achievements of adults are far beyond what the immature members would be capable of if left to themselves,” Dewey explained. “Education, and education alone, spans the gap,” Dewey concluded.<sup>67</sup> For Dewey, education was the transmission of the accumulated intelligence, the experience, of mankind from one generation to the next. In so doing, the Indian becomes the figure that both requires education and simultaneously is an exhibit of how education works.

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<sup>65</sup> At the end of his career, Dewey expressed some regret for trying to use the term “experience” at all. In retrospect, he said he preferred the term “culture.” As Colon and Hobbs incisively characterize, Dewey regarded culture as “one of the ways by which nature transacts business with itself.” Gabriel A. T. Colón and Charles A. Hobbs, “The Intertwining of Culture and Nature: Franz Boas, John Dewey, and Deweyan Strands of American Anthropology,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76, no. 1 (2015): 139-62; see also Colon and Hobbs, “Towards a Pragmatist Anthropology of Race,” *The Pluralist* 11, no. 1 (2016): 126-35.

<sup>66</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-6.

As the social world grew ever more complex, however, Dewey believed that a breach opened between the young and the old. In a “savage” society, this gap was never that large; the world was not so sophisticated that elders couldn’t bring their young people up to speed within a lifetime. But Dewey felt that modernity had spelled an end to this kind of informal education as a sufficient means to get on in the world: “With the growth of civilization, the gap between the original capacities of the immature and the standards and customs of the elders increases. Mere physical growing up, mere mastery of the bare necessities of subsistence will not suffice to reproduce the life of the group.” Instead, there was a need for a special kind of experience to help the young close the gap between their individual experience and the experience of community. Without such training, there would be a psychological rubber-band effect, and community life would be caught in a collective case of arrested development.

Dewey concluded that the advancements of civilization had produced the need for schools. As civilization develops, “intentional agencies—schools—and explicit material—studies—are devised. The task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons.”<sup>68</sup> As such, schools were both cause and effect of civilization. He concluded that Indian people’s lifeways represented only the crudest forms of education. “In savage and barbarian communities, such direct participation (constituting the indirect or incidental education of which we have spoken) furnishes almost the sole influence for rearing the young into the practices and beliefs of the group.”<sup>69</sup> This was not simply a different mode of education, it was altogether inferior to the kind of education that could be organized in schools.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey further refined the place of social occupations in experimental intelligence. Echoing his essay “Interpretation of Savage Mind,” Dewey concluded

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>69</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 21.



that rather than fall back to an essential difference to explain the difference of savage and civilized people, history had shaped respective psychological patterns. “It seems almost incredible to us, for example, that things which we know very well could have escaped recognition in past ages,” Dewey wrote. “We incline to account for it by attributing congenital stupidity to our forerunners and by assuming superior native intelligence on our own part. But the explanation is that their modes of life did not call for attention to such facts, but held their minds riveted to other things.” As far as Dewey was concerned, the social occupation of a Navajo weaver (such as he had enacted for his students at the Laboratory School) was not any less appropriate a response to an environment than a loom operator in a Chicago textile factory. Rather, the Navajos had quite reasonably organized their labor to make their environment productive into particular forms, which had resulted in their creation of certain social occupations. “Just as the senses require sensible objects to stimulate them, so our powers of observation, recollection, and imagination do not work spontaneously, but are set in motion by the demands set up by current social occupations.”<sup>70</sup> This diversity of environments and the variety of human responses to them explained the diversity of human social development across time and space.

To underscore the difference between the respective societies which grew out of such social occupations, Dewey used the example of a presumed American Indian community in the arid western United States (perhaps Eastman’s Dakota people): “A savage tribe manages to live on a desert plain. It adapts itself. But its adaptation involves a maximum of accepting, tolerating, putting up with things as they are, a maximum of passive acquiescence, and a minimum of active control, of subjection to use.” Dewey reached back all the way to his trip to the Colorado mines

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

with Frederick Riggs in 1892 to use a particular phrase to describe the development of the San Luis valley: to make “a wilderness blossom like a rose.” Nearly twenty-five years removed and nearly seventeen hundred miles away in New York City, Dewey continued with his account: “A civilized people enters upon the scene. It also adapts itself. It introduces irrigation; it searches the world for plants and animals that will flourish under such conditions; it improves, by careful selection, those which are growing there. As a consequence, the wilderness blossoms as a rose. The savage is merely habituated; the civilized man has habits which transform the environment.”<sup>71</sup>

This “habituated” and “accommodated” mode of thinking produced by the “savage mind” made Indians a prescientific people. This was because a psychology of accommodation did not cultivate experimental intelligence because it did not lead to action. “For Dewey then, mental capabilities i.e. intelligence, are connected to environment, more specifically the ways in which people interact with or on their environment,” writes Kimberly Richards in her study of Dewey. “The more ‘stimuli’ or activity that people engage in, within the environment, the more their social customs, observations and imagination will be challenged. In short, the ‘social activities’ and occupations that Native peoples have attended to, have not challenged them to develop their mental capacities, hence their intellectual capabilities continue to be limited.”<sup>72</sup> The distinction was a matter of experimental intelligence.

In a key passage, Dewey argued that “we have no right to call anything knowledge except where our activity has actually produced certain physical changes in things.... Short of such specific changes, our beliefs are only hypothesis, theories, suggestions, guesses, and are to be entertained tentatively and to be utilized as indication of experiments to be tried.” Action,

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<sup>71</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> Richards, “Ancillary Citizenship and Stratified Assimilation,” 94.

increasingly sophisticated actions, thinking-by-doing, was the currency of experimental intelligence. “On the other hand, the experimental method of thinking signifies that thinking is of avail; that it is of avail in just the degree in which the anticipation of future consequence is made on the basis of through observation of present conditions.” Dewey argued that testing alone was not the heart of inquiry; instead, speculation and hypothesis required creativity and imagination, a matrix of inquiry whose terminus was expressed through the consequent control of the environment which it produced. Savage mind was therefore Dewey’s shorthand for a psychology that did not function as a pattern of inquiry that produced experimental intelligence.

Dewey’s foiling of the savage mind of accommodation and civilized psychology of control in *Democracy and Education* starkly resembles attitudes frequently circulated in the frontier discourse. For example, in 1876, the Michigan Centennial commission reprinted a sermon by Charles Francis Adams given at the Philadelphia centennial celebration to offer Michiganders a triumphal lesson in how they had transformed Michigan into a productive state that was the envy of the Eastern seaboard. Adams explained that Indian people in the Great Lakes who lived there prior to the pioneers simply had no such ambitions: “Without forecast, and insensible to ambition,” such Indians “must be regarded merely as the symbol of continuous negation, of the everlasting rotation of the present, not profiting by the experience of the past, and feebly sensible to the possibilities of the future.” To the contrary, when the Euro-Americans arrived in Michigan, however, “the magnificence of nature presented to his view, to which the native had been blind, at once stimulated his passion to develop its advantages by culture, and ere long the wilderness began to blossom as the rose.”<sup>73</sup> While he was hardly alone in this attitude about Indigenous psychology, Adams proved to be a particularly incisive speaker on the

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<sup>73</sup> McCracken, *Michigan and the Centennial*, 234.

matter. Adams concluded that “between two such forces, the American Indian, who dwells only in the present, and the European pioneer, who fixes his gaze so steadily on the future, the issue could only end one way.... The one goes on dwindling even to the prospect of ultimate extinction.”<sup>74</sup>

Though his project was very different than that of Adams, Dewey’s experimentalism could similarly be underscored by its supposed deficit among American Indian people. “What we call magic was with respect to many things the experimental method of the savage; but for him to try was to try his luck, not his ideas. The scientific experimental method is, on the contrary, a trial of ideas; hence even when practically—or immediately—unsuccessful, it is intellectual, fruitful; for we learn from our failures when our endeavors are seriously thoughtful,” Dewey expounded.<sup>75</sup> Whereas civilized thinkers changed their world with their experimental action, savage thinkers were content to accommodate to more rudimentary explanations, such as magic. Whereas both magic and science were modes of interaction with the environment, only one fostered experimental intelligence.

### **Dewey and Eastman on Epistemological Crisis**

All of this came home in *Democracy and Education* in what Dewey called “an extreme example.” Suppose that savage people looked up and saw a smudge of light hanging in the sky, or what Dewey calls a “flaming comet.” How would they explain such a phenomenon? Dewey asserted that “savages [would] react to a flaming comet as they are accustomed to react to other events which threaten the security of their life. Since they try to frighten wild animals or their enemies by shrieks, beating of gongs, brandishing of weapons, etc., they use the same methods to

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 234-35.

<sup>75</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 347-48.

scare away the comet.” With this view, Dewey maintained that the sudden appearance of “flaming comets” would be understood by savage minds within previous accumulated explanations for proximate phenomena. Dewey explained that “to us, the method is plainly absurd—so absurd that we fail to note that savages are simply falling back upon habit in a way which exhibits its limitation,” he concluded. “The only reason we do not act in some analogous fashion is because we do not take the comet as an isolated, disconnected event, but apprehend it in its connections with other events. We place it, as we say, in the astronomical system. We respond to its connections and not simply to the immediate occurrence.” As a result, “our attitude to it is much freer.”<sup>76</sup> In his example, Dewey did not mean to denigrate such a response as banging a drum to ward away a meteorite; he held that the response of the “savage” mind to flaming objects of the sky could be explained by Indian-as-savages’ lack of a larger matrix of meaning into which they could place such an event.

When failing to chase away a comet at the banging of a drum or the unsheathing of weapons, Dewey asserted that the result would be a physic breakdown on the part of the savages. Without an adequate store of experimental intelligence, the “flaming comets” would provoke an epistemological crisis. Dewey taught this to his students in 1914: “Human conduct in order to be effective must be orderly and organized,” one audience report of his lectures read. “This will be especially true among savages. Such invasions, or threats of them, are called crises.”<sup>77</sup> With this view, customs (or culturally congealed habits) had a powerful grip on Indian people in particular. According to Dewey’s lecture, “Savage life is controlled by complicated chains of unchangeable customs. They are very far from having the freedom that certain poets and philosophers have supposed.” To support his assertion about savage crises, Dewey invoked American Indian

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<sup>76</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 350.

<sup>77</sup> Dewey, “Reports of Dewey’s Addresses,” 399.

people: “Professor Dewey then discussed the ideas that savages associate with their crises. The Algonquin Indians have generalized the cause of the crisis feeling under the name manitou [*sic*]. It is a mysterious, solemn power which may be compared in a sense with an electric charge. It may be found anywhere and in anything. It is found in brave warriors, sacred objects, sacred persons. Any animal hard to track or kill has it, e.g., the rabbit or the wildcat.” Whereas “Algonquin Indians” invented “manitou” to paper over crises provoked by remarkable events such as a “flaming comet,” civilized Euro-Americans could bring experimental intelligence to bear on such phenomena. Dewey insisted that “with civilization these crises are minimized. Our life is steady and confident compared with that of savages. Not only do we know much more of nature and her laws, but our course of conduct is much more flexible and readjustable [*sic*]. We desire discoveries and changes; the savages do not.”<sup>78</sup> Dewey was confident that experimental intelligence would inoculate civilized thinkers from the epistemological crisis produced in savage minds by similar events.

This may have made for good philosophy in 1914, but it was *already* bad history. In fact, the people of North America had experienced a phenomenon similar to the “extreme example” of Dewey as recently as 1833, during what became known later as the Great Meteor Storm. On the evening of November 12, people all over the North American continent looked into a night sky illuminated by lights streaking across it in awesome proportions. For many Euro-Americans, the density of the “shooting stars” was unlike anything they had ever seen. Their accounts of the event pockmark the pages of numerous diaries, newspapers, and local histories across the North American continent.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Rather than interpret the celestial phenomenon of the meteor within a scientific worldview, a great many Euro-Americans across the continent had experienced the event as a crisis.<sup>79</sup> In the days following the meteor storm, Arkansas newspaper editor Charles Bertrand noted that “this phenomenon has alarmed a great number of persons”; indeed, Yellville, Arkansas resident John Tabor testified: “Just before midnight, my brother woke up and was nearly paralyzed with fear at beholding the air filled with falling stars. When he was able to speak, he woke us all up and told us to hurry and get on our clothes for the world was coming to an end. We all concluded that it was too late to pray and submitted ourselves to await the approach of our destruction.”<sup>80</sup> Other witnesses, such as Latter Day Saint Joseph Smith Jr., took succor in the stars, writing that “I arose [*sic*] and behold to my great Joy the star fall from heaven. They fell like hail stones a litteral fullfillment [*sic*] of the word of God as recorded in the holy scriptures and a sure sign that the coming of Christ is clost [*sic*] at hand.”<sup>81</sup> The falling stars were understood as both the end of days and a miraculous sign of God’s imminent coming. Whether it was fear or rejoicing, the meteors landed on many Euro-American pioneers with millenarian portent.

For Eastman’s Dakota people, however, the experience of the meteor shower was instead woven into the broader collective experience of their reciprocal relationship with the world around them. This was evidenced by the documentation of the meteor’s appearance in a number

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<sup>79</sup> This is not to say that Euro-Americans could not also interpret the meteor showers as Dewey suggested. On Euro-American accounts that recorded the event in the frame of astronomical science, see Mark Littmann, *The Heavens on Fire: The Great Leonid Meteor Storms* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Littmann, “American Newspapers and the Great Meteor Storm of 1833: A Case Study in Science Journalism,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Monographs* 10, no. 3 (2008): 249-84.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Mary L. Kwas, “The Spectacular 1833 Leonid Meteor Storm: The View from Arkansas,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 314-24.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Smith, “Joseph Smith Jrs. Book for Record,” *Journal*, Nov. 1832-Dec. 1834, 19-20, Joseph Smith Collection, CHL, accessed May 30, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1832-1834/20>.

of winter counts. A winter counter is a pictorial calendar and a memory device often curated by a single creator. Events were selected and recorded on the count which anchored community life. Consequently, a winter count functions as a form of community memory. Like many other astronomical events, the Great Meteor Storm of 1833 was included on several winter counts, such as the one kept by the Yanktonai Dakota Elder Lone Dog from 1800 to 1871.<sup>82</sup> Painted on tanned skins or etched into wooden calendar sticks, the meteors of 1833 sat alongside other important events such as the marriages, droughts, wars, and hunts, and the births and deaths of community leaders. In this fashion, the Great Meteor Storm was one notable event alongside others, suspended in a web of personal and community history. Vine Deloria Jr. once explained how Dakota winter counts were one expression of an Indigenous epistemology based in experience, where “life thus had a contemporaneous aspect which meant immediate experience of life, not analysis and dissection.”<sup>83</sup> Rooted in their particular place under the night sky, such seemingly stupendous events as the sudden appearance of “flaming comets” in 1833 were ultimately fit inside a Dakota worldview that rendered the extraordinary astronomical activity legible alongside other events of everyday experience.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Colin Calloway, “Lone Dog’s Winter Count,” in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost* (New York: Springer, 1996), 31-36.

<sup>83</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., “Custer Died for Your Sins,” 221.

<sup>84</sup> For a summary of history and meaning of winter counts, see Candace S. Green and Russell Thornton, ed., *The Year the Stars Fell: Lakota Winter Counts at the Smithsonian* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, 2007), 1-11, 55-56. For the great empirical accuracy of winter counts as they document environmental change on the Great Plains, see Matthew D. Therrell and Makayla J. Trotter, “WANIYETU WÓWAPI: Native American Records of Weather and Climate,” *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 92, no. 5 (May 2011): 583-92.





Figure 4.3. Lone Dog's winter count, undated photostat, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

Instead of causing American Indian people to panic, the stars caused the Euro-American Christians to experience crisis. In contrast to the Dakota epistemological framework, the meteor shower was for many Euro-Americans an experience of temporal disjuncture.<sup>85</sup> Contrary to Dewey's assertions that civilization offered an expanded experimental matrix that allowed modern thinkers greater context, Euro-Americans proved less mentally adroit than Dewey had imagined. Prompted by the premises of Christianity, the meteors left many Euro-Americans on

<sup>85</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), 62-73.

the Great Plains in the 1830s struggling to integrate the striking light into their own experience as anything but a crisis.

How might such accounts of Euro-American panic—placed beside the practice of the winter count—have challenged Dewey’s own thinking about “savage” mind? Histories of the 1833 Great Meteor Storm were within Dewey’s notice. He might have read about it in newspapers, which often printed stories of people remembering the event. Stories of Euro-American remembrances of the panic of 1830s were published widely in numerous newspapers across the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One newspaper recalled in 1899 that the meteors “caused consternation among the masses. The people rushed from their homes excited and almost crazed.”<sup>86</sup> Perhaps he might have even put the query to Frederick Riggs and asked how settlers like his father Jeremiah Riggs had interpreted the falling stars over the Great Lakes just four years before Michigan statehood.

Eastman’s *Indian Boyhood*, the one source Dewey cited from an Indigenous person, actually contained within it an opportunity to loosen the grip that the frontier discourse had on the pragmatist. In his 1902 autobiography, Eastman tells a story of visiting with Dakota elder Smoky Day. Eastman wrote that Smoky Day was an infamously loquacious elder who was known in his community as a memory keeper. Eastman noted that he was like “a living book of the traditions and history of his people.” Eastman assured his Euro-American audiences that Smoky Day accomplished these historical feats not only through his own memory and the stories he told, but through a historical archive from a series of calendar sticks. Eastman described how Smoky Day carefully collected, etched, and stored a number of color-coded sticks to denote the passage of time from notable events marked in the flow of his experience of community life.

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<sup>86</sup> “Meteoric Shower of 1833,” *The Nashville American*, November 15, 1899.

Eastman related how Smoky Day made notches in the sticks, each colored in a particular fashion, to denote events of major import and the number of years that had passed since their occurrence. “For instance, there was the year when so many stars fell from the sky, with the number of years since it happened cut into the wood,” Eastman wrote. “Another recorded the appearance of a comet; and from these heavenly wonders the great national catastrophes and victories were reckoned.”<sup>87</sup> Eastman illuminated that not only could Dakota people distinguish between comets and meteors but that Dakota history was a textured story woven with great specificity regarding such celestial events.

Eastman records just how Smoky Day wove the two together. In a lengthy scene in *Indian Boyhood*, Smoky Day tells Eastman the story of Jingling Thunder. To situate the exploits of Jingling Thunder in Dakota history, Smoky Day makes reference to the Great Meteor Storm. “Many winters ago there was a great battle, in which Jingling Thunder won his first honors. It was forty winters before the falling of many stars, which event occurred twenty after the coming of the black-robed white priest; and that was fourteen winters before the annihilation by our people of thirty lodges of the Sac and Fox Indians. I well remember the latter event—it was just fifty winters ago. However, I will count my sticks again.”<sup>88</sup> To perform his credentials to Eastman, Smoky Day counted his “variously colored sticks, about five inches long.” Satisfied that his archive supported his narration, Smoky Day, like any good historian, then offered up the sticks to Eastman to “verify his calculation.” Smoky Day then proceeded to tell Eastman the history of the Dakota nation and of the great battle between the Anishinaabe and Ho-Chunk

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<sup>87</sup> Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, 115.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

which drove them out of the Great Lakes and into the Plains, all of which was kept within the calendar sticks.<sup>89</sup>

Winter counts and the calendar sticks are not a more rudimentary iteration of a system of historical preservation than a trove of written documents in an archive. To the contrary, they represent an alternative yet equally capacious historical epistemology that has endured the development of other non-Indigenous systems. These are an Indigenous archive from which Smoky Day could summon up for a young Ohíye S'a a sweeping narrative of both national meaning and family lineage. Beginning with the meteor storm of 1833, Smoky Day told Eastman a history of Dakota peoplehood, their struggles, and their relationship to their homelands. As if this was not a sufficiently dexterous historical narrative, Smoky Day was then able to situate Eastman's own life and family history within this history. After his encounter with Smoky Day, Eastman concludes by relating the subsequent evening spent lying in his bed in silence, "awake a long time committing to memory the tradition I had heard."<sup>90</sup>

Eastman's book ought to have undermined Dewey's account of the crisis he presumed would be caused in the "savage mind" by the appearance of such a celestial phenomenon. While we can only speculate, the notion is intriguing. Had Dewey's disposition towards Indigenous people not been distorted by the frontier discourse, he might have recognized the Euro-Americans who understood the meteors as a great rupture of experience as the ones in the throes of epistemological crisis. Had Dewey considered the sophistication of Smoky Day's historical recounting of the meteor storm, he could have appreciated an example of Indigenous people seamlessly incorporating the flaming comets into their historical experience. Had he been more willing to closely attend to his Indigenous contemporaries like Eastman, Dewey might have had

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 122.

an opportunity to rewrite the role of the Indigenous in intelligence with the actual Indigenous experience that was right of front of him. Had he done these things, Dewey might have applied his own experimental method to his philosophy and realized that his account of “savage” response to a “flaming comet” was “simply falling back upon habit in a way which exhibits its limitations.” Dewey might have realized it was he who was the one whose thinking was caught up in habit—that is, the habitual depictions of Indian people by the frontier discourse. Instead, Dewey’s writings helped to tighten the discursive mesh around his contemporaries, both Indian and non-Indian alike.<sup>91</sup>

## **Conclusion**

I have argued in this chapter that the many Instrumental Indians proliferated in Dewey’s work precisely because he used them to develop his philosophy of experimentalism.<sup>92</sup> Many of Dewey’s major statements regarding his concept of experimental intelligence were made through reference to “savages,” “savagery” and “civilization” through both implied and explicit references to American Indian people. American Indian people became encoded by the frontier discourse as primitive hunter-gathers vanishing before the onslaught of modernity, making them synonymous in Dewey’s mind with savages. By drawing on Indian people as avatars of “savage mind,” Dewey was constantly calling on imagined Indians to help develop and clarify his

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<sup>91</sup> Around the time *Democracy and Education* was published, winter counts became objects of anthropological curiosity. Rendered through the prism of the frontier discourse and salvage anthropology, winter counts were viewed as productions of an endangered and vanishing people, and many winter counts found their way into the hands of Euro-American private collectors or institutions such as the Smithsonian. See Halsey, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian*.

<sup>92</sup> People listened—and learned—from Dewey’s use of the Instrumental Indian. In one of his lectures in 1914, Dewey explicated his genetic psychology to his audience, which was recorded by observers. “Professor Dewey illustrated this by comparing the savage mind with the civilized mind, holding that the differences here are not innate, but are the result of the difference in social states.” Dewey, “Reports of Dewey’s Addresses,” 393.

account of experimental intelligence. This pattern of Indians appearing in his work not as a possible constituency but as evidence for his philosophy is what I call the Instrumental Indian.

This pattern was established by Dewey beginning in his career in Michigan and his immersion in the frontier discourse. In this way, I have endeavored to show how Dewey's vocabulary of savagery was primarily a product of his own experience with the frontier discourse. Dewey's immersion in the frontier discourse makes the Instrumental Indian not only an artifact of ethnocentrism born from racial recapitulation, but a consequence of Dewey's inextricable part of the warp and woof of the settler colonial mesh in the United States. Put simply, if thinking scientifically was the threshold to civilization, then *Ethics*, *How We Think*, and *Democracy and Education* can be read as peculiar texts of Native erasure.

In *Indian Boyhood*, Dakota philosopher Charles A. Eastman tried to communicate the sophistication, complexity, and value in Indigenous epistemology, ethics, and ontology, not as antecedents to civilized mind, but as a worthy (if not superior) peer to Euro-American alternatives. Eastman believed that an Indigenous epistemology such as the history practiced by Smoky Day and his calendar sticks offered far greater dexterity for Dakota people to integrate such events as the Great Meteor Storm of 1833 into their history than their Euro-American counterparts. His treatment of this history could have challenged the way Dewey regarded "savage mind," yet his testimony fell on deaf ears.

Instead, Dewey's citation of Eastman appropriated *Indian Boyhood* as evidence for his account of moral situations. Rather than treat Eastman's dilemma to become trained as a warrior or go east to school as a pressure exerted on Eastman and his Dakota community by the federal government, he instead invoked it as an approximation to how people of the past encountered such psychological dilemmas. Such an interpretation was not inevitable. Instead, there was even

some potential for Dewey to appreciate Native systems of education. As his co-author James Tufts wrote, “If Dr. Eastman’s own boyhood was a typical one [then] the consciously directed educational forces were very great among the Indians. They gave to the boy’s mental and moral equipment for his life as hunter and warrior an unremitting and extraordinarily well directed course of instruction.”<sup>93</sup> Though Dewey acknowledged that Eastman’s elders had surely acted as teachers, his education among the Dakota was not one that would lead to fostering experimental intelligence. Whatever Tufts might have appreciated about Eastman, in Dewey’s hands, *Indian Boyhood* was thrown on the heap of anthropological work of Indian “Others” whose testimony could shed light on primitive psychology. Dewey was hardly motivated by racial animus; instead, his dismissive attitude was a result of conditioning by his immersion in the frontier discourse. As a consequence, Dewey conscripted Eastman and other Indigenous people as useful foils to illuminate his experimentalism. In so doing, Dewey made Eastman into an Instrumental Indian.

In so doing, Dewey failed to engage with Eastman’s complex form of cultural politics. To be sure, Eastman, like many other Indian progressives, was playing a fraught game when he tried to talk back to Euro-American audiences. Dewey took advantage of Eastman’s performative cultural politics to enlist him and his books as a firsthand account of how humanity had developed from one mode of experimental intelligence to the next. “Pupils often come away from the conventional study of history, and think either that the human intellect is a static quantity which has not progressed by the invention of better methods, or else that intelligence,

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<sup>93</sup> James H. Tufts, review of *Indian Boyhood* by Charles Eastman, *Psychological Bulletin* 1, no. 13 (December 15, 1903): 475-76. Tufts also mentioned Eastman in the course of his later examination of ethics. For Tufts, Eastman represented a progressive Indian who had escaped the bonds of his collective’s moral culture by dint of creative teachers. “Group morality has its serious defects,” Tufts announced in 1914. “It is not likely to be progressive. It is more likely to enforce the old than to grasp the new. Teachers of morality, therefore, have sought other methods.” In particular, Tufts believed art and literature were vehicles for teaching young ethical conduct: “Dr. Charles Eastman in his *Indian Boyhood* tells how he was taught to love heroism, to admire the brave, successful hunter and warrior, by all the tales of the bravery of his ancestors with which his grandmother filled his youthful imagination.” James H. Tufts, “The Teaching of Ideals,” *The School Review* 22, no. 5 (May 1913): 329.

save as a display of personal shrewdness, is a negligible historic factor,” Dewey came to write in *Democracy and Education*. “Surely no better way could be devised of instilling a genuine sense of the part which mind has to play in life than a study of history which makes plain how the entire advance of humanity from savagery to civilization has been dependent upon intellectual discoveries and inventions.”<sup>94</sup>

Like many other Euro-Americans, Dewey proved a poor student of Eastman’s lesson. But the fault for this reading, I argue, lies not with Eastman, but with Dewey. At the same time, that an otherwise humane, insightful, and informed reader such as Dewey would fail to read Eastman’s book as little more than evidence for savage psychology illustrates just how difficult Eastman’s project truly was. For his part, Eastman did not allow such misinterpretations to deter him. Regardless of the challenges facing the successful realization of his cultural politics, Eastman would continue his activism as a “representative Indian,” becoming an important figure in the Society of American Indians founded in 1911. He went on to publish works that would carry on his Indigenous counter-discourse, which arguably culminated in his 1916 *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. As Lucy Maddox notes, Eastman’s cultural politics were perhaps best suited to the *longue duree*; what his contemporaries could not clearly hear, we might. We should strive to listen, and hear what Dewey did not.<sup>95</sup>

Eastman’s brand of patient survivance, however, does not mean that we can let Dewey off the hook for his instrumentalization of Indigenous people like him. Dewey invites such scrutiny because he continued to utilize the frontier discourse to instrumentalize Indian people long after his arrival in New York.

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<sup>94</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 226.

<sup>95</sup> Maddox, *Citizen Indians*, 5.



**CHAPTER 5:**  
**Settlements: The People's Institute of New York**  
**and the Settler Colonialism in Cultural Pluralism, 1904-1918**

On Tuesday, March 9, 1915, John Dewey took the stage at the Cooper Union in New York City. The Union was hosting an event billed as a "People's Forum," one of the most popular programs sponsored by the New York People's Institute (PI). This institute, arguably the city's leading settlement house organization, used the Cooper Union for programs intended to bring highbrow culture to the city's immigrant and working-class population and the progressive elite alike. These People's Forums regularly drew thousands of people from across New York and were regarded as an important gathering place for the city's progressive community. Dewey was no exception; in fact, the philosopher had gone so far as to join the PI advisory board just two months earlier. The institute eagerly featured Dewey as a part of its March lecture series billed "TO-MORROW," and he gave a talk entitled "The Needs of Modern Education."<sup>1</sup>

While the text of his remarks are not extant, we have some idea of what Dewey said thanks to the records of the director Frederic C. Howe. Howe later wrote that "the addresses by Prof. Dewey and Mr. Wirt on the new movements and experiments in education were arranged to supplement each other."<sup>2</sup> Dewey's pairing with William A. Wirt, superintendent of the Gary, Indiana, school system, is suggestive. Wirt's innovative Gary schools blended vocational

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<sup>1</sup> "This Week's Free Lectures," *The New York Times*, March 7, 1915, ProQuest Historic Newspapers.

<sup>2</sup> "Cooper Union Work," in Reports to the Board of Trustees, January-March 1915, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

education in public schooling to address what many progressives regarded as a pressing need to provide for the practical education of immigrant children. Between Dewey's pairing with Wirt and the theme of the PI lecture series, "TO-MORROW," we can deduce that Dewey's talk was likely composed from selections from his forthcoming *Schools of To-Morrow*, which had its first printing just two months later in May of 1915. In *Schools of To-Morrow*, Dewey and his co-author Evelyn Dewey (his daughter) took readers on a tour of experimental schools across the country and offered reflections on their various philosophical innovations. In light of the outbreak of World War I in Europe, the Deweys had reserved special emphasis in their book on the capacity of American schools to absorb immigrant children into the fabric of an increasingly anxious society. One of the institutions they featured was William Wirt's Gary schools. Of Wirt and his experimental schools, the Deweys wrote, "The question he tried to answer was this: What did the Gary children need to make them good citizens and prosperous human beings?"<sup>3</sup>

While many progressives extolled Wirt for devising a means to assimilate immigrants by transforming them and their children into productive wage workers, the Deweys' praise was different. The Deweys wrote that "it would be a mistake to consider the Gary schools simply as an attempt to take the unpromising immigrant child and turn him into a self-supporting immigrant." Instead of such Americanization by way of industrial efficiency, the Deweys felt that the real lesson to draw from Wirt's schools was that practical education in public schools was one of the best ways to teach immigrant children "to be successful as a human being and an American citizen." By framing Wirt's Gary schools as centers at which immigrant children could be socialized as Americans first and workers second, Dewey regarded Wirt's school as "a small community in its discipline, and a democratic one." This was a major achievement, Dewey

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<sup>3</sup> John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of To-Morrow* (1915), *Middle Works*, 8:320.

noted, as Gary's steel-town population was composed of nearly two-thirds foreign-born residents. In his lecture before the PI's audience, Dewey likely extolled Wirt's Gary schools as a model for New York's immigrant children: to prepare them for their future as a vital part of America's industrial democracy, not as members of the proletariat, but as citizens of a multicultural democracy.<sup>4</sup>

Dewey's lecture was just one way that he entered the debate among the city's—and the nation's—progressive community over the questions of the impact of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization on American life. From the 1890s to the 1920s, New York was an intellectual hotbed at the forefront of ideas about the changing nature of the cosmopolitan make-up of the modern United States. This period might be inaugurated in the year 1896, when immigration to the United States from Eastern European nations like Italy, Poland, Russia, Hungary, and others eclipsed that of Britain, France, Germany, and northern Europe. By 1907, more than 80 percent of Europe's immigrants to the United States were from these Eastern European countries.<sup>5</sup> Would American culture, long associated with White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values, or what scholars have called “Anglo-Conformity,” survive this new wave of immigration? New York's progressive reform community led the nation in a search for answers to the questions provoked by immigrant racial, ethnic, and cultural difference.

The PI was an important venue where such ideas were circulated, debated, and promoted. Founded in 1897, the PI's experimental, social-scientific, and empirical ethos could claim a long list of impressive accomplishments by the time Dewey joined its advisory board in 1915. It had achieved national fame for its programs like the People's Forum; created Community Centers in Public Schools 63 and 17 to promote coordination between schools and neighborhood

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<sup>4</sup> Dewey and Dewey, *Schools of To-Morrow*, 320-338.

<sup>5</sup> Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 99.

communities; formed a Music League for low-income families to attend concerts, symphonies, and plays; founded a National Board of Censorship to ensure films depicted only the highest brand of morality; and even converted several municipal streets into temporary playgrounds for the city's working-class children through its Department of Play Streets as a part of "fresh air" initiatives.<sup>6</sup> Through these programs which coordinated progressive elites and working-class immigrants, workers at the PI imagined they were weaving immigrant citizens into a new American social fabric. One PI publication pronounced that "if America is the melting pot of the world, the People's Institute may be termed the melting pot of New York City."<sup>7</sup>

But what, exactly, was the nature of this new American "melting pot"? As Lawrence Levine observes, by the turn of the century the melting pot had become "the most popular and long-lived explanation of what transforms a polyglot stream of immigrants into one people."<sup>8</sup> Scholars have suggested that from the New York progressive scene—and the settlement house organizations that anchored it—emerged one of America's most important twentieth-century cultural innovations, a theory of American cultural pluralism.<sup>9</sup> This emerging movement of pluralism began to challenge the political and cultural homogeneity of the melting pot consensus. Among the many progressives who articulated such philosophies of multiculturalism were John Dewey, Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne, and Waldo Frank.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Minutes of Meeting: The People's Institute Brief Resume of Results Accomplished Since October, 1914," in Transcripts of Minutes 1912-1915, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>7</sup> Untitled manuscript, in Writings: Various Authors, the People's Institute, Box 24, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 106.

<sup>9</sup> On the changing conceptions of American identity, especially in literature and popular culture adjacent to the frontier discourse, see Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); and Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey: Dilemmas of a Philosopher and Naturalist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

Kallen, one of Dewey's closest pragmatist allies, rejected an essentialist view of American identity embedded in ethnic stock in favor of a multicultural confederation. Kallen wrote in *The Nation* that "men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent; they cannot change their grandfathers."<sup>11</sup> He concluded that instead of the melting pot, Americans could create "a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind."<sup>12</sup> In "Trans-National America," Randolph Bourne sketched out a vision of multiculturalism for immigrants where the moniker of "'American' is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors."<sup>13</sup> Bourne became an outspoken advocate for multiculturalism, arguing that "already we are living this cosmopolitan America." "What we need is everywhere a vivid consciousness of the new ideal," he concluded.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, Waldo Frank supplemented Bourne's call for a "trans-national America" by skewering White Anglo-Saxon Protestant ideology, politics, and culture and its stranglehold on American culture. Frank was confident that, fortified with diverse new peoples, modern American culture would be deeper and more diverse and life-giving than its ancestrally English antecedent: "America is for us indeed a promise and a dream. We go forth all to seek America. And in the seeking we create her."<sup>15</sup> Frank spoke eloquently for all the progressive multiculturalists by offering a constructivist account of American culture that Werner Sollors has called "American identity by consent," rather than "descent" in race.<sup>16</sup> Racial nationalism began

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<sup>11</sup> Horace Kallen, "Democracy vs. the Melting Pot," *The Nation*, February 25, 1915, 220.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 133.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Casey N. Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 117.

<sup>15</sup> Waldo Frank, *Our America* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 3-40.

to give way to civic nationalism. In this way, the New York progressives were articulating a cultural pluralism that would become the foundation for multiculturalism in the United States.

As they debated these ideas and vied with one another to usher in what Joel Pfister has called the “multicultural modern,” progressives like Dewey, Kallen, Bourne, and Frank gathered at settlement house organizations like the PI to try out their ideas.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Dewey’s lecture at the PI in 1915 was an encapsulation of his unique contribution to this debate. While Dewey shared many of the multiculturalists’ larger cultural antipathies for the homogenizing melting pot, Dewey specifically placed schools at the center of his multicultural program. Dewey centered the classroom as the ideal site where progressive educators could integrate diverse “cultural nationalities” into a unified “political nationality.”<sup>18</sup> Dewey argued that American schools should be a training ground for community problem-solving. At schools organized as democratic communities, education could play an important role in celebrating cultural difference, rather than erasing it. Placing schools at the center of this new cultural pluralism was Dewey’s signal innovation to the larger twentieth century movement and a cornerstone of his progressive synthesis of education and democracy.<sup>19</sup>

In a 1917 article “The Principle of Nationality,” Dewey further outlined his version of cultural pluralism. In this essay, Dewey made the case for two analytical categories for considering nationalism: political nationalism and cultural nationalism. Political nationalism was a sense of the geographically bounded citizens of a nation-state and amounted to the various

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<sup>17</sup> Joel Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Multicultural Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 25-26, 135-42.

<sup>18</sup> Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Scholars credit Dewey’s ability to translate cultural pluralism into education in ways that were beneficial for immigrant and ethnic groups. As Kronish writes, “Dewey’s views on cultural pluralism, especially with reference to the Jewish group, were inspired by Kallen, and they provided useful support for Jewish educators who were arguing passionately for the importance of ethnic survival in democratic America.” Ronald Kronish, “John Dewey and Horace M. Kallen on Cultural Pluralism,” *Jewish Social Studies* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 135-48.

mechanisms for establishing, governing, and adjudicating legal membership in the nation-state. Conversely, cultural nationalism was a sense of the cultural ties forged by language, history, and memory, which formed “a body of people somehow distinctly united by very strong ties and bonds.” Cultural nationalism was the stuff that made a polity into an imagined community.<sup>20</sup> In Dewey’s view, cultural nationalism was capacious, allowing for many different cultural groups residing within one nation-state. Settlement houses, the embodiment of schools as social centers, could accomplish both nationalisms.

Despite the fact that this multiculturalism appears to offer a vision of American pluralism that could have been invoked as a scathing critique of the cultural destruction of Indigenous cultures through industrial boarding schools, Dewey never leveraged the pluralism in his progressive synthesis of education and democracy for this purpose. Of course, even if he had extended his multiculturalism to include a concern for Indigenous students, it may very well have done little to service a call for self-determination in schooling for Native communities. This is due to the shortcoming of multiculturalism as a vehicle for Indigenous democracy, since it treats American Indian people as one among many ethnic or racial groups in the United States and erases Indigenous people’s distinct political status as sovereign peoples. As Sandy Grande, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, and others in Indigenous studies have argued, liberal conceptions of multiculturalism “operated in a homogenizing way, centered on unifying all peoples in the nation-state.” This inclusion might serve ethnic immigrants, but only hamstring efforts for Indigenous claims to self-determination exercised through their political, not ethnic,

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<sup>20</sup> John Dewey, “The Principle of Nationality” (1917), *Middle Works*, 10: 287, cited in Trachtenburg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 5.

differences.<sup>21</sup> As Jean O'Brien succinctly states, "Indigenous Studies cannot settle for the idea that Indigenous peoples have *culture* in the absence of *politics*."<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Dunbar-Ortiz bemoans how histories that frame the United States as an immigrant nation that becomes more democratic as it expands to include new minority populations is a narrative that required that "Indigenous nations and communities had to be left out of the picture" due to the historically inconvenient reality that "as territorially and treaty-based people in North America, they do not fit the grid of multiculturalism" and could only be "included by transforming them into an inchoate oppressed racial group."<sup>23</sup> This transformation from sovereign people to benighted racial group was affected in part by the immigrant-centric progressive multiculturalism espoused by Dewey and the New York progressives. These progressives ultimately helped to cement the national myth of a multicultural United States shaped by immigrant diversity that has held sway for much of the twentieth century.

In this formulation, "Dewey makes no mention of Americans of native or African descent," Trachtenberg notes. "Dewey missed an opportunity to take his argument another crucial step, to distinguish between two terms that have bedeviled Indian-White relations: 'nation' and 'tribe.'" According to Trachtenberg, the shortfall lay not in the term "tribe" itself, but in the discourse in which it were mobilized. "At the time of the massive migrations starting in the 1880s, foreign nationalities or ethnicities were often described as if they were tribal ... which in the history of its wider use as a descriptive term for native societies, it became a term of denigration and abuse."<sup>24</sup> In other words, these were terms tangled in the frontier discourse.

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<sup>21</sup> Grande, *Red Pedagogy*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Andersen and Jean O'Brien, eds., *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, xiv.



When applied to immigrants, they could aid cultural pluralists' effort to separate culture from race. When applied to Indians, however, they further conflated the two.

Why have most scholarly treatments of Dewey and his progressive multicultural circle not interrogated consequences of this brand of pluralism for Indigenous people? Philosophers and intellectual and cultural historians have been seemingly preoccupied with cataloguing the differences in outlook between Dewey, Kallen, Bourne, and Frank. Most scholarship spills a great deal of ink over the division caused in their network by Dewey's endorsement of the United States' entry to World War I and subsequently chronicles the subsequent skirmishes between the pragmatists Dewey and Kallen and the more radical "Young Americans" led by Bourne and Frank.<sup>25</sup> However, while these disagreements are certainly important to understanding the broader intellectual history of the progressive era, a scholarly fixation with these internecine rifts among Euro-American progressives has eclipsed what they had in common. Namely, Dewey and his interlocutors all shared a commitment to pluralism for immigrants that relied on the settler colonial erasure of the Native.

For example, in his famous multicultural manifesto, "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot," Kallen gave his readers a sense of dislocation that many native-born Whites felt by the recent influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe by channeling Barrett Wendell's sardonic observation that "we are submerged beneath a conquest so complete that the very name of us means something not ourselves.... I feel as I should think an Indian might feel, in the face of ourselves that were."<sup>26</sup> For his part, Bourne used his Deweyan-inflected anti-essentialism to give voice to the myth of the vanishing Indian: "We shall have to give up the search for our native

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Dalton notes that Bourne and Frank "persisted in their attempts to lay bare the unwelcome cultural consequences of Dewey's bias toward science and technique." Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey*, 110.

<sup>26</sup> Kallen, "Democracy Versus Melting-Pot," 93.

‘American’ culture. With the exception of the South and that New England which, like the Red Indian, seems to be passing into solemn oblivion, there is no distinctly American culture.”<sup>27</sup> In *Our America*, Frank concluded similarly that the search for an American culture could not be found in Indigenous traditions. In his cultural history of the United States, Frank repeated Turner’s frontier thesis, whereby European pioneers “could not adapt the very real culture of the Indian,” because “the primitive man is not the same as the man, fresh from the sophisticated world of Western Europe, who is wrenched back to the surroundings of a distant past.”<sup>28</sup> As a consequence, Frank concluded that Euro-Americans and Indian cultures developed on divergent historical trajectories—all of which was a moot point, considering it had culminated in Indigenous vanishing: “The Indian is dying and doomed,” Frank concluded. “There can be no question of this. There need be no sentimentality.”<sup>29</sup> Dewey, Kallen, Bourne, Frank—they all indulged in the elimination of the Native in order to articulate their vision of multiculturalism.<sup>30</sup>

Instead of dwelling on the factors that sundered Dewey and New York’s progressives, this chapter seeks instead to highlight what the vast majority of these multiculturalists had in common: the frontier discourse. From the point of view of critical Indigenous history, arguably the most salient feature of Dewey’s and the New York progressives’ pluralism was not the divisions amongst them caused by World War I, but rather their enduring consensus on the erasure and appropriation of the figure of the Native for the purposes of extolling their

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<sup>27</sup> Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” in *In Search of Democratic America: The Writings of Randolph S. Bourne* (Washington, DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 61.

<sup>28</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> Randolph Bourne and Waldo Frank were two other figures in Dewey’s circle who helped articulate a theory of multiculturalism. Unlike Kallen, Bourne and Frank were Dewey’s students at Columbia. See Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey*, 103.

multiculturalism for immigrants.<sup>31</sup> As this chapter will argue, Dewey and the New York progressives brewed multiculturalism into the antidote for the American “melting pot” for immigrants at the expense of Indigenous people, building the settlement house movement on a foundation of settler colonial erasure of the Native.<sup>32</sup>

### **Dewey and the Settlement House Synthesis of Education and Democracy**

The settlement house movement was largely a response to an influx of immigration and urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1880s, the decade when Dewey arrived in Michigan, there were 11.3 million Americans living in 286 cities across the country. At the beginning of 1900, the decade when he arrived in New York, there were 25 million people living in 525 cities.<sup>33</sup> This rapid growth was not lost on reformers. Progressive reformers who organized the first settlement houses harnessed much of the same historicism from racial recapitulation. To counter older, essentialist ideas about poverty, hygiene, and moral degeneracy, many reformers pointed to the environment—in this case, the urban landscape—as the source of these social problems. Industrialism in particular threatened to unspool the bonds of community. Rather than reproduce older benevolent forms of uplift in the style of religious charity or embrace more radical solutions to capitalism, however, these progressives attempted to rebuild community life through education. By developing particular urban neighborhoods, recruiting entire families to attend their programs, and addressing concrete community needs, settlement

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<sup>31</sup> Casey Blake labeled the debates between Dewey and his interlocutors as “the unfolding of an indigenous radical tradition in the United States.” Blake, *Beloved Community*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Preliminary forays into an intellectual history of immigrants and Indigenous people has been best accomplished by Werner Sollors, Alan Trachtenberg, and Joel Pfister. More scholarship should be attempted from scholars situated in Indigenous studies to supplement works such as those by Lucy Maddox and Kiara Virgil, which treat questions of citizenship, assimilation, and Americanization with origins in twentieth-century New York.

<sup>33</sup> “Urban Population, 1790-1900,” U.S. Census data, cited in Roger Daniels, *Not Like Us: Immigrants and Minorities in America, 1890-1924* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1997), 24-25.

houses became centers for neighborhood community life and a foundation for polyglot American society but from the ground up.<sup>34</sup>

Settlement houses functioned as engines of assimilation, employment, and education for a new wave of immigrants. They offered many not-yet-White Eastern immigrant peoples, such as Italians, Poles, Russians, and Greeks, an institutional path to assimilation.<sup>35</sup> Settlement houses offered relief from the brutal conditions of tenements in New York and Chicago. Settlement house employment proved an important avenue of work for women as clerks, teachers, and managers. At the same time, women also developed professional experience as case workers, social surveyors, and statisticians. But at their heart, settlement houses were educational enterprises. Many settlement houses offered language instruction, patriotic education, home economic classes, vocational education through classroom instruction, and didactic activities. Many settlement houses featured classrooms, kindergartens, nurseries, and all manner of workshops, kitchens, and laundries that doubled as learning spaces. These were schools where American identity was a matter of pedagogy.

Inspired by such civic education, the PI began on May 15, 1897, when “a small group of individuals representing different elements in our society gathered in the Chantry of All Souls Church to consider the advisability of organizing a new Institution.”<sup>36</sup> They were inspired to address what they would later describe as a “civic wasteland” growing in the heart of urban New York. Fueled by an influx of immigration, growing tensions between capital and labor, and a rising anxiety about the viability of liberal democracy in an age of expertise, alienation, and

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<sup>34</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Warren S. Nishimoto, “The Progressive Era and Hawai’i: The Early History of Pālama Settlement, 1896-1929,” *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, 34 (2000): 170.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> “The People’s Institute,” Minutes, 1, Transcripts of Minutes May 1897-December 1899, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

machine politics, these New Yorkers felt action was desperately needed: “It was thought that groups of men and women animated by a common purpose would derive personal benefit and work out good for others by means of associations for social intercourse combined with the study and discussion of present problems,” an early PI annual report attests.<sup>37</sup>

In a letter to the editor in 1905, founder Charles Sprague-Smith described the PI as a part of a movement of “progressive democracy.” Sprague-Smith was careful to describe the organization he led as distinct from both the city’s old-guard reformist movement, which defined its objectives with more overtly religious rationales, and the newer socialist movement, which grew increasingly radical. The PI would stand above the fray of partisan politics due to its “rational view of society, holding it to be the association of individuals for the common protection and welfare of all” against the “combination between unprincipled capital and corrupt politics.”<sup>38</sup> The well-to-do founders of the PI had imagined an organization for immigrant people “not only for protection, but for adjustments to this new (American) environment.”<sup>39</sup> In 1900, the advisory board was expanded to include such luminaries as Thomas Slicer, J. G. Phelps Stokes,

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<sup>37</sup> “The People’s Institute,” Minutes, 37, Transcript of Minutes, 1900-1901, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>38</sup> “The Progressive Movement,” Charles Sprague Smith, March 6, 1905, Newspaper Clippings 1905, Box 31, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library. An Advisory Board was formed which, consisting mostly of the reform community’s elite, showed just how commodious this “progressive” label could be. The 1897 board was constituted by men and women such as Samuel Gompers, Jacob Riis, and Lillian Wald. “The People’s Institute,” Minutes, p. 3, People’s Institute Transcripts of Minutes May 1897-December 1899, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library. Though the group embraced the rhetoric of class and racial pluralism as the foundation of their organization, they had a particularly narrow vision of how the group would be properly organized: in order for “such associations to be successful ... as well as [achieve] democratic equality,” it could not welcome just anyone into its ranks. The founders imagined “good character as the controlling qualification for membership.” “The People’s Institute,” Minutes, 37, Transcript of Minutes, 1900-1901, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>39</sup> Report of the Community Clearing House for November, December 1917, Reports to the Board of Trustees Nov-Dec 1917, Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

and Andrew Carnegie, figures who would steer the PI to become arguably the city's leading progressive reform organization.<sup>40</sup>

The PI followed in the footsteps of perhaps the most famous settlement house in the United States, the Hull House. Hull House was founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr on the south side of Chicago in 1889. A prototypical settlement house, the Hull House was something of a community center, combining housing, workshops, kitchen, laundry, and, most importantly, classrooms. For Addams and Starr, Hull House was always first and foremost an educative enterprise. Addams insisted that Hull House and the settlements it inspired were “a protest against a restricted view of education, and make it possible for every educated man or woman with a teaching faculty to find out those who are ready to be taught. The social and educational activities of a settlement are but differing manifestations of the attempt to socialize democracy, as is the existing of the settlement itself.”<sup>41</sup>

Dewey's involvement at Hull House is well documented. He was a member of the board of trustees, a routine lecturer, and enthusiastic booster.<sup>42</sup> Despite their concern for the social problems stemming from immigration, Hull House and the PI followed an institutional reconfiguration of schooling and democracy within the frontier discourse. In particular, settlement houses inverted the frontier discourse away from the frontier itself and into the city.<sup>43</sup>

In his study of such settlements in Hawai'i, Alfred L. Castle suggests that “settlement houses

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<sup>40</sup> “The People's Institute Minutes,” Transcript of Minutes, 1902-1904, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>41</sup> Jane Addams, “The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements,” in *Philanthropy and Social Progress: Seven Essays by Miss Jane Addams, Robert A. Woods, Father J. O. S. Huntington, Professor Franklin H. Giddings, and Bernard Bosanquet* (1893; repr. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1969), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Allen Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1985), 57-58.

<sup>43</sup> Not long after Dewey arrived in New York, Charles DeGarmo argued that “the growth of cities and the disappearance of the frontier have made non-social individualism detrimental to our further progress.” Charles DeGarmo, “Social Aspects of Moral Education,” in *Forgotten Heroes of American Education: The Great Tradition of Teaching Teachers*, ed. J. Wesley Null and Diane Ravitch (Greenwich, CT: Information Age, 2006), 293.

staff viewed their role as ‘settlers’ in the inner city bringing civilization to a new, urban frontier.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, the urban landscape was recast as a wilderness, and settlement house workers as the pioneers—making immigrants the object of uplift and assimilation as the Indian-as-savage had previously been cast.

In 1902, Dewey published an essay in *Elementary School Teacher* called “School as Social Centre,” which he also delivered as an address to the National Education Association that year. The essay brought into greater focus Dewey’s more refined synthesis of education and democracy. While the essay foreshadowed many of the themes that would become fully articulated in *Democracy and Education* and elevate that book to the status of Dewey’s masterwork, “School as Social Centre” suggests the extent to which Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy was invested in the settlement house movement.<sup>45</sup> I argue that “School as Social Centre” is the key to grasping how Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy made him complicit in settler colonialism.

Dewey long believed that public schools played an important function in assimilating immigrants to the United States. Specifically, Dewey approved of public schooling’s capacity to incorporate new arrivals into a unified political nationalism. “The power of public schools to assimilate different races to our own institutions ... is doubtless one of the most remarkable exhibitions of vitality the world has ever seen.” At the same time, he was unhappy that

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<sup>44</sup> Alfred L. Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy: A History of the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Historical Society, 1992), 10.

<sup>45</sup> At the same time, schools as social centers had a responsibility to offset the alienation of industrial labor. “The old worker knew something of his process and business as a whole. He was thus aware of the meaning of the particular part of the work in which he himself was doing. He was and felt it as a vital part of the whole, and his horizon was extended. The situation is now the opposite,” Dewey declared. “The worker in a modern factory who is concerned with a fractional piece of a complex activity, present to him only in a limited series of acts carried on with a distinct portion of a machine, is typical of much in our entire social life. Most people are doing particular things of whose exact reasons and relationship they are only dimly aware.” John Dewey, “School as Social Centre” (1902), *Middle Works*, 2:87-88.

assimilation into a single political culture had led to an effort to homogenize immigrant cultures.<sup>46</sup> In large part due to Dewey's work at the Hull House and the PI, Dewey told his NEA audience that "wise observers in both New York and Chicago have recently sounded a note of alarm. They have called attention to the fact that in some respects the children are too rapidly, I will not say Americanized, but too rapidly de-nationalized. They lose the positive and conservative value of their own native traditions, their own native music, art, and literature. They even learn to despise the dress, bearing, habits, language, and beliefs of their parents."<sup>47</sup> As a result, schools had a lot to learn from settlement houses.

Dewey outlined several reasons why the time was right for changing schools from places of transactive pedagogy into social centers. Foremost among them was that the modernization of housing, communications, and transportation in the late nineteenth century had led to an explosion in immigration, urbanization, and industrialization which "had made America a meeting-place for all the people of the world." This influx of immigrants to cities like Chicago and New York meant that xenophobia, nativism, and racism were on the rise, all of which Dewey regarded as inimical to democracy. Fortunately, the school as a social center was ideally positioned to combat this social problem: "Bigotry, intolerance or even an unswerving faith in the superiority of one's own religious and political creed, are much shaken when individuals are brought face-to-face with each other, or have the ideas of others continuously and forcibly placed before them."<sup>48</sup> In this pronouncement, we see Dewey's unswerving commitment to democratic

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<sup>46</sup> Dewey, "School as Social Centre," 85.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 84.



equality, to such a degree that it might be justifiably “forcibly placed” before those who might hold out against integration into this democratic community.<sup>49</sup>

Dewey was confident that schools configured as social centers would “provide means for bringing people and their ideas and beliefs together, in such ways as will lessen friction and instability, and introduce deeper sympathy and wider understanding.”<sup>50</sup> As social centers, schools could bring diverse people together in a new form of community: “There is mixing people up with each other; bringing them together under wholesome influences, and under conditions which will promote their getting acquainted with the best side of each other.”<sup>51</sup> Schools configured as social centers directly injected the school into democratic culture in local community formation.

Dewey’s ideas about the school as a social center was akin to a settlement house. In fact, Dewey was directly inspired by the settlement house movement. “I suppose, whenever we are framing our ideals of the school as a social centre, what we think of is particularly the better class of social settlements,” Dewey plainly stated.

What we want is to see the school, every public school, doing something of the same sort of work that is now done by a settlement or two scattered at wide distances through the city. And we all know that the work of such an institution as Hull House has been primarily not that of conveying intellectual instruction, but of being a social clearing-house. It is not merely a place where ideas and beliefs may be exchanged, not merely in the arena of formal discussion—for argument alone breeds misunderstanding and fixes prejudice—but in ways where ideas are incarnated in human form and clothed with the

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<sup>49</sup> Dewey was eager for school to take up the social function once assigned to churches. “The church, with its supernatural sanctions, its means of shaping the daily life of its adherents, finds its grasp slowly slipping away from it. It is impossible for society to remain purely as passive spectator in the midst of such a scene. It must search for other agencies with which to repair the loss.” Specifically, secular schools could teach ethical conduct, not through sermons or catechism but through history and practice. Schools that do so show students how to have “decent, respectable, and orderly lives.” Like other progressives, Dewey favored the school’s gymnasium, workshops, and playgrounds rather than “the brothel, the saloon, the low dance-house, the gambling den, the trivial, inconsiderate and demoralizing associations which form themselves on every street corner.” Who would define those criteria, exactly, remained unstated. Dewey, “School as Social Centre,” 86-91.

<sup>50</sup> Dewey, “School as Social Centre,” 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

winning grace of personal life. Classes for study may be numerous, but all are regarded as modes of bringing people together, of doing away with barriers of caste, or class, or race, or type of experience that keep people from real communion with each other.<sup>52</sup>

Dewey was keen to make the schoolhouse an important hub for an existing community, say, in an urban neighborhood. As a crucial access point to a local community, schools were natural points of leverage for the social reformer. At the same time, Dewey was also invested in the idea that school would also become a community unto itself, bringing students, parents, and teachers together in new relationships. As such, schools as social centers were both reactive and proactive in their capacity to cultivate community.<sup>53</sup> Dewey praised the Hull House for celebrating the lifeways of ethnic immigrants from their former country through a labor museum, where children saw “the industrial habits of the older generations—modes of spinning, weaving, metal-working, etc., discarded in this country because there was no place for them in our industrial system.” Insofar as these social occupations had been the foundation for cultural expression, Dewey was worried that changes in labor threatened a corresponding disintegration of community culture. “Many a child has awakened to an appreciation of admirable qualities hitherto unknown in his father or mother for whom he had begun to entertain a contempt. Many an association of local history and past national glory has been awakened to quicken and enrich the life of the family.”<sup>54</sup>

In fact, Dewey concluded that settlements were the model for his synthesis of education and democracy. “We may say that the conception of the school as a social centre is born of our entire democratic movement,” Dewey concluded.<sup>55</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that Dewey’s cultural pluralism was therefore forged in the context of the settlement house movement. As a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 92.

result, it was designed to address progressives' anxieties over immigration, not address federal conscription of schools for the elimination of the Native political and cultural autonomy. When extended to Indian people, Dewey's cultural pluralism looked a lot less like multiculturalism than it did like assimilation. Dewey's formulation flattened Indians into a racial minority to be assimilated, incorporated, or harmonized along with immigrant ethnicities. What's more, that cultural pluralism enlisted the logic of Native erasure to use Indians in the rites of Americanization for immigrant people. The consequence is that Dewey's cultural pluralism was blind to the history—and therefore future—of Native people.<sup>56</sup>

Where Dewey saw opportunity for democracy on the new urban frontier, Michael Katz saw a coercion in the same urban landscape: "There is a darker side to the social thought of even the best progressives, notably Dewey and Jane Addams," Katz charged in *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*. "The emphasis on community in Jane Addams and the definitions of democracy and experience in Dewey provide particularly subtle and sophisticated instances of the widespread attempt in their time to foster modes of social control appropriate to a complex urban environment."<sup>57</sup> While scholars have long debated the extent to which Dewey's vision shared a coercive tendency with other progressives in the settlement house movement, my concern is simply to establish that when Dewey imagined schools as social centers, he was thinking principally about predominantly European immigrants to urban areas, not Indigenous people. For this reason, I suggest that his larger synthesis of schooling and democracy was primarily concerned about the immigrants who became the settlers in the unfolding process of nineteenth

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<sup>56</sup> See Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 102-28; Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 98-139; Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 46-47, 57-58.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusions of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 118.

and twentieth century settler colonialism. Into this ideological context stepped a young student of Dewey named John Collier.

### **Collier's Calling: The People's Forum, 1907-1914**

As it turns out, Dewey's appraisal of settlements was precisely the kind of democratic spirit that lured a young John Collier to work for the PI in New York. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1884, Collier first came to New York in 1902 to study at Columbia University. He then traveled to Europe and studied informally at the Collège de France, where he met his future wife, Lucy. Eventually, he and Lucy made their way back to New York. In 1907, Collier began working for the PI, the beginning of what would become a twelve-year stint at the settlement house. It was at the PI that Collier would become acquainted with Dewey and his synthesis of education and democracy.<sup>58</sup>

John Collier was convinced that the PI had correctly diagnosed the social problems of modern American life and had an actionable plan for their amelioration. According to Collier, the most pressing problem plaguing a rapidly industrial, urban, and corporate United States was community disintegration as a result of mechanization. Collier believed that the social forces produced by modern manufacturing—scientific management, Taylorism, mass production, and increased automation—had condemned American workers to widespread alienation from themselves and from each other. As Kenneth Philp writes, “Collier felt that the supremacy of machine over man led only to the uprooting of populations, the disintegration of neighborhoods, and the starvation of the soul.”<sup>59</sup> In these concerns, Collier was not alone; many turn-of-the-

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<sup>58</sup> John Collier, *From Every Zenith: A Memoir* (Denver: Sage Books, 1963), 59-114. See Robert Fisher, “Community Organizing and Citizen Participation: The Efforts of the People's Institute in New York City, 1910-1920,” *Social Service Review* 51, no. 3 (September 1977): 474-90.

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), 10.

century Americans were concerned about how machines would change—and cheapen—their lives, including Dewey. “Work has become an affair of machines,” Collier lamented. “In production, the worker is an auxiliary machine.” Collier was not against machine efficiency itself, but rather its social consequences: “Machine industry and economic combination are potentially the liberators of the human, the social, the ideal. But at present machine industry has pulverized the social bond and shrivelled [*sic*] the human element in work.”<sup>60</sup>

As he had made his way from Atlanta to New York via Appalachian and European adventures, Collier witnessed firsthand that “machine industry with its physical consequences has changed the nature of migration.” From his own travels, Collier diagnosed that “under actual conditions, the migration of Italian to Cleveland or of the Carolina mountaineers to Raleigh, or of country boys to a mercantile center, means the dropping away of the community and social traditions, the rupture of the slowly built provincial, family and moral standards which sustained and controlled the immigrant before he left his native home.”<sup>61</sup> All of this, Collier believed, had culminated in a crisis of American civilization, where individuals hopelessly became disconnected from community life.<sup>62</sup>

Critic though he had become, Collier was not hopeless about reversing the corrosive trends of machine production. When he returned to New York in 1907, Collier was quick to place great confidence in the city’s various reform organizations to address the social ills born from industrialization. Through educative gatherings and wholesome recreation, Collier believed that settlement house organizations could mitigate and even repair the damage

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<sup>60</sup> Untitled manuscript by John Collier, in Writings Articles on the Community Center, Box 24, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>61</sup> Philp, *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 170-216.

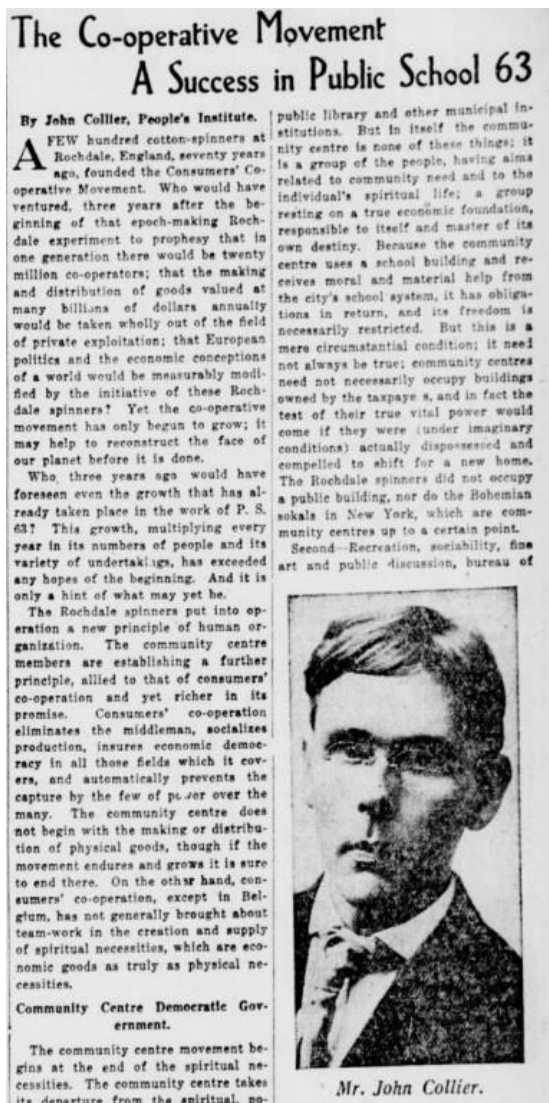


Figure 5.1. "The Co-operative Movement A Success in Public School 63," *New York Tribune*, June 29, 1915, Chronicling America, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

of displacement by modernization. As Collier was convinced that any solution to the crisis of civilization would demand more than just talk, the PI and its slate of programming for immigrants soon caught his attention.<sup>63</sup> The PI, which billed itself as "a social experiment station," offered Collier a chance to roll up his sleeves and get to work as a community organizer among New York's immigrant neighborhood.<sup>64</sup> Soon, Collier found himself working at the PI in various roles, including as a secretary, on the film censorship board, and as an investigator at large.

One of the places where Collier first encountered New York's progressive multiculturalism was at the People's Forum. The Cooper Union was one of the venues where pluralism for immigrant people simultaneously consigned Indigenous peoples to the dustbin of U.S.

history—and regulated their future in American democracy only as assimilated individuals. As early as 1914, retailer and noted Indian assimilator Jon Wanamaker donated decorations of the Cooper Union Hall for the PI's programs; we can only speculate if these decorations were

<sup>63</sup> Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 26.

<sup>64</sup> 18th Annual Report, 1914-1915, in *The People's Institute Annual Reports 1914-1915; 1920-1922*, Box 26, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

delivered to Union by Indigenous boys or girls fresh from Carlisle, or the graduates whom Wanamaker employed, such as Luther Standing Bear.<sup>65</sup> What we do know is that the PI's first director, Charles Sprague-Smith, evoked the People's Forum meetings as an ideal educative setting to foster tolerance for immigrant multiculturalism through Native erasure: "We are all the children of immigrants, no matter how far back we go," Sprague-Smith extolled from the Union stage in 1907.<sup>66</sup> So Sprague set the stage for settlement house pluralism to treat all peoples and ethnic communities in the United States as immigrants at one time or another.

A seemingly expansive view for immigrant people, Sprague-Smith's vision occluded the nation's Indigenous people in a way that was similar to Dewey, Bourne, and Frank's writings. In the service of multiculturalism, Bourne repeated this settler colonial catechism, explicitly reserving the category of the "native-born American" to non-Indigenous people: "We are all foreign-born or the descendants of the foreign born, and if distinctions are to be made between us and they should rightly be on some other ground than Indigenous-ness."<sup>67</sup> Bourne's "Trans-National America" was possible due to America's unique frontier experience. "Only the American—and in this category I include the migratory alien who has lived with us and caught the pioneer spirit and a sense of new social vistas—has the chance to become that citizen of the world." Bourne was willing to extend the mantle of American to immigrants who had taken up the "pioneering spirit."<sup>68</sup> The figure of the pioneer, trampling over the Indian and sending him into the past, is the synecdoche for Bourne's pluralism. In a profound understatement, Pfister writes that "without in any way undervaluing Bourne's desire to empower the disempowered, he

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<sup>65</sup> "Report of the Chelsea-Greenwich Activities," October 13, 1914, Reports to the Board of Trustees, 1914, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>66</sup> "Laud Immigrants at Mass-Meeting," *New York World*, February 23, 1907, in Newspaper Clippings 1907, Box 32, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>67</sup> Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind*, 143.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 133.

can be criticized for having concentrated only on European immigrants, with whom he engaged, to his intellectual delight, in the New York City that inspired Collier's early proto-multicultural activism."<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, the People's Forum events, advertised by the PI as educative, ennobling, and uplifting, strongly appealed to Collier. Inspired by the success of such mass gatherings, Collier became increasingly interested in the PI's education programming. By December of 1911, Collier was reporting to the board of trustees discussing the possibility of the PI's sponsorship of a trade school.<sup>70</sup> After this meeting, Collier begins to show up regularly in most trustee meeting minutes, indicating the trustee's blossoming confidence in the secretary.<sup>71</sup> They even furnished Collier with a budget to hire his own stenographer, so as to better enable their rising star to capture his overflowing wisdom in writing.<sup>72</sup> Seemingly an endless fountain of reports, memos, and bulletins, Collier was certainly one of the PI's most dynamic employees—as marked by a series of promotions, pay raises, successful motions and votes in board of trustees meetings, the hiring of his wife, and in being named acting director.<sup>73</sup> After taking a brief hiatus, Collier returned to PI in 1914 and soon began searching for a new kind of program that might gather the neighborhood's diverse communities into one place to forge lasting face-to-face relationships with one another. It was this impetus that brought about the Pageant of Nations, and with it, the beginning of Collier's progressive synthesis of education and democracy.

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<sup>69</sup> Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated*, 238.

<sup>70</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Trustees of the People's Institute," December 15, 1911, in Transcripts of Minutes 1910-1911, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>71</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the People's Institute," January 26, 1914, in Transcripts of Minutes 1912-1915, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>72</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the People's Institute," February 21, 1916, Transcripts of Minutes 1916-1919, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>73</sup> Collier was made acting director at least once in 1917. See "Reports for the Trustee's Meeting of the People's Institute, November, 1917," in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1917, Nov-Dec, Box 2, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.



## **The Pageant of Nations: The Origins of Collier's Cultural Conservation, 1914**

The PI's 1914 Pageant of Nations serves as an excellent window into Collier's multiculturalism and his nascent synthesis of education and democracy. It started when the PI began to embrace a new model for community organizing through public schools. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a group of reformers led by Edward J. Ward began to use municipal infrastructure to deliver new community programs to working-class communities in Rochester, New York. These institutions began with playgrounds and recreation spaces and ballooned into "neighborhood libraries, meeting halls for social and cultural clubs, public baths, and community theaters."<sup>74</sup> Such centers were intended by reformers to utilize school buildings as hubs for community organizing to the benefit of both children and adults. This vision for community centers, hosted by public schools as offices, classrooms, or workshops, was aligned with a Deweyan philosophical outlook that imagined schools as the center of community life, especially in urban neighborhoods.<sup>75</sup>

Collier became convinced that the school-based community center should be the core of the PI's educative programming. Collier began to work on the PI's version of the Rochester community centers, a transition from his earlier portfolio that appears to be largely at his own initiative. Unlike Jane Addam's Chicago Hull House, the PI did not operate its own dormitories for immigrant people, nor did it operate its own schoolhouse like Dewey's Chicago Laboratory School. While it did run an office for immigrant arrivals called the Gramercy Clearing House, the PI chose to employ a modified version of Ward's Rochester model, which took advantage of

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<sup>74</sup> Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 33. For other developments in extending didactic environments beyond the classroom in proximity to the settlement house movement, see also William Reese, *Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements During the Progressive Era* (Boston: Routledge, 1986), 148-76.

<sup>75</sup> Kelly enumerates several figures in the community center movement with whom Collier might have been familiar, noting in particular that "John Dewey established a school-social center in Chicago in 1902, shortly before [Collier] left for Columbia University." Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 32.

existing public schools as an established presence in predominantly immigrant neighborhoods. In particular, Collier argued that the PI's community centers should consist of an embedded presence of institute staff, workers, and volunteers within select public schools during both day and nighttime hours in order to deliver education, health, and nutrition programs to working-class and immigrant children and their families. This would allow the PI to avoid the large expense of operating such a space on its own, while allowing the PI to remain a persistent presence in the daily life of the neighborhood.<sup>76</sup>

But perhaps most importantly, Collier's vision for the PI's community centers stood in stark contrast to Ward's Rochester program based on his inclination for unilateral administration. Whereas Ward's centers in Rochester were governed by a given school's principal, the PI's model for embedding community centers in existing public schools meant that only PI staff would control the community center's programming. Collier, who had great disdain for what he deemed formal pedagogy, traditional educators, and small-minded school administrators, did not want to surrender the schools to the educators; the community centers were too important in his scheme of multiculturalism to let anyone other than himself dictate the terms of their operation. Collier capped off this authoritarian vision for democracy through schools with some decidedly paternalistic ideas: such centers would help immigrant people "pay their own way, and to win local freedom for themselves through demonstrating their ability to use such freedom without

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<sup>76</sup> While Collier championed the community center model, the PI did operate settlement house buildings in New York with Lillian Wald. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform*, 16. On the context of the settlement house movement alongside the community center movement, see Wayne E. Fuller, "Changing Concepts of the Country School as a Community Center in the Midwest," *Agricultural History* 58, no. 3 (July 1984): 423-41; Gerald Gamm and Robert D. Putnam, "The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840-1940," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 511-57; and Troy D. Glover, "The 'Community' Center and the Social Construction of Citizenship," *Leisure Sciences* 26, no. 1 (September 2004): 63-83.

abusing it.”<sup>77</sup> Collier’s proclivity for the unilateral control of the means by which he sought to affect his vision for reform would be an important foreshadowing of the policies he pursued in Indian education as Commissioner of Indian Affairs over a decade later.

The PI’s first community center was P.S. 63 in the Bowery on New York’s Lower East Side. As Collier wrote, “The first community center, located in School 63, Manhattan, was undertaken as a scientific experiment.” In time, the community center at P.S. 63 was used by the PI as an instructional classroom, a demonstration space, and a night school for immigrant adults. This was in accordance with Collier’s vision that the PI’s community centers would be “not merely centers of recreation, but of social service of every kind, and of continuation of education, and of the formation of public opinion.” Around these hubs, Collier hoped that a cultural pluralistic yet distinctly American democratic community might form to replace the fraying bonds of family, the workplace, and church. Writing about such schools as a solution, Collier explained: “This institution must rest on the responsible local effort of citizens joined together in the capacity of citizens. The structure of society must be preserved, while yet the plain people, knowing one another as fellow citizens and neighbors, must find a way to exert their democratic power.”<sup>78</sup> The PI board of trustees later attributed the success of the PI’s community centers “almost entirely due to continuous effort in this direction by Mr. Collier.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “The New York Training School for Community Center Workers and the Community Center Movement,” in Community Workers Training Center Reports 1916-1918, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>78</sup> John Collier, “Community Organization and the Great Decision,” in *Community Organization*, 2, in People’s Institute, Collier, John Articles, Box 27, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library. By the time Collier left New York, the community center had been dubbed the William McKinley Community Center and was by far the most successful of the PI’s fourteen such centers across New York. See also Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 36-37.

<sup>79</sup> “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustee of the People’s Institute,” December 20, 1916, Transcripts of Minutes 1916-1919, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

In time, the community center at P.S. 63 would also serve as the center of gravity for Collier's 1914 Pageant of Nations. Collier imagined the Pageant of Nations as an expression of the PI's brand of progressive multiculturalism. He explained to reporters how the PI could count nearly twenty distinct ethnic neighborhood communities that had been split into various groups that hardly interacted with one another, let alone the country's broader national culture. "This pageant will actually bring them together to symbolize America in the pageant as the breeder and protector of a new, united race," he explained. Collier insisted that "it will be necessary to show the dress, manners, customs and qualities of all the peoples from whom the new race is to come."<sup>80</sup> The conceit of the pageant was to demonstrate that the vibrant cultural lifeways of immigrants could showcase a variety of cultural traditions that America could absorb. "It is the aim of the People's Institute in this work to blend the gifts of the Old World and the New," the *New York Times* reported, "to give us what the immigrants have to bring and to assure to them the best of what we have to offer."<sup>81</sup>

In particular, Collier felt the amelioration of community life disintegrated by industrialism lay in the renewal of what he regarded as premodern culture bonds within new, modern forms of community association. In various cultural practices such as "the folk dance, the periodical festival, the monthly or annual marts and fairs, the mystery and morality plays, the folk lore whose boundless accumulation is only now being recovered," Collier held hope that a new modern sense of community might be wrought.<sup>82</sup> "Neither the family, as it formerly lived within the walls of the home, nor the church ... nor the influence of unconscious community

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<sup>80</sup> "Pageantry to United Races on East Side," *The Sun*, February 23, 1914, page 10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>81</sup> "Tenement Dwellers To Give Pageant of the Peoples," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1914, page 53, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>82</sup> John Collier, "City Planning and the Problem of Recreation," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, January 1914, 208-215, in People's Institute, Collier, John Articles, Box 27, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

tradition, can be revived in their old forms,” Collier wrote. “They are disappearing institutions.” Collier, much like Dewey, believed that new kinds of social institutions had to be intelligently designed to counter community dissolution by the forces of modernity, which had rendered such social occupations obsolete. “We may hope for no solution for this problem short of the creation of ... new community interests and civic enthusiasm [that] may be engendered to take the place of shattered community tradition and waning ecclesiastical inspiration,” he concluded.<sup>83</sup>

In New York, the resources to affect this solution were all around him: “American immigrant quarters are like some fateful and magical sea strand, heaped with a corroded, shattered and yet noble wreckage of the leisure-time heritage of the past of our Caucasian people.”<sup>84</sup> In this way, in every person arriving in New York displaced either from within or beyond the borders of the United States, Collier saw a potential solution to the problem of the disintegration of community in America. Collier conceded that New York was a teeming mass of foreign-feeling humanity that often inspired anxiety from native-born Americans: “New York is eighty per cent immigrant or born immigrant. Never since time began has humanity so adequately been represented in one metropolis.” However, Collier felt—like Kallen—that such a human cacophony could be turned into a harmony of social progress: “The immigrant is really not a liability or menace, save as an undirected immigration and the neglect or abuse of immigrants within American communities have made him such. He is rather an asset through which, if it be wisely used, America may become the most united and yet delightfully various, the most gorgeous and happy nation on earth.”<sup>85</sup> Just as Dewey, Collier advocated for

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. See also E. A. Schwartz, “Red Atlantis Revisited: Community and Culture in the Writings of John Collier,” *American Indian Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 507-31.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> The Training School for Community Workers of the People’s Institute of New York, Announcement, 1917-1918, in The N.Y. Training School for Community Center Workers, 1915-1917, Box 26, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

“hyphenated Americanism: the conception of a nation built out of social groups; conservation of immigrant values as a means toward real assimilation.”<sup>86</sup> To achieve this renewal of American community, Collier’s solution was classic Dewey: the accumulation of greater social intelligence to solve new problems. “We cannot revert to historical method when the economic foundations have changed,” Collier wrote. “But can we not look forward ... and possibly break the destructive force of conditions?”<sup>87</sup> In Collier’s view, instead of a blight on America, mass immigration offered rich cultural resources for remedying America’s social ills—if only immigrants could be guided by settlement house workers like those at the PI to conserve their cultural nationalism while accepting American political nationalism.

On June 6, 1914, Collier attempted this feat, when an estimated 15,000 people assembled across New York City’s sidewalks, balconies, and rooftops to watch a curious procession wind its way through the city streets. A column of “Tyrolean men and maidens in the festive games of the Austrian alps, gay Bohemian folk, and Hungarians in their national dance” emerged from Public School 63 and made their way down East Fourth Street. Close behind came Croatians, Ukrainians, and Slovaks who brought “strange customs and picturesque games from Eastern Europe.” On their heels were Russians, Italians, Turks, Spaniards, and Romanians, dancing, parading, and waving to the crowd. Accompanying these marchers were a police escort, a marching band, and a crowd of children, flanked by “Dutch, English, Irish, Scotch, School Builders, and May Pole dancers.”<sup>88</sup> The parade coursed along the East Side between Eleventh

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<sup>86</sup> John Collier to E. F. Sanderson, October 2, 1916, in Community Workers Training Program Correspondence 1916-1917, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>87</sup> Untitled manuscript by John Collier, in Writings Articles on the Community Center, Box 24, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>88</sup> “Pageant of Nations Reviewed by 15,000,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 1914, C5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

and Twelfth Streets for several hours, offering onlookers a variety of folk dress, games, and songs.

But as the Pageant of Nations finished its route and returned to P.S. 63, it came to be led by a legion of youthful Indian braves, princesses, and kings. Wearing faux buckskins and feathered headdresses of their own design, this costumed multinational contingent of immigrant children added a purportedly “First American” flavor to the display of European folk dress. These imagined Indian guides led the immigrant train back to the grounds of P.S. 63, where the participants assembled on an athletic field behind the school. As the audience closed in around them, the children divided themselves into rehearsed groups for the closing of the pageant, a re-enactment of the history of New York itself. As the *Times* had explained in the weeks before the event, “The grown people will do their part in the dances and songs, and the children, in costume, will present a historical picture playing, telling in vivid pantomime the story of the neighborhood from the time of the Indians down to the present day.” Soon, observers were delighted to see how the children had assembled “domestic scenes at campfires, war dances, and tribal differences before the arrival of Hendrick Hudson and his armed men.”<sup>89</sup>

This was the culmination of the pageant, a living history of America which saw the children of immigrants dressed as “the first inhabitants of Manhattan in its early days,” reported the *New York Times*—though youthful exuberance was sometimes at odds with the supposed verisimilitude of the actual event. “One could tell the squaws easily from the noble warriors in their feather head dresses, because the squaws were wearing skirts,” an observer for a newspaper noted. “Otherwise one might have thought they were just boys of School 79, of whom 150 took

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<sup>89</sup> “Tenement Dwellers To Give Pageant of the Peoples,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 1914, page 53, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

part in these scenes.”<sup>90</sup> The children then staged the arrival of the Dutch to Long Island, a performance in which the *Times* reported praised “the Indian squaws and the Dutch vrouws [as] the most interesting performers in these scenes.” Yet as the pageant wore on, some of the girls lost interest in playing Indian with the supposed dignity of America’s stoic forebearers, leading the reviewer to conclude that “they were frisky young squaws, who flew about in a lively fashion and did not look at home cooking and sewing.”<sup>91</sup> The boys were even less disciplined. A number of this party yelled supposed war cries so loudly that they reportedly drowned out the accompanying music of the Beethoven Symphony Orchestra. Eventually, the pageant Indians retreated to the edge of the field, and the event concluded in something called an “E Pluribus Unum” ceremony, where young women of various ethnicities—“Russia, Celtic, Semitic, and Teutonic”—helped to raise an American flag and lead the crowd in patriotic song.<sup>92</sup>

The pageant’s Indian play was a way for immigrant people, mostly those who may have been often viewed with skepticism by native-born Euro-Americans, to reenact the imagined seventeenth-century welcome of European colonists by New York’s Indigenous people. In so doing, the pageant’s Indians could extend the imagined Lenape sanction of the settlement of the first Europeans in Manhattan to a new generation of European arrivals to the shores of the New World. In this way, the pageant’s playing Indian is a textbook example of the work of Phil Deloria and Jean O’Brien, who have shown how the appropriation of an imagined Indigenous

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<sup>90</sup> “Pageant of Nations Reviewed by 15,000,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 1914, C5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* For more on the historiography of American pageantry, particularly in New York City, see David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); David M. Reimers, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Angela M. Blake, *How New York Became American, 1890-1924* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); and Cody Dodge Ewert, “Schools on Parade: Patriotism and the Transformation of Urban Education at the Dawn of the Progressive Era,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 16, no. 1 (January 2017): 65-81.



identity to sanction the settlement of Euro-Americans in North America was (and remains) a crucial function in the settler colonial erasure of the Native—manifested not so much in the elimination of all things Native, but rather its appropriation for non-Indigenous ends. In order to imagine themselves as new Americans, these recent twentieth-century arrivals symbolically performed the identities of the oldest Americans.

The event, widely regarded as a success, elevated Collier's profile in the settlement house movement. *The New York Times* celebrated "John Collier, recreation secretary of the Institute, [who] first thought of massing together the neighborhood dances and songs and costumes into one great festival for New York."<sup>93</sup> But the Pageant of Nations was also an important moment in the suturing of Collier's multiculturalism to his politics on schooling and democracy. Collier's pageant aimed to use New York's public schools as community centers to help enact multiculturalism for immigrants against native-born Euro-American nativism, not against Euro-American settler colonialism. While Collier's multiculturalism embodied in the pageant seemed to offer a kind of defense of multiculturalism, it was a pluralism extended to immigrants through Native erasure. Indeed, Collier's pageant is instructive of the degree to which New York's progressive multiculturalism failed to adequately capture the reality of the U.S. settler colonial past; since Indigenous people were imagined as entirely vanished from Manhattan, the state of New York, and the United States at large, the pageant's celebration of immigrant multiculturalism required their exemption.

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<sup>93</sup> "Tenement Dwellers To Give Pageant of the Peoples," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1914, page 53, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

## **The Training School for Community Workers, 1915-1917**

While the Pageant of Nations had been a success, Collier was not satisfied that a single parade could affect the full integration of such immigrant communities into American democracy. On the heels of his well-received pageant, Collier set out to convince the institute's leadership to expand its educational initiatives to accomplish his vision. A school to train community workers to usher immigrants into multiculturalism, Collier believed, was the ideal way to transmit his progressive synthesis of education and democracy to a wider cohort of social workers. In his proposal, Collier was entering the Deweyan vein of the progressive movement, which imagined schools and educators were crucial to cultivating local communities. By conserving the clothes, songs, and languages of various immigrant groups as part of a transnational stockpile, settlement houses and their social workers could defeat the homogenization pressure of the melting pot while still realizing a common democratic culture. Insofar as Collier's plan resonated with the likes of Dewey, the idea must have appealed to the PI leadership, who gave Collier a wide berth to pursue the idea.

The origins of Collier's Training School for Community Workers began in February 1915, when Collier convened a PI seminar on "community center problems." Collier reported that this gathering of PI staff, volunteers, and concerned citizens "clearly showed the need for a permanent training school."<sup>94</sup> The challenges that stood in the way of democratic community organization were many, and the number of trained workers was too few. He took his concerns to the PI leadership, where the minutes record that "Mr. Collier presented the idea to the Executive Committee of amalgamating the work which the People's Institute might do with regard to

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<sup>94</sup> "General Announcement Opening Session 1915-1916," in *The N.Y. Training School for Community Center Workers, 1915-1917*, Box 26, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.



Figure 5.2. *Manhattan: 20th Street—1st Avenue, 1920*, New York Public Library Digital Collections. Public School 40 on East 20th Street, one-time host to Collier’s Training School for Community Workers.

immigrant assimilation with the other work of the People’s Institute.”<sup>95</sup> Collier’s pitch was simple: if PI wanted to promote its brand of cultural conservation across New York through programming similar to the Pageant of Nations, it would need a legion of community organizing experts to accomplish this task. “The demand for trained community leaders, far in excess of the supply” was the pressing need that Collier’s proposed school would therefore meet.<sup>96</sup> In 1919, Collier reflected on the origins of his school: “The Training School had two aims in the view from the start,” he

wrote. “First, it was aimed to recruit and train leaders for community work. Second, it was aimed to conduct propaganda and demonstrations which would popularize and develop the community movement itself.”<sup>97</sup>

Collier’s pitch worked. In the summer of 1915, the PI launched the Training School for Community Workers under Collier’s direction. As historical scholarship on Collier notes, the Training School operated with a measure of independence from the PI’s other portfolio of

<sup>95</sup> “Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the People’s Institute,” October 28, 1915, in Transcript of Minutes 1912-1915, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>96</sup> “General Announcement Opening Session 1915-1916,” in The N.Y. Training School for Community Center Workers, 1915-1917, Box 26, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>97</sup> John Collier to the Board of Trustees for the Training School for Community Workers and the People’s Institute, November 14, 1918, in Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, in Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

programs. Both Philp and Kelly note the relative autonomy of the Training School as evidence that foreshadows Collier's go-it-alone nature as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. However, the autonomy of Collier's school has been somewhat exaggerated. "The People's Institute is a membership corporation governed by a Board of trustees, and the Training School for Community Workers is a department of The People's Institute governed by its own Board of trustees but not incorporated," Collier documented in a 1917 letter.<sup>98</sup> As Collier explained the school's status to its students, "Close cooperation is maintained by the Training School not only with the community centers of New York but with the settlements and neighborhood associations and with the various municipal departments whose work is related to the community center movement."<sup>99</sup> It was decided that the school would be funded by a combination of monies from wealthy PI patrons and tuition from enrolled students. While it was supposed to be a resource for other progressive organizations in New York to train their workers, the school would nevertheless remain responsive to its biggest patron: "The relations with the Institute would be intimate to practically any degree desired by the Institute," Collier assured the PI's trustees.<sup>100</sup> Still, Collier felt he had more than enough autonomy at the Training School to accomplish his vision. In directing his own school, Collier imagined that he had his finger on the pulse of the entire New York settlement house movement.

At the completion of the school's first year in May 1916, Collier was pleased to report that of the first class of thirty-six, twenty-seven graduated. Two dropped out, and two others "failed to qualify for a diploma." Nine graduates were placed in social orientations by the end of

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<sup>98</sup> John Collier to Carl Beck, December 15, 1917, in Labor Forum Correspondence of John Collier 1917 A-C, Box 9, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>99</sup> Training School for Community Workers syllabus, circa 1918, in Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, in Box 12, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>100</sup> "Mr. Collier's Report to the Trustees," May 21st to June 21st, in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1915 Apr-Oct, Box 1, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

the year, where they went to work in eight “community and social centers” in public schools across New York.<sup>101</sup> Anna Drayton celebrated the evident success of their enterprise: “As for the subject matter of its lectures, etc., the school has gone far beyond the promises made in its original announcement,” she wrote. “Possibly, no social service school has been so radically clinical [original emphasis] in its method, as has the New York Training School.”<sup>102</sup>

In October of 1916, the second year of Collier’s Training School got underway. There were sixteen full-time students and forty part-time students. Their curriculum was divided into six areas: field work, social dance, practical crafts, “study of motion pictures,” sociology, and practicum. “The work during the first month of the school was handled by Mr. Collier” and four others, two of whom were “instructors from the Teacher’s College.” Collier had faith in his curriculum, in part because he never doubted that his students would not be as driven as himself. “The students are being ‘worked hard’ but they are intensely interested,” he mused, “and discipline is possible because the main student body is giving unstinted time.”<sup>103</sup> By early 1917, Collier was convinced that the school had catapulted the PI into a place of national prominence, if not preeminence, among progressive organizations experimenting with schools. “We seem to have passed the stage where it has been necessary to create a moment in this field or to generate energy,” he wrote to the trustees. “The leadership by New York in the whole movement, are brilliant.” He concluded, “We are now rather in a position of directing the momentum.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> “The New York Training School for Community Center Workers,” in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1916 Jan-Apr, Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>102</sup> “The New York Training School for Community Center Workers,” in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1916 Jan-Apr, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>103</sup> “Summary of Work of the Training School for the Past Month,” Reports to the Board of Trustees 1916 May-Dec, Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>104</sup> “Mr. Collier’s Report to the Trustees,” May 21st to June 21st, in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1915 Apr-Oct, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

## Collier as Deweyan Pedagogue

Collier could make such claims in part due to the nationally prestigious educational advisors at his Training School. Overseeing Collier's school was its Educational Committee, a body composed of Columbia Teaching College professors William Heard Kilpatrick, Albert Shiels, and John Dewey. Dewey likely agreed to join the Educational Committee for Collier's Training School because he had found his advisory work for the PI to be a high return on little investment. Between Dewey and Kilpatrick, the Teacher's College was well represented at Training School programming. On March 20, 1916, Kilpatrick gave a lecture at the Training School entitled "The Dewey Point of View."<sup>105</sup> Between Dewey's role on the advisory board, his engagements at the Cooper Union, and the sustained presence of his deputy Kilpatrick at the Training School, Collier soon became well versed with Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy.

Through his idiosyncratic leadership of the Training School, Collier fashioned himself in the mold of a Deweyan pedagogue. The Training School kept a collection of articles, an inventory of which contained Dewey's "Some Dangers in the Present Movement for Industrial Education."<sup>106</sup> A talk at the Training School was held on the "rise of the Froebelian or John Dewey idea in leisure life enterprise."<sup>107</sup> Moreover, Collier himself did a great bit of instruction that mirrored many of Dewey's philosophical interests. Collier wrote that from October to November of 1916, he had "given about thirty hours of lecture work on sociology and psychology," providing the students of the Training School with such lectures as "Social

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<sup>105</sup> "Program for the Month of March," February 29, 1916, in Community Workers Training Program Correspondence 1916-1917, Box 12.

<sup>106</sup> "Vocational Guidance," Writings Articles Americanization Recreation, Box 24, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>107</sup> The Training School for Community Workers of the People's Institute of New York, Announcement, 1917-1918, in The N.Y. Training School for Community Center Workers, 1915-1917, Box 26, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

Psychology,” “Meaning and Growth of Community Organization,” and “Public Health as an Expression of Democracy.”<sup>108</sup> Collier filled his reports to the trustees with all manner of the business at the school, but his reports detailing the Training School “purely as a teaching agency” were lengthy, detailed, and stuffed with optimism for his expansive didactic vision that often invoked Dewey.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, it was also around this time that Collier opened his own school at his home in Sparkhill, New York. Dubbed the “Home School,” John and Lucy Collier set up a school for their children and some children of their neighbors. By 1915, the school had twelve students, including the Colliers’ three children.<sup>110</sup> Collier hired two teachers for the Home School using his connections at the PI. There was “Mattie Bates, a disciple of John Dewey” and “a girl from the New York Training School For Community Workers, whose only name I can remember was her nickname ‘Red,’” Collier recalled.<sup>111</sup> In his biography of Collier, Lawrence Kelly notes that “in keeping with Dewey’s dictum, the Home School eschewed discipline for permissiveness.”<sup>112</sup> Under Bates and Red, Home School students studied through a variety of activities and projects, kept a garden, and swam in a nearby mill pond as physical education. Collier celebrated his Deweyan teachers as having an “experimental and creative interest in the development and nourishment of intellectual interest through responsibly, constructive activity.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John Collier, “Report for Month Ending November 16, 1916,” Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, Box 12; “Training School for Community Workers Lecture Program First Semester,” 1918, in Community Workers Training School Lecture Programs, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>109</sup> “Report to the Trustees for the Month Ending,” Reports to the Board of Trustees 1916 May-Dec, Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>110</sup> Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation*, 51-54.

<sup>111</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 66.

<sup>112</sup> Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation*, 52.

<sup>113</sup> Cited in Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation*, 52.

Therefore, it is perhaps no surprise then that Collier's Training School reports shared an explicitly Deweyan vocabulary. A brochure for the school used Dewey's key unit of analysis, intelligence, in its experimentalist language: "[The Training School] has for its purpose the application of intelligence to the everyday problems of these new times. It substitutes definite knowledge and practical helpfulness for well-meaning sentimentality."<sup>114</sup> Perhaps the most overt of Collier's borrowing from Dewey was the pragmatist's quotation emblazoned on the front cover of the Training School's first general announcement:

We have to recognize that the furtherance of the depth and width of human intercourse is the measure of civilization. We must have system and constructive method, springing from a widely inventive imagination, a method checked up at each turn by results achieved. Freedom and fulness [*sic*] of human companionship is the aim, and intelligent co-operative experimentation the method.<sup>115</sup>

Naturally, invoking Dewey's name served as a useful way to promote the Training School. Collier knew his school benefited from its association with Dewey. "John Dewey was a member of the Training School's advisory board," Collier wrote proudly in his memoir. Collier detailed that "his leading disciple in education, William Heard Kilpatrick of Teachers College, Columbia University, met with the students frequently."<sup>116</sup> Collier highlighted Dewey's affiliation with the PI as a way to highlight his new school's unique pedagogy in the service of training experts to bring multicultural settlement house programming to immigrant people under the banner of democracy. Leroy Bowman was one visitor to the Training School. A settlement house worker, Bowman was invited by Collier to give a talk about community organization at the school. He remembered that "John Collier seemed to be the whole school," and wrote that "I

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<sup>114</sup> "A School that Studies Life," August 1918, The NY Training School for CC Workers 1917-1918, Box 26, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>115</sup> "General Announcement Opening Session 1915-1916," in The N.Y. Training School for Community Center Workers, 1915-1917, Box 26, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>116</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 84.



knew of his intense feelings about neighborhood democracy.”<sup>117</sup> Bowman characterized Collier’s instruction regarding “great discussion on the questions: What is a community? How large should an urban community be? What methods should be used in order to insure a maximum degree of local democracy?”<sup>118</sup> The Deweyan influence on such curriculum is unmistakable.

Over the years, Collier’s conduct as the director of the school made it clear that the answers to such questions had little practical import on his leadership. Collier directed the Training School for Community Workers as if it were his exclusive domain. Taking advantage of the relative autonomy of the school from the wider programs of the PI, he prioritized the instruction of the students in his particular brand of sociology, psychology, and political theory. He dealt dismissively with his critics, both within and beyond the PI, especially New York socialists. And he largely abdicated his responsibility to fundraise for the school, leaving it up to PI leadership to do this crucial work for him.

It only took two years before Collier’s PI coworkers began to protest his leadership of the Training School. They complained to PI leadership that while Collier’s school was humble in its enrollment and curriculum, his promotional materials and catalog were written in a self-aggrandizing manner that wildly exaggerated the size and importance of the school. Furthermore, while Collier believed that his pedagogy could merge theory and practice through case studies and practicums, his staff felt that his rhetoric was writing checks his pedagogy could not cash. To add insult to injury, there were too few expert volunteers to carry out the practicums. When prompted to reflect on Collier’s leadership of the Training School, one observer told the trustees

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<sup>117</sup> Leroy Bowman to John Collier, August 10, 1962, cited in Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 87.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

that “I do not want you to think that Mr. Collier is at any disadvantage at my hands by reasons of any recognition which I may make of the fact that he is a theorist rather than a practical man.”<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, Collier used too much of class time to pontificate on his particular theorizations, which some felt bordered on the mystical. His staff clearly was chagrined when, after his abstract lectures about psychology, Collier told students “the extent to which the . . . theoretical subject matter can be correlated with the immediate experience of students in the field, will be left during the present year in a large measure to the student themselves.” As a result, those familiar with the Training School believed the school under Collier was largely devoid of actual instruction in the practical techniques of community organizing or adult education. They charged that the school “does not sufficiently equip its students with tricks of the trade, techniques, or knowledge or practical devices.” The staff’s complaint culminated in the claim that “we have initiated things and dropped them, we have had doubtful successes, we are required things of students without giving them guidance needful for that measure of success which breeds confidence.”<sup>120</sup> Historians know the nature of these complaints because a chagrined Collier wrote them down in detail, which belies just how personally he took any criticism of a school he imagined as his very own.

Collier chafed at the critique of his pedagogy, which he felt missed his unique brand of blending of theory and practice in the mold of Dewey. He admitted that he had “felt a certain embarrassment last year because, with a small group, we still proceeded in part by the formal lecture method.” But this mode of instruction should not, Collier was convinced, obscure his real innovation. Echoing Dewey, Collier wrote indignantly that “a school proceeding by

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<sup>119</sup> Letter from Edward Buss to E. F. Sanderson, December 1, 1916, in Community Workers Training Program Correspondence 1916-1917, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>120</sup> “Criticism of the Training School as Reported by Mrs. C., Mr. McB. etc.,” in Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

unconventional methods and evolving with an unstable social movement is utterly vulnerable when criticized from the a-priori assumption that conventional academic methods are the right methods. We have been building our house while we were living in it,” Collier seethed. “That is the new conception of education and of social action. What other use would our school have?”<sup>121</sup>

Above all else, Collier took umbrage at what he felt was a slanderous accusation that his brand of psychological, sociological, and philosophical instruction at the Training School was not empirical but mystical. Collier countered these charges with pragmatism, echoing a very Deweyan line of reasoning regarding the accumulated wisdom of contemporary pedagogy: “Criticism must be directed against results, not against methods, under these circumstances,” Collier wrote.<sup>122</sup> While Collier’s instruction certainly wandered into idealist metaphysics, he nevertheless prided himself on the school’s proven practical outcomes.<sup>123</sup>

This led Collier to mount a defense of his school’s curriculum. In an open letter titled “The Presentation of Psychology at the New York Training School,” Collier cited Dewey directly as a kind of shield against criticism of his school. “We have been criticized for not keeping the biological point of view sufficiently to the fore; for being ‘mystical,’ and even ‘anti-

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<sup>121</sup> Letter from John Collier to the Board of Trustees for the Training School for Community Workers and the People’s Institute,” November 14, 1918, in Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, in Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> For example, Collier assigned students readings from Frederic W. H. Myer’s *Human Personality* which posited that mediums could commune with the souls of the dead to find philosophical truths in life. Untitled note dated November 14, 1918, in Community Workers Training Center Correspondence 1918-1922, N.D. Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library. Collier probably further tipped his hand somewhat against his colleague’s charge of mysticism when he endorsed William James. Demonstrating his familiarity with pragmatism as a wider school of thought, Collier wrote that “psycho-physical parallelism was the pragmatic hypothesis fifty years ago. To-day, psycho-physical parallelism is included within the so-called behaviorist hypothesis.” James, Collier lauded, “was supremely adept in seeing where empirical science ended and metaphysics began, and we have tried to make our students recognize that the scientific and metaphysical points of view are different but not contradictory.” John Collier, “The Presentation of Psychology at the New York Training School for Community Workers,” February 5, 1917, in Community Workers Training Center Reports 1916-1918, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

scientific,” Collier complained.<sup>124</sup> To dismiss the charges of mysticism and idealism at the Training School, Collier then enumerated what kind of psychology, exactly, he was actually teaching by stating emphatically “we have used Dewey’s writing extensively.”<sup>125</sup>

Despite Collier’s attempts to defray criticism by citing his Deweyan influences, PI Director Edward Sanderson evidently put Collier on notice for his overzealous grip on his school. To lessen the sting of this judgment, Collier took time off and went to North Carolina. Indulging in some of the mysticism he denied himself in New York, Collier evidently found spiritual succor camping in the forest; the North Carolina woods seemed to sweep away Collier’s defensiveness about the school. Collier’s August 8, 1917 telegram to Sanderson from Andrews, North Carolina, seems to suggest he had come to peace with his colleagues’ critique of his pedagogy: “Glorious day on the mountains yesterday. Sudden clairvoyance about issues involved. I must mend my ways but we must not compromise any values. JOHN COLLIER.”<sup>126</sup>

Down from the mountains, Collier then wrote a reflective and apologetic letter to Sanderson that included some rather unvarnished introspection: “I attempt more than I can do,” Collier admitted. Collier took responsibility for his “temporary hurt” over the critique of his school and attributed this to his own learning, suggesting that “I haven’t been graduated yet, and haven’t finished my work yet viewing the Institute as a school of life and a vehicle of action.” Collier also fashioned a defense of not only his school, but his entire career in settlement house work in New York: “The Institute did not discover me to myself, did not awaken me to the world, but it has enabled me to work over into social practice enough of nearly everything vital

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<sup>124</sup> John Collier, “The Presentation of Psychology at the New York Training School for Community Workers,” February 5, 1917, in Community Workers Training Center Reports 1916-1918, Box 12.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Telegram from John Collier to Edward Sanderson, August 8, 1917, in Community Workers Training Program Correspondence 1916-1917, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

in me ... so that my very nature is indebted to the Institute.”<sup>127</sup> It was not only the institute to which Collier was indebted, but the philosophy of John Dewey as well.

## **Conclusion**

By the time Dewey and Collier collaborated at the PI’s Training School, Dewey had fully embraced the settlement house as the model for his synthesis of education and democracy. Beginning with Hull House in Chicago, Dewey was confident that the best settlements were not driven by religious uplift, but from an emerging secular faith about democratic culture that was as intense as his own. “Everywhere we see signs of the growing recognition that the community owes to each one of its members the fullest opportunity for development,” Dewey wrote in “The School as Social Centre.” “This is no longer viewed as a matter of charity, but as a matter of justice.”<sup>128</sup> Dewey ultimately championed the settlement house as the model for his synthesis of education and democracy because he fervently believed that these institutions promoted democratic culture.

While Dewey more fully explored his vision of schools in the image of settlements in *Democracy and Education*, his 1902 essay “Schools as Social Centre” underscores the social problems Dewey had in mind for his synthesis of education and democracy. The racism, xenophobia, and nativism that were exacerbated by industrialism, urbanization, and mass immigration could be defrayed by schools configured as social centers in the image of a settlement house like the PI. The PI had been founded by the city’s elite progressive reformers to address the problems they believed were caused by a massive influx of immigrants to urban areas like New York. While schooling that affected inclusion may have realized democracy for

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<sup>127</sup> John Collier to Edward Sanderson, August 8, circa 1917, in Community Workers Training Center Correspondence 1918-1922, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>128</sup> Dewey, “School as Social Centre,” 93.

immigrants, the same cannot be said for indigenous people. For Dewey and the New York progressive pluralists, settlement house organizations like the PI could accomplish the feat of *e pluribus unum* through didactic rituals of Americanization. Yet even this pluralism relied on the backgrounding of Indigenous people.

In particular, Collier's Pageant of Nations in 1914 cast young boys as screaming "braves" and girls as frolicking "squaws" to sanction the arrival of Euro-Americans to Manhattan in both the seventeenth and twentieth century. This was a history that backgrounded Indigenous people, one that culminated in a ceremony of citizenship for immigrant people that further reinforced Indigenous replacement by Euro-Americans by consigning the feathers and buckskins so synonymous with Indians to the margins of modern American life. The pageant's closing ceremonies further enacted the erasure of Indigenous people in American memory by representing them as an inevitably fading culture destined to be replaced and surpassed by Euro-American settlement of the frontier—all within the shadow of P.S. 63. Scott Pratt identifies twentieth-century settlements like Hull House as an important nexus for articulations of pluralism that is amenable to Indigenous anti-colonial politics. He suggests that the Hull House should be considered a vital node in the story of intersectional responses to White supremacy, which he identifies as a part of the "indigenous attitude." But unlike Pratt's suggestion, Dewey's emerging cultural pluralism was not joined with Indigenous people and their anti-colonial policies at these settlements. Instead, Collier and the PI injected the logic of Native erasure into the core functions of the settlement house.<sup>129</sup>

Where all this left actual Indigenous people was ambiguous. Such was the case in December 1917, when PI Clearing House worker Sherwood Trask observed the appearance of "a

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<sup>129</sup> Scott Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 282, FN 13.

big, hearty Indian from Arizona—a young man who had been making \$125 a month as pit boss in a copper mine—[who] came to us for employment and advice about the strange customs of ‘Little-Bagdad-by-the-Subway.’” Trask’s fanciful language animated the notion that New York City was a cosmopolitan melting pot that had somehow failed to absorb this Indian man from rural Arizona. Trask went on: “He was newly arrived in the city, eager for education. He is handicapped by the lack of an arm.” While the clearing house staff tried to find the man employment as they would any other immigrant worker, they evidently failed. Ultimately, the PI decided to resort to education: “We endeavored to secure temporary employment for him and sent him under an early charter to Dartmouth College, whereby all expenses, for an Indian, are paid under scholarship provisions,” Trask reported. The plan was foiled, as Trask lamented that PI workers “now cannot locate the young man, who registered from another part of the city and has moved from his address.”<sup>130</sup> Still, the PI’s solution to resort to schooling for an Indian applicant is suggestive of the wrinkle that Indigenous people posed to the settlement house synthesis of education and democracy. It would be a wrinkle that Dewey’s pluralism would prove unable to iron out.

This chapter has endeavored to show how Collier’s leadership at the Training School was more than a mere dress rehearsal for Collier’s leadership style at the Office of Indian Affairs. Rather, it was from his experience as a pedagogue that Collier began to formulate his own political philosophy of schooling that had three Deweyan inflections. First, Collier came to believe that schooling had a role to play in promoting multiculturalism. Collier thought that a vibrant immigrant community would require the conservation of its particular cultural identity

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<sup>130</sup> “Report of the Community Clearing House for November, December 1917,” in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1917 Nov-Dec, Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

and history. From his engagement with Dewey and the New York progressives at the PI, he came to believe that modern schools should facilitate that cultural conservation, not impair it.

Second, Collier sharpened the importance of local communities in his own philosophical project. Like Dewey, Collier labored at the PI under the premise that modern democratic organization could be best achieved in local communities, and that schooling had a role to play in this effort. Pedagogy could be philosophy in action. Crucially, however, this did not preclude national efforts at democratic organization; in characteristic fashion of most progressives of the period, Collier never gave up on the role of the federal government to help accomplish the changes in American life he so eagerly sought. As Kelly rightly notes, “The training school, however, represented a subtle shift in his thinking. The concept of an elite now entered into his theory about the democratic process.”<sup>131</sup>

Third, and perhaps most importantly, Collier embraced the Deweyan imperative that schooling was one of the most important instruments in cultivating a common American democratic culture. At the PI, Collier had learned that schools served democracy by expertly conserving immigrant cultures, not by empowering immigrants themselves to design or operate their own schools. Unlike Dewey, however, the use of schools and state power in concert as a mechanism for delivering that democracy never lost its appeal to Collier—as long as it was *his* vision of democracy. But Collier was not the only one whose synthesis of education and democracy was about to be put to the test. The New York settlement house movement and its commitment to democracy was about to be severely strained by U.S. entry into World War I.

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<sup>131</sup> Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation*, 98.



**CHAPTER 6:**  
**Refractions: Waldo Frank and the Anti-Modern Primitivist View**  
**of the Frontier Discourse, 1919-1933**

Sometime in 1916, Dewey shared some of his writing with his associate Waldo Frank. Frank was an author, activist, and critic who became prominent in New York's literary circles during the early part of the twentieth century. By that year, the two were quite close. A number of Frank's novels ended up in Dewey's library.<sup>1</sup> Frank's wife, Margaret Naumburg, was friendly with Alice Chipman.<sup>2</sup> Margaret visited Chipman at the Deweys' home around August of 1913. "She brought me some beautiful flowers and is prettier and nicer than ever," Alice told her daughter Evelyn.<sup>3</sup> In 1917, Frank sent Dewey a copy of his latest novel, from which Dewey "anticipated much pleasure" reading. This warm relationship culminated in their collaboration on *The Seven Arts*, a literary journal edited by Frank, which was first published in 1916.

Frank wrote in his memoir that during his tenure as editor at the short-lived magazine, "I saw John Dewey not only at his office at Columbia University but in his New York apartment

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey to Waldo Frank, January 3, 1917, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Naumburg attended Vassar College and graduated from Barnard College in 1912. From 1914 to 1916 she studied at Columbia University (where she was said to have studied with Dewey) and the London School of Economics. She completed a training course with Maria Montessori in Rome, studied the mind-body relation with F. Matthias Alexander in London, and worked in visual arts, music, and drama. In 1915 Naumburg was the founder and first director of the Walden School, New York, an alternative, experimental school. Later specializing in art therapy, she lectured at leading medical schools, hospitals, institutions, and meetings in the United States and Europe and wrote several books on the subject. Naumburg married Waldo Frank in 1916; they were divorced in 1924. Despite her separation from Frank, Naumburg kept in touch with the Dewey family. In 1940, Naumburg sent Dewey a wallet as a birthday gift. John Dewey to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, ca. April 2, 1941, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3. See also Frederick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 150.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Chipman Dewey to Evelyn Dewey, ca. September 10, 1913, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

and his humble house in Long Island. So modest was he, he seemed actually pleased when this cub, not yet thirty, wanted to see him and wanted to print his homely words all stiff at the joints. He confided; yes, he wrote poetry of a sort. Oh, no! it was not to be seen.”<sup>4</sup> Despite Dewey’s humility, he eventually allowed Frank to read some of his poetry. While it is unclear exactly which poems he allowed Frank to read, one might have been “America”:

Thou opened wide thy gates  
And they came crowding in,  
And still they hurrying come.

For they had not known rest at home,  
Nor quiet nor the far and friendly solitude.  
Scarcely had they stopped to wash or dress—  
They came so breathless trooping in.

I know now if self-moved they came,  
Or pushed unwitting from behind—  
This resistless, unresisting tide  
Of souls. Or were they many souls  
Or one all-possessing soul  
I know not.

But on it flowed;  
And its banners were shawls upon the head;  
Its flutes the cries of babes at breast;  
Its drums the pattering of the unceasing feet;  
And its leader and its chieftain was the look on every brow intent—

The set and driving look—  
Of search where man spreads friendly out  
And sees the sun in kindness nod to him  
Before he lays him down to die.<sup>5</sup>

Dewey’s undated poem reflects his investment in the New York multiculturalist circle in which he and Frank were a part. In “America,” Dewey takes Horace Kallen’s metaphor of an

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<sup>4</sup> Waldo Frank, *The Rediscovery of Man: A Memoir and a Methodology of Modern Life* (New York: G. Braziller, 1958), 89.

<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, “America,” Folder 59, Box 62, John Dewey Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

American “symphony” and literally transposes it onto the bodies of immigrant people. These bodies are an orchestra of humanity featuring banners, flutes, and drums who form a parade of humanity “crowding” to America’s “gated” shores. Dewey’s poem underscores that these immigrant people were desperate in their search for a place of friendly welcome. How could Americans hear such plaintive calls and not be moved to such a plight? It is the kind of attitude that led Dewey to his commitment for a philosophy in action, one which took him to New York’s settlement houses like the People’s Institute (PI).<sup>6</sup>

Not long after, Dewey’s and Frank’s collaboration at *The Seven Arts* imploded over the discord sown amongst the New York progressive circle over the United States’ entry to World War I. As Paul Carter argues of their short-lived journal, “Although Frank claimed later that the ‘mutual distrust and spiritual failures’ of the individuals of the group killed it, World War I was the primary cause.”<sup>7</sup> Their circle, drawn together at venues at *The Seven Arts* and the People’s Institute, broke into two camps. The first camp, led by Dewey and backed by John Collier, viewed the war as compatible with a defense of democracy around the globe. For Dewey and Collier, the war in Europe represented a real challenge to democracy. They believed that U.S. entry to the war was, in Wilson’s catchphrase, an armed struggle to make the world “safe” for democracy. The other faction, led by Randolph Bourne and supported by Waldo Frank, regarded the war as a degradation of democracy in the United States itself. They regarded rapid growth of

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<sup>6</sup> In another poem entitled “Indian Summer at the Farm,” Dewey indulged in some pastoral idealism that spoke to his imagery in “America.” Derived from the frontier discourse and pastoral nostalgia, the term “Indian summer” connoted a timeless, out-of-history feeling by association with Indians and the autumnal harvest time. His poem recalled an imagined quality to late summer days: “In the long lazy hours / Of slow October days / Ever float these fleecy flowers / Through time’s dim drifting maze.” It’s not clear which farm, exactly, Dewey had taken inspiration from—perhaps one he saw in Burlington, Vermont, during his youth, or perhaps Frederick Riggs’ farmhouse in Fenton, Michigan. Regardless, “Indian Summer” paints an idyllic land of a homestead land, bathed in the last of summer’s light—precisely the kind of place where the imagined immigrant for “America” might find “sun in kindness” for which they were so desperately seeking. “Indian Summer at the Farm,” in Folder 50, Box 62, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

<sup>7</sup> Paul J. Carter, *Waldo Frank* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), 31.

the state's wartime powers as inherently inimical to democracy. In this way, the New York progressive circle that had gathered at places such as the PI began a fracturing that would re-orient them into two factions. These factions would come to be divided not only by the war, but over the foundations of America's democratic culture itself.

Before the war, Frank had regarded Dewey as the leader of the New York progressives. "Dewey wrote for us, 'In a Time of National Hesitation' which admirably expressed American doubts as the nation fell to war," he explained. Frank emphasized that it was Dewey's credulous attitude about Wilson and the war that caused a major break between them: "When his pragmatism made Dewey accept the war, Randolph Bourne was there to reject Dewey's pragmatic [*sic*] acceptance."<sup>8</sup> Frank wrote of Bourne: "He sat at the feet of Professor Dewey. But the war, which drove all the world including Dewey mad, drove Bourne sane."<sup>9</sup> After 1917, Frank struggled to square his opposition to the war with his affection and admiration for his former mentor. While others criticized Dewey without naming him out of respect for their former leader, Frank felt no such compulsion. In his 1919 book *Our America*, Frank leveled a blistering critique of pragmatism, and not just any pragmatism—John Dewey's brand of pragmatism. In this fashion, Frank announced his philosophical alternative, what he called "revelation." Following Bourne, Frank criticized Dewey for supporting the war; but unlike Bourne, Frank concluded that the choice of his former mentor was a direct consequence of his experimentalism, "whose pragmatic view of truth lacked what in my later language I was to call 'revelation.'" Frank complained that "the followers of Dewey limited knowledge to what they

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<sup>8</sup> Frank, *The Rediscovery of Man*, 87-88.

<sup>9</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 198. As Frank narrated, "In June appeared 'The War and the Intellectual' which made Bourne the conspicuous voice of the entire group—and at the same time separated him from the 'hesitation' of John Dewey, Bourne's former teacher and master," Frank related in his memoir. "In this essay and subsequent ones ... which showed how by entering the fight America had tossed away the one chance to end it and to control the peace—there was no 'hesitation.' Bourne emerged as a hero, the banner bearer." Frank, *The Rediscovery of Man*, 92.

called Instrumentalism, which was also a delusion; since the Real exceeds what the senses give us and what logic develops from the senses; and since the mind can be instrumental to apparent human needs only by achieving a dimension beyond them.”<sup>10</sup>

As scholars have noted, Frank’s criticism of Dewey was both political and methodological. Frank and the Young Americans of which he was a part increasingly embraced a literary mode of idealism, which cast pragmatism as a crude form of instrumentalism. And he was hardly alone. Of his association with the Young Americans, Frank remembered that “when I wrote *Our America*, I felt myself a captain with other captains.... In that book I named my brothers: Sherwood Anderson, Van Wyck Brooks, Carl Sandburg, Alfred Stieglitz [and] Lewis Mumford].” In his memoir, he looked back on the 1920s and concluded that “I had no sense of my self as a solitary.” In a grandiose account written in the third person, however, Frank concluded that “none of these captains went to Don Quixote’s extremes of total commitment to either revolution or revelation, except Frank.”<sup>11</sup>

Contemporary scholars such as Thomas Dalton and Casey N. Blake have examined Waldo Frank and the Young Americans’ break from Dewey and their ensuing enmity for his pragmatism. They demonstrate how despite the fact (or perhaps as a result) that Dewey had been their one-time mentor and inspiration, Frank and the Young Americans increasingly cast the experimentalist and his pragmatism as a nemesis to their new project of idealism. The historiography on Dewey’s post-war career emphasizes these breaks between Dewey and the Young Americans. Yet the focus on the divisions among the New York progressives such as

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<sup>10</sup> Frank, *The Rediscovery of Man*, 145.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-46.

Dewey and Frank overlooks something they all had in common: a debt to the frontier discourse.<sup>12</sup>

Frank and Dewey located the future of American democratic renewal in one of the two seemingly quintessential figures of the frontier, the pioneer and the Indian. In *Our America*, Frank surfaced Dewey's reliance upon the frontier discourse. Frank castigated Dewey for developing his pragmatism and its corollary philosophy of democracy through pioneers. In contrast, Frank associated his own method of revelation and the Young Americans' broader idealism as an alternative to Dewey's pragmatism by identifying with Indians. Anti-modern primitivism,<sup>13</sup> the antimodern antipathy towards the changing nature of life in the United States, had challenged Victorian Protestant Republican social mores. As Gail Bederman, Matthew Frye Jacobsen, Joel Pfister, and others have documented, primitivists note the threat of "overcivilization." As a consequence, many Euro-American cultural critics increasingly found succor in the qualities they associated with the supposedly primitive life of American Indians. Such primitivists found appeal in Indians as representatives of an authentic American culture. As an anti-modern primitivist, Frank eschewed the materialism and instrumentalism he associated with Dewey's pragmatism and embraced a version of idealism he associated with Indians. This critique of Dewey led Frank to condemn the federal government's Indian school system. However, neither Frank's idealism nor Dewey's pragmatism were ultimately compatible with Indigenous self-determination in schooling.

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<sup>12</sup> Casey Blake suggests that "more recently, historians have depicted the young American critics as representatives of a cultural transition from Victorian values of character building and self-reliance to a consumer ethos emphasizing therapeutic growth within the structures of a corporate capitalist society." This is what Pfister has tried to do for John Collier; however, John Dewey's influence on Collier is largely missing. This is a major oversight, as Blake argues further that the Young Americans are best understood as united by "a communitarian vision of self-realization through participation in a democratic culture." Blake, *Beloved Community*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

This chapter reconstructs Dewey's progressive circle in New York from the point of view of Indigenous history. Rather than focus on the ways in which the progressives were divided over World War I, I focus on the ways in which their various growing critiques of American life had something in common: a reliance upon the frontier discourse. The controversies between the New York progressives like Dewey and Frank played out through the medium of the frontier discourse. We can see how the frontier discourse proved to be an underlying structure of the debate amongst the New York progressives by following their respective idiosyncratic journeys to Taos, New Mexico. Taos Pueblo is one of nineteen pueblo nations in New Mexico. Many scholars have documented the immense cultural interest of progressive figures from New York in Taos. The town and pueblo together became a center of gravity for many painters, writers, and artists throughout the 1910s and 1920s. But Taos Pueblo was not merely a node in a bohemian, progressive, and romantic circuit; it was also a prism through which many Euro-Americans gazed in their attempts to make sense of American culture in the aftermath of World War I. From their trips to Taos Pueblo, we can gauge the broad spectrum of the various philosophical projects that were refracted through their investments in Indigenous people.<sup>14</sup>

Dewey and his New York circle of progressives also felt the draw to Taos. Between 1918 and 1930, Waldo Frank, John Collier, and John Dewey all visited Taos, New Mexico. Frank visited first in 1918. Frank's writing corroborates Joel Pfister's account that many of the Young Americans were developing a sense of modernity through new formulations of self. For Frank, that meant going west, the lands where the echoes of a closed frontier might resonate still. The

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick B. Pike, "Latin American and United States Stereotypes," *The Americas* 42, No 2 (October 1985): 131-62. Despite their often competing investments, the writings of the progressives at Taos rarely penetrated the frontier discourse to appreciate the Indigenous tradition of democracy practiced at that nation for hundreds of years. See Maurice Crandall, *These People Have Always Been a Republic: Indigenous Electorates in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1598-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

would-be leader of the Young Americans, Frank saw a Taos Pueblo people as a prime example of his anti-modern primitivism. When Frank visited, he paid special attention to Indians as figures of an essential and authentic American culture. After his trip, Frank remembered a feeling that encouraged his embrace of ethno-romanticism: “I realized that my whole life must explore the silence within me.”<sup>15</sup> Frank wished to commune with the silence inside himself much like the Indians he had seen at Taos seemed to commune with the natural world. Exploring this silence could be accomplished through revelation, not pragmatism. It was therefore in New Mexico, not New York, where Frank distilled his method of “revelation” as an exercise in anti-modern primitivism. It was at Taos Pueblo where Frank enlisted the figure of the American Indian in his war against pragmatism.

Of the three, Dewey paid a passing visit to Taos last. He traveled through Northern New Mexico in 1930. “I’ve had a wonderful trip—the desert & Indian country is fascinating,” Dewey wrote to Louise Romig on April 10, 1930. “There are lots of interesting people in Sante Fe [*sic*].” Dewey proved to be quite familiar with the Southwest art scene, especially the colony at Taos. “Mabel Dodge who married an Indian lives in Taos,” Dewey related to his correspondent. He also remarked about Taos Pueblo, describing it as “one of the best Indian villages there in existence—built 2 or 3 stories high with ladders on the outside to go up. The Indians in this region have always been farmers, & are Catholics. They keep their old religion underneath the Catholicism.” Still, Dewey was content he had secured a worthy souvenir from his visit in the form of “a little silver for presents, turquoise set in bracelets & necklaces, made by the Indians out of Mexican dollars.”<sup>16</sup> Unlike his erstwhile anti-modern primitivist colleague in Frank, Dewey’s own journey to New Mexico did not produce a substantial revelation about Indigenous

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<sup>15</sup> Frank, *The Rediscovery of Man*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> John Dewey to Louise Romig, April 10 and 11, 1930, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.



people. He would continue his invocations of Instrumental Indians in his philosophy largely uninterrupted.

In between Frank and Dewey's treatments of Taos, both chronologically and in philosophical temperament, was that of John Collier. When the United States entered World War I, Collier sided with Dewey and supported a war to defend democracy. Like Dewey, Collier was able to rationalize the restriction of U.S. civil liberties and the extraordinary violence of the war in the greater service of democracy. This culminated in his curriculum of Americanization at the PI's Training School for Community Workers during World War I. However, Collier eventually was pushed out of the Training School and the PI altogether. Disillusioned, he went to California seeking to make a new career as a teacher. Collier's cross-country move was no mere career change; it marked a new development not only in his philosophy, but in his politics. Collier's faith in the settlement house to remedy democracy's ills was displaced by a trip to Taos Pueblo in 1920.

Collier's arrival to Taos on Christmas Eve, 1920, represents the merging of the cultural pluralism of the New York progressives and the settlement house set with Native people. In New Mexico, Collier was struck by Taos Pueblo less like Dewey and much more like Frank. It was there that Collier's cultural pluralism for immigrants was transformed into anti-modern primitivism for Indians. In Taos, Collier found a way to reconcile both his anti-modern primitivism and his pragmatism. Collier found a middle position between Frank and Dewey. From Dewey, Collier took his experiential education and his synthesis of education and democracy in the school as a social center. From Frank, Collier took the romanticization of Indian culture and the political imperative to stop its destruction by schooling. In his career in Indian Affairs, Collier would use Frank-esque anti-modern primitivism to dismantle the Indian

School Service's weaponization of schooling, while mobilizing Dewey to rebuild a new progressive alternative in its place. As such, Collier's interests in Deweyan education render his experience at Taos not as a beginning, but as a continuation. I argue that into the philosophical breach opened by what Tom Holm has called the "Great Confusion" in Indian affairs, Collier brought the embrace of Indian culture in the spirit of anti-modern primitivism from Frank with a politics of schooling born from the Deweyan synthesis of education and democracy. More precisely, Collier's passionate anti-modern primitivism and cultural conservation, formed at the PI in part with his reading of John Dewey, found new expression through Indians. In so doing, Collier translated Dewey and his settlement house pluralism for immigrants from New York to Indian Country. The results would fall well short of self-determination in Indian schooling.

### **Waldo Frank's Anti-Modern Primitivism: *Our America*, 1919**

If World War I had seemed to split a crack in the New York progressives between the Young Americans and Dewey, then Waldo Frank's publication of his book *Our America* in 1919 blew it wide open.<sup>17</sup> After touring the West and Southwest in 1918, Frank published the book based on his travels. In it, Frank offered a scathing take-down of pragmatism. In his account, pragmatism was an unfortunately American philosophy. According to Frank, pragmatism emphasized instrumentality, utilitarian efficiency, and a crass materialism. "Nothing frustrated the literary intellectuals who criticized Dewey's philosophy more than his refusal, as Waldo Frank put it, to 'hierarchise' his values," writes Robert Westbrook.<sup>18</sup> For a self-styled idealist such as Frank, Dewey's method was far too agonistic. It had led to Dewey's failure to grasp that American entry to World War I was a failure of democracy, rather than a success.

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<sup>17</sup> Helge Normann Nilsen, "Waldo Frank and the Idea of America," *American Studies International* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1979): 27-36.

<sup>18</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 402.

For his part, Dewey was more willing to concede to Frank that pragmatism was distinct to the United States. He himself wrote that there was “something instructive about our spiritual estate in the fact that pragmatism was born upon American soil.”<sup>19</sup> What Dewey rejected about Frank’s account was its conflation of his experimentalism with materialism, a crude utilitarianism, philosophical cover for technical rationality.<sup>20</sup> There is no doubt that Frank’s charge that Dewey’s method was a vulgar pragmatism was a straw man argument. Yet Frank landed a real blow on Dewey. While he mischaracterized Dewey’s pragmatism as a window-dressing for technical rationality, he rightly surfaced how Dewey’s philosophy came from the frontier imaginary. In other words, quite apart from his philosophical mischaracterizations, Frank offered a prescient genealogy of Dewey’s pragmatism in which he excavated the frontier discourse.

While Frank’s critique of Dewey has been largely dismissed by contemporaries and scholars as a polemic that reduced Dewey’s method to a vulgar instrumentalism, the precise manner of Frank’s critique of Dewey is worth closer scrutiny. Few of Dewey’s interlocutors were able to identify the frontier discourse in the pragmatist’s writings more than Waldo Frank. It is telling that Frank located the origin of Dewey’s support for the war in the pragmatist’s ideas about democracy from America’s frontier past. The Young Americans’ criticism of pragmatism

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<sup>19</sup> Cited in Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 148.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey’s experimental intelligence was not a technological rationality, nor was his synthesis of education and democracy an argument in favor of Taylorism in schools. As Dewey himself noted, his experimentalism was not synonymous with efficiency. “If you want schools to perpetuate the present order, with at most an elimination of waste ... then one type of intellectual method or ‘science’ is indicated. But if one conceives that a social order different in quality and direction from the present is desirable and that schools should strive to educate with social change in view by producing individuals not complacent about what already exists, and equipped with desires and abilities to assist in transforming it, quite a different method and content is indicated for educational science.” Dewey, “Progressive Education and the Science of Education” (1928), *Later Works*, 3:262; see also Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 368-69.



Figure 6.1. Alfred Stieglitz, *Waldo Frank*, 1920, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

was that Dewey's philosophy was better suited for a culturally homogenous frontier past and not a heterogeneous urban future. The nature of their philosophical dispute is not of primary interest to my purposes, however. Instead, I am interested in how Frank had aimed his barbs at Dewey's support for war in Europe, but landed them in the American West. Frank's attack on Dewey's method was not merely hyperbolic or metaphorical; instead, Frank

was surfacing the frontier discourse as the foundation of Dewey's philosophy.

According to Frank's *Our America*, the United States was a nation uniquely shaped by material history. In his first chapter, "The Land of the Pioneer," Frank sketched out this history from colonization to the present. Frank asserted that it had been Europeans' commercial interests that drove them to colonize North America. "The dream of gold, the passion for silk, the urge of a short passage to the wealth of India—all the stirring envies of all the bursting European nations

poured men and poured force upon American soil.”<sup>21</sup> Ensuing political struggles over the questions of who would keep that material wealth prompted the Revolutionary War: “The Constitution, which by brilliant means they thrust upon the people, secured the commercial oligarchy which persists to-day.”<sup>22</sup> Yet the materially rapacious people of the United States had always clung to idealisms such as God, freedom, and liberty. To Frank, this appeared like something of a paradox: “If the United States was a nation created for commercial interests, accumulation of capital, and creation of private property, whence then, the moral tone that is never absent from American expression?”<sup>23</sup> Frank set out to find an answer in his subsequent chapters of *Our America*.

The story he spun resulted in a different vision of America’s frontier past than offered by Dewey. Frank understood the frontier not as a history of the progress of pragmatism, but as a history of the failure of idealism. Frank conceded that pioneers were preoccupied with material improvement: “What dreamers and poets America in those early days possessed lived in an element whose stress was acquisition,” Frank wrote. “The energy that parted the Atlantic and hewed the forests of a continent was wide enough and deep, to engulf much of the idealistic forces of the individual swept in by the pioneering Stream.”<sup>24</sup> But this reservoir of idealistic energies had been perverted by capitalism: “It was but natural to find from the beginning a greater part of men’s capacity for dream and for creation turned into materialistic channels—into genius for invention, for political manipulation, for accumulation.”<sup>25</sup> And yet, even in the fellowship of accumulation on the frontier, there was fellowship nonetheless. “Catholic from

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<sup>21</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 13-14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

France and Spain, Puritan and Cavalier and demi-slave from England, burgher from Holland, were moved by a common mastering impulse, were confronted by common, mastering conditions: and they answered in common specific ways.” While they may have come to North America divided by language, class, and nationality, they shared a common experience of confronting the wilderness. “They were that distinct and still unchartered creature: the American Pioneer.”<sup>26</sup>

Like the frontier thesis, Frank imagined the continent as a dangerous wilderness from which Europeans were forced to become something new. The impetus for that historical evolution was the danger presented by Indigenous people. “A hostile people, a savage continent enclosed them,” Frank insisted.<sup>27</sup> “The crude stockade that served to hold them against Indians and wolves became a symbol of their mental attitude, a token of their faith. Every narrowing instinct of self-preservation and acquisition tended to make them intolerant, materialistic, unaesthetic.”<sup>28</sup> He further characterized the problem that the frontier posed to the pioneer:

He had, to begin with, to revert to a rough mode of life long since overlaid in Europe. He could not adapt the very real culture of the Indian. He could not continue in the cultural paths of his native land. He was compelled to call, by an unceasing effort of his will, upon every primitive resource. But he could not, because of these primitive conditions, become once more a primitive man. The primitive man is not the same as the man, fresh from the sophisticated world of Western Europe, who is wrenched back to the surroundings of a distant past. The primitive man moves with fluent comfort in the environment which has called him forth and sums his capacities of mind and manner. The pioneer must do violence upon himself.<sup>29</sup>

This self-harm was not simply Frank’s assertion for dramatic effect—it was historical argument for intellectual and cultural origins of industrial alienation, the vagaries of mass culture, and the possessive individualism that Frank derided in his own day. “The pioneer had no

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18.

time for vision, for that sensation of harmony which is the sense of beauty,” Frank insisted. “To read of the voyage of Ulysses meant to stop voyaging himself. The pioneer, in order to save himself from the sheer threat of being overwhelmed by his surrounding world, needed to combat it—its loveliness and passion.”<sup>30</sup> As a consequence, pragmatism had inadvertently raised a stockade against the wilderness vitality of idealism. Pragmatism was therefore a pioneer’s philosophy *par excellence*: “To offset these academic ghosts that had lingered in places where the frontiersman had no will to go, any measure of utility could not but be good.”<sup>31</sup> In this view, “For long the overwhelming need had been the settling of land,” Frank noted. This had led Americans to embrace a philosophy that emphasized the utility of common sense epistemology embedded in the unity of experience. “By the old *rule-o’-thumb* of the frontiersman we had whipped the Indians and the British.... By the old *rule-o’-thumb*, we now proceeded to direct education, evolve philosophies of life, write books, preach God, work out our cultural salvation.”<sup>32</sup>

However, the pioneer ethos had not vanished with the closure of the frontier. “The pioneer psychology had long since become the temper of the people,” Frank argued. This pioneer psychology, which had outlasted the material conditions of the frontier, was now a rather provincial sensibility. In the modern era, it was a hindrance to the cultivation of a deeper culture.<sup>33</sup> In particular, Frank chronicled how the vestigial pioneer psychology was increasingly a threat to education. In primary and secondary education, pioneer psychology had led to vocational training as a cloak for proletarianization. At the same time, Frank argued that even university education had surrendered a vision for liberal arts and instead embraced a “utilitarian”

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

ethos that converted “culture” into social capital. “The newly ‘cultured’ young man” graduates with a college education, whereupon “the employer is impressed by his culture and takes him into partnership.”<sup>34</sup> This degradation of art and literature at the university was a problem for national life, a most egregious consequence of the pioneer psychology overstaying its welcome.<sup>35</sup> But more than anything else, the pioneer psychology had produced “the one Philosophy that America can justly claim to be her own. We evolved Pragmatism.”<sup>36</sup>

In his treatment of America’s pioneer history, Frank spilled a considerable volume of ink over the evolution of pragmatism. Frank welcomed pragmatism’s original function as a means to distinguish an American philosophy that was distinct from Europe. Frank praised William James and John Dewey for articulating their method as “a tool of liberation from the old stocks” of European thought. According to Frank, “John Dewey turned it, by his genius, into a stupendous lever that pried open the stuffy arcana of Education, let in fresh air, let in the reality of an intense American world.” To this, Frank accounted: “So far, so good.”<sup>37</sup> Yet despite its origins in “the benign hands” of James and Dewey, Frank concluded that pragmatism was ultimately rooted in the frontier history of the United States itself. For all the negative utility it had achieved in exposing “false values,” pragmatism had failed to bring about new positive ones. Dewey’s pragmatism was simply the pioneer psychology disguised as systematic philosophy. Frank defined James’ and Dewey’s pragmatism as a method where “the measure of utility is the manifest process of Society, together with such individual acts as have immediate social

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>35</sup> One consequence that particularly upset Frank was that literature and arts “found their place in the universities.” The result was that “‘Culture,’ which the Americans had forced to leave behind in Europe, became a commodity to be won back with wealth; a badge of place and prestige.” Frank unloaded on the university as the keeper—and maker—of high “culture,” which he felt was a “little shelf, in essential and abbreviated form,” a rather narrow platform where “the busy American finds ‘culture.’” Ibid., 26.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 27.



currency. Value, therefore, does not implicitly inhere in being. Life is a machine, and like a machine externally produced. The vast affluence of human energy is channeled down (in theory) to turn the wheel of whatever mundane program the philosopher deems progressive.”<sup>38</sup>

The result of this analysis was that Frank devoted a considerable portion of *Our America* to dismissing Dewey’s method of pragmatism as an outdated product of the frontier history of the United States. The elevation of utility as the criterion for the good was directly linked to the historical settlement of the frontier, where maximizing utility had been crucial to survival. After the frontier had closed, pragmatism was a utilitarian solution that had outlived the problem that had first supplied it. By the dawn of the 1920s, Frank charged that pragmatism had choked off more promising alternatives: “At once, by this premise, the pragmatist, in a pioneer world where the concept of utility had become limited ... loses all leverage *outside* of the reality in which he lives.”<sup>39</sup> According to Frank, Dewey’s pragmatism condemned the ideal to a slow death at the margins of American philosophy.

Much of Frank’s argument in *Our America* revolves around the same frontier discourse in which Dewey himself was immersed. For example, Frank’s condemnation of pragmatism pivoted around a crisis exacerbated by the closure of the frontier. According to Frank, the settlement of California had been a harbinger of the end of this chapter in U.S. history. At the ocean, “the Caucasian, upon the shores of the pacific, needed to turn his back on the Orient: for the first time could not face Westward. The frontiers were clamped down. The pioneer’s first Act was done.”<sup>40</sup> When the frontier closed, the nation’s growth ceased growing geographically wide, and instead had turned psychically deep. “All of its energies could no longer go to the adding of

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<sup>38</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

cubits to its stature,” Frank concluded. “What we needed now was self-control of our vastness, self-consciousness, articulation. Lest we flounder in the world like a man with the mind and muscles of a child.”<sup>41</sup> Frank argued that while such a philosophy of experience might have served the materially preoccupied pioneers, it was ill-matched for the challenges of modernity. It was time for a new way of thinking. His method of revelation was the post-frontier alternative to pragmatism.

When Frank imagined that the frontier had “open,” he had depicted Indian people as part of the problem. Hostile Indians, wrote Frank, had incentivized America to embrace pragmatism as its representative philosophy. The Indian of the open frontier was a “hostile,” whose violence had forced settlers to raise walls, build fences, and block houses. Though Frank had little patience for greedy and naive pioneers who announced (in his words), “Let us go out to the naked and unprotected Plains” and then cried foul when attacked by Indians, he ultimately concluded that “the pioneer, massacred by Indians, blotted out by malarial fevers, halted by desert and topless mountain” could hardly be blamed for their focus on crude circumstances for survival.<sup>42</sup> But after the frontier was closed, Frank changed his tune. Condemning Dewey for holding up the pioneers as quintessential Americans, Frank threw in his lot with the Indians.

By 1919, Indians were a source of inspiration for the more deeply aesthetic, idealistic, and spiritual renewal Frank had in mind. Frank’s regard for Indians in *Our America* is indicative of a larger cultural shift in the United States. Earlier histories fetishized the “Indian as helper” in New England, as memorialized in such figures as Massasoit. But the transformation of the Indian from a threat to pioneers to what Joel Pfister calls an anti-modern figure of the therapeutic Indian

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<sup>41</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

was made possible by the supposed closure of the frontier. Indians stood apart from Europeans through their imagined connection with nature, political communalism, and spiritual power. The result was a race of people who the first pioneers had loathed, but their idealistic successors were now free to appreciate.

The qualities of anti-modern primitivism attributed to Indian life could now supplement the pioneer psychology's deficits in modern society. Now, Indians were no longer threats that justified the pioneer ethos of pragmatism, but were indeed resources for a new generation of Young Americans who were interested in pursuing idealism. Without the spiritual quality that Indians had come to represent, the pioneer psychology and its crass utilitarianism would bring ruin to the modern United States. Frank also elevated Indigenous lifeways to the sophistication of a "very real culture." He attributed the holistic integrity of Indigenous culture by essentializing it. Like many anti-modern primitivists, Frank regarded Indian people as existing in harmony with nature. This harmony, Frank felt, was superior to American materialism. "America is a land with a shrieking rhythm," Frank wrote. "And whatever you would understand of our weakness and our synergy you must interpret in this key. Centuries ago, a balance to this autochthonous rapture was achieved in the Indian civilization." Frank imagined the "balance" in Indian culture was not just superior to Dewey's pragmatism and its estrangement from the ideal, but he believed it offered Euro-Americans an alternative to modernity. Frank held up traits associated with Indians through the frontier discourse's cousin, the Noble Savage, as complementary to his philosophy. "The uncorrupted Indian knows no individual poverty or wealth. All of his tribe is either rich or poor. He has no politics. And in consequence all his energies beyond the measure of his daily toil rise ineluctably to spiritual consciousness: flow to consideration of his place and part in Nature, into the business of

beauty.”<sup>43</sup> Imagining Indians as having no politics, Frank depicted them and their culture as a vessel for his idealism.

While Frank praised Indians for their harmony with nature, he condemned Dewey’s pioneers for destroying it. Where Indian people conserved, Euro-Americans had wasted. “The Indian met the strain of his world with a passionate restraint,” Frank pontificated. “Reserve became so deep a portion of his life that it can be no less than the need of life which caused it. It was not ethical, not philosophical. It was instinct for survival like that which led him to hunt for food or to propagate his kind. This instinct of reserve—a function of the American world—the white man did not bring with him. Much of the excess to which his ways were drawn in the new life is due to an ethnic lack of preparation.”<sup>44</sup> Idealism, not pragmatism, was the truly Indigenous philosophical tradition in America. According to Frank, materialism is what led to Euro-American ethnocentrism in the first place: “The Indian is a savage only by the materialistic measure of the Caucasian,” Frank insisted.<sup>45</sup> “The American prefers not to dwell on the effect of the white invasion upon the Indian nature. The white man called the Indian bloody, treacherous. And yet he merely tried to defend his world.” Was not the defense of one’s homeland a noble trait worthy of respect, if not emulation? If Americans let go of the pioneer as the heroes of U.S. history and elevated Indians, instead, they might learn something from the tiny fragments of their culture that had managed to survive the settlement of the West. “Whether he dwelt in popularous [sic] cities or in *tepees*, he lived in a spiritual world so true and so profound, that the heel of the pioneer has even now not wholly stamped it out.”<sup>46</sup> For Frank, there was no question that his sympathy for Indian culture entitled him and the Young Americans to avail themselves of that

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<sup>43</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 114.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

culture. “Fortunately, the Indian is not yet gone. And in his spirit, his works, his physiognomy to-day ... we may read the answer to our ignorance,” he concluded.<sup>47</sup>

Specifically, Frank “read his answer” at Taos Pueblo. Like many anti-modernist primitivists, Frank was enraptured with Indigenous people of the Southwest. “Much of what is beautiful in Mexican life has its clear source in the ancient Indian cultures,” he wrote. Try as he might to distinguish his interest in Indians as a form of high-brow culture from the superficial exoticism of a growing tourism industry, Frank nevertheless expressed a familiar pattern of the romanticization of the Indigenous cultures in places like Arizona and New Mexico. “There are plenty of collectors to rage like locusts through the New Mexican and South-Californian hills, and make their blight of *Santas* and pottery and blankets,” Frank complained. This tourism continued to value Indian culture only through materialism. Instead, Frank wanted to break free of these shackles and experience the real, authentic Indians that stood for America itself: “America was too long insulated from this spiritual wealth that flowered along the edges of the Great Desert. It had no eyes for the loveliness of ’dobe towns, nor for the fire of this people that still burns under the ban of the Industrial world like jewels in the dark.”<sup>48</sup> Frank resolved to witness such jewels for himself.

One way that Frank was convinced he could circumvent this superficial interest in Indians expressed by tourists was by carefully observing actual Indigenous people at places like Taos. In reading Frank’s memoirs, the revelation he put at the core of his own method (which he insisted was superior to Dewey’s pragmatism) was inspired by his travels west. Just as Dewey

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>48</sup> Frank was a savvy observer of Pueblo religious meetings. He saw how some Pueblo people had “met the Catholic invasion by a clever compromise,” weaving in their own customs into those of the Catholic church. But for all this insight, he was blind to others’ syncretic spiritual practices. “Everywhere, the cultures which we call Indian—symbolizing and perpetuating in the false name our ignorance—were of a spiritual nature. And everywhere, these cultures were buried by the Caucasian floods.” Frank, *Our America*, 107-111.

had traveled with Riggs to the family's Colorado mine and was inspired to opine about making the desert "bloom like a rose," so too did Frank travel west to Wyoming, a place he dubbed "the real Wild West!" After he graduated from Yale with his master's degree, Frank accompanied a friend, Jack Rollinson, to his ranch in Wyoming. "We young easterners had a good time in Wyoming," Frank wrote, deploying his signature philosophical descriptor, characterizing the trip by saying that "more than a vacation it was a revelation." Frank framed the trip as something of a spiritual journey. Surveying the expanse of the wooded foothills and flat plain, Frank wrote that "the whole scene for me, from mountain pine to self, was a collaboration."<sup>49</sup> One night while preparing to make camp, Frank "heard a call and answered it, then stopped my horse to hear better. The call came again, and I was about to answer again when I realized that it was the cry of wolves. I had answered the call of wolves. I shuddered, and the shudder became part of the darkening earth as the sun leaves it. I had been in communication with the wild: and it had entered me!"<sup>50</sup> At the Wyoming ranch, Frank noted how a new cast of Americans populated his vision: "Neighbors dropped in, strangers, passers-by, cowboys looking for work, 'bad men' who turned out to be Jack's friend and not so bad; an old-time Indian fighter whose speech had Indian phrases."<sup>51</sup> Far from New York and its settlement houses, Frank was entranced. "This was America!" he proclaimed. "West 78th Street, Lausanne, Chatham Square, and Yale were as remote as if seen through the far end of a telescope."<sup>52</sup>

Compelled to see further, Frank traveled on to Taos, New Mexico. Visiting in the summer of 1918, Frank lauded the Taos Pueblo people for their supposedly racial traits of serenity, stoicism, and introspection. Watching a dance, Frank observed a Taos man and wrote

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<sup>49</sup> Frank, *The Rediscovery of Man*, 50-52.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 50-52.

appreciatively of the “massive power of his features” in the dance, becoming a “symbol of his greatest striving: to achieve an inner harmony with the living world.” Meanwhile, Frank suggests that “the Indian girl is gentle, timid ... but when she is a woman and a mother, her slender grace spreads into buxom ease.”<sup>53</sup> Frank’s racializing and sexualizing language to describe Pueblo people was a common feature of many Euro-American men who fancied themselves as anti-modernists primitivists. Such ethos justified the means. In *Our America*, Frank concluded that in no small part because of the example of Indigenous people like the people of Taos Pueblo, America was a land of “buried cultures” through which anti-modern primitivists might uncover an authentic American culture. These cultures were antecedent to those brought even by the earliest immigrants; they were, therefore, worthy of consideration as valuable claimants to an essential notion of American identity. Frank made it clear that the proper means to excavate these buried cultures was through the Young Americans’ idealism, not Dewey’s pragmatism.

Yet Frank concluded his treatment of Taos Pueblo with another element of the frontier discourse, the ideology of Indian vanishing. “The Indian is dying and is doomed. There can be no question of this. There need be no sentimentality,” Frank concluded matter-of-factly. “The Indian will be destroyed.” Though Frank imagined that Indian culture might be conserved by anti-modern primitivists, he did not believe that Indian cultures could be preserved before the inevitable wave of materialism in modernity which threatened to overwhelm them. “It may seem unjust that a spiritual culture so fine as his should be blotted out before the iron march of the Caucasian. It may seem the very irony of progress.”<sup>54</sup> Frank bemoaned that actual Indigenous people at Taos were increasingly seduced by modernity, “already lost in the spell of the tin-can

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 114-15.

<sup>54</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 115.

and the lithograph.”<sup>55</sup> Still, there was time for Frank to take succor in the Indians who clung to their traditional ways and so resisted joining the ranks of American modernity: “His love for the laws of life, the pride of his own being before the mysteries that dispose, remain with him,” Frank mused. “He makes his sanctuary of silent mediation deeper from the encroachment of the human world. And holding up his head, he meets the Storm.”<sup>56</sup>

In his ruminations on Indians and pioneers, Frank had tried to distance himself from Dewey and his pragmatism. He chastised Dewey, noting that “a brilliant philosophy turned the old *rule-o’-thumb* of the frontiersman into polysyllabic words.”<sup>57</sup> As if anticipating Deweyan apologists, Frank dared his audience to read Dewey’s philosophy more carefully: “Examine this creed, and its pioneer derivation becomes plain. The backwoodsman needed a rationale for pressing-on: he needed to make bitter sacrifice of self, the sacrifice of culture, in order to carry through the job of his Age—the unfolding of the American empire.”<sup>58</sup> In the service of the settlement of the frontier, the underlying utilitarian logic of pragmatism had paid dividends. But with the closure of the frontier, pragmatism had become an anachronism:

The reality bequeathed us by centuries of pioneering and its industrial sequel made our great need the creation of a new reality. But only spiritual force can create. Pragmatism, in its servility to Reason, is supine before the pioneer reality whose decadent child it is. As a recreative agent of American life—which it claimed straightaway to be—it was destined to be sterile: destined to rationalize and fix whatever world was already in existence. The legs of the pioneer had simply become the brains of the philosopher.<sup>59</sup>

While Frank imagined his anti-modern primitivism as a more humane relationship to Indian people than Dewey’s pragmatism, Frank was ultimately just as instrumentalizing of the

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>56</sup> Frank endorsed the work at the School of American Research of the Archeological Society in Santa Fe as the best means to preserve the Indian culture of the Southwest. Frank, *Our America*, 115-116, FN, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Frank, *The Rediscovery of Man*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 28.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



Indians he romanticized. In fact, Frank was caught up in the romantic side of the same frontier discourse that enmeshed Dewey and led him to background and foil Indigenous people. In the end, Frank just came down on the other side of the frontier.

However, their instrumentalization of Indigenous people served different ends. For Dewey, Indians had become instrumental as a means to historicize intelligence itself. For Frank, Indians became a candidate for therapeutics of anti-modern primitivism—but only after the closure of the frontier, when they supposedly no longer seemed to pose a threat to settlement. Indians, once a factor in the pioneer’s preoccupation with materiality, were now a means to undercut it. The most salient feature of their debate is not how they differed, but what assumptions they shared. Dewey’s version was historical; Frank’s was essential. Both took advantage of the backgrounding and foiling of Indians and pioneers to understand pragmatism, albeit towards different ends. Even in his anti-modern primitivism, Frank betrayed his fundamental congruity with Dewey—not in method, but in history. Dewey’s pragmatism and Frank’s idealism were equally rooted in the frontier discourse. From the perspective of Indigenous history, while their respective branches may have diverged, the trunk of the intellectual family tree of the New York progressives was ultimately one and the same save for one crucial exception: schools.

While Frank’s idealism led him to embrace anti-modern primitivism that homogenized, essentialized, and fetishized Indigenous cultures, Frank ultimately did what Dewey never could: he saw how schooling imposed by the federal government functioned to destroy Indigenous community life in a fundamentally anti-democratic way and condemned it. Where some philosophers like Dewey were content to study Indians through anthropology, Frank insisted that the proper relationship with Indians was their emulation: “Nowhere is there a widespread effort

to *study* the Indian culture as a native fact from which vast spiritual wealth might still be mined.” Frank suggested that this scholarly engagement with Indians did little to disrupt federal Indian policy: “The Indian Office of the United States is brutal and venal. It does not disguise its will to stamp out the Indian’s dances, cut his long hair and ‘civilize’ him out of existence.”<sup>60</sup> This led Frank to condemn federal Indian schooling: “The American authorities wage relentless war upon the Indian customs. By law and schooling, they conclude to-day the word of yesterday’s invasion. And many are their victims.”<sup>61</sup>

By way of anti-modern primitivism, Frank had arrived at a critique—problematic though it may have been—of anti-democratic schooling. Dewey’s pragmatism never did. Of course, it is hard to imagine that Frank’s romantic philosophical alternative could have grounded a political program of self-determination for Indigenous people, let alone in schools. After all, a modern school for Indians, by Indians, would have been decidedly incongruous with Frank’s anti-modern primitivism, which deputed them as vanishing along with the frontier. But one of the New York progressives caught in the division over World War I set off to try to resolve this exact problem: John Collier.

### **Collier’s Lesson from Dewey: Schools as Social Centers**

As we considered in the previous chapter, John Collier understood his Training School for Community Workers at the PI as an exercise in Dewey’s pedagogy. Collier explicitly drew on Dewey’s philosophy in his leadership of the PI’s Training School for Community Workers. Despite the fact that the time Dewey himself spent at the school was limited, the influence of his political and educational philosophy saturated Collier’s pedagogical thinking. In fact, during the

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<sup>60</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 116.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

four years that Collier oversaw the PI's Training School from 1915 to 1919, Dewey would come to sit on the school's advisory board, and his works were widely read and discussed by Collier and his staff. Furthermore, Prof. William Heard Kilpatrick, Dewey's colleague at the Columbia Teacher's College, was a frequent collaborator with Collier at the school, where he expounded on "the Dewey Point of View." Collier and his wife Lucy even opened a school for their own children in Sparkhill, New York, called the Home School, which Kenneth Philp and Lawrence Kelly both describe as directly inspired by Dewey's philosophy. As a result, when the U.S. entered World War I, Collier had little difficulty assimilating Dewey's pro-democracy, pro-war attitude into his settlement work. In fact, Collier was eager to enlist his Training School in the cause of teaching American patriotism. But just as Dewey's support for the war had fractured the New York progressives, so too was Collier beset by forces that would soon hasten the unraveling of his Training School.

On the eve of U.S. entry to World War I, Collier's Training School was struggling. The perennial problem posed by funding the school had still not been secured on a permanent basis. When the Training School term concluded May 23, 1917, Collier had written, "The students are satisfied. All but two are pretty sure to be placed in work before the summer begins." This success was offset by grim financial uncertainties: "We cannot yet judge whether we will have the students to go ahead next year. We are advertising and circularizing; we shall know within a fortnight or so what the prospects are."<sup>62</sup> In the four months that had passed since the United States had declared war on the Central Powers, American mobilization for World War I was in full swing; New York and its settlement house movement had become a domestic front in the new struggle to make the world safe for democracy. As diagnosed by the Training School, the

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<sup>62</sup> "Report to the Trustees for the Month Ending May 15, 1917," in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1917 Jan-Apr, Box 2, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

problem of the war was that “the half million non-English speaking immigrants of this city and other hundreds of thousands who have not yet come into helpful contact with American life” made these people and their neighborhood a potential hotbed for sedition. “Emergency conditions due to the present war show that many aliens have become liabilities,” the school’s pamphlet dubbed “A Call to Service” explained. Whereas “unadjusted” immigrants had previously threatened the viability of republicanism, the war and the danger posed by spies, communists, and other radicals—real and imagined—had transformed the immigrant problem into a pressing national security threat.<sup>63</sup>

Though he understood his work at the PI as a means to conserve immigrant folk cultures for the purpose of ameliorating American life, unlike Bourne and Frank, Collier threw his lot in with Dewey in support of U.S. intervention in World War I. Collier’s agreement with Dewey is significant because despite Collier’s philosophical alignment with the Young Americans’ views, his willingness—if not eagerness—to use his Training School for Americanization and nationalization in war time moved his entire synthesis of education and democracy in a state-dominated direction. Collier insisted that the Training School could do its part for the war effort and graduate “such experts as health nurses, charity inspectors, community center and night school principals and teachers of English and employment workers ... [who] must be put to work on Americanization.”<sup>64</sup> In this way, Collier saw his cultural conservation in concert with wartime Americanization: “Nearly all of the training for

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<sup>63</sup> “A Call to Service,” in The N.Y. Training School for Community Center Workers, 1915-1917, Box 26, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library. On the intensification of Americanization and patriotic education during this period, see Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Letter from John Collier to Archibald Stevenson, November 22, 1917, in Community Workers Training Program Correspondence 1916-1917, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

community work offered by the Training School for Community Workers is at the same time a training for Americanization work.”<sup>65</sup>

Collier soon became the central node for the coordination of the PI and the city’s Americanization campaign. He believed that his leadership of the Training School was a way to inoculate the city’s immigrant population with enough American patriotism to prevent its radicalization by destabilizing forces.<sup>66</sup> Collier pushed the PI to use its education programs to meet this urgent need: “I have been more or less responsible for that part of the Municipal Campaign which deals with Public Schools,” Collier informed the trustees.<sup>67</sup> Collier described the effort as part of the responsibility of “the Training School, partly under the People’s Institute, partly under the Mayor’s Committee on National Defense, and partly under the Community Clearing House.” Most concretely, Collier announced that his Training School began an “emergency course for Americanization workers,” which would recruit one hundred and twenty-five students and teach them in three afternoon classes two hours long with a curriculum “devoted to the discussion of the Americanization problem and the new meaning of Americanization.”<sup>68</sup>

The war proved to be a temporary boon for the Training School. Collier noted that he was using an advance pedagogy of the “forum method,” which was the reason student enrollment had become “more intense and the attendance gradually larger.”<sup>69</sup> None of Collier’s early critics could now deny that wartime Americanization injected a new sense of urgency into the Training

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<sup>65</sup> The Training School for Community Workers of the People’s Institute of New York, Announcement, 1917-1918, in The N.Y. Training School for Community Center Workers, 1915-1917, Box 26, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>66</sup> “Report for the Trustees Meeting of the People’s Institute,” October 1917, in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1917 May-Oct, in Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

School. “The school is quasi official,” stated an internal report. “Our lectures are held in the public library; our Americanization course is practically a normal school for the board of Education and the Committee on Aliens of the Mayor’s Committee on Defense.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Collier was initially proud of his retooling of the school to “modify and expand its program to meet, at least in some measure, the demands of the World War upon local communities.”<sup>71</sup> By November of 1917, ninety-one full-time students had graduated from Collier’s emergency Americanization course and joined the wider wartime effort. “Our Americanization course now becomes an extension course in various branches of community work,” Collier wrote with satisfaction.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the popularity of the Training School’s crash course for community workers to spread the gospel of Americanization, Collier ruminated about one purpose of his school. “The work of the Training School is going ahead successfully but we are not yet decided as to the best plan for next year,” he wrote. At first, Collier pursued a long-term strategy of building alliances with other progressive organizations to cement his school as a vital part of the progressive movement. “I am consulting with representatives from Columbia, the School of Philanthropy, the Kehillah and Bureau of Municipal Research about plans of cooperative training,” Collier reported in 1918.<sup>73</sup> While Collier’s emergency courses in Americanization were supposedly funded by the Mayor’s Committee on National Defense, the money was slow to make its way to the PI. “We nevertheless proceeded to organize the Americanization courses,” wrote Collier,

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<sup>70</sup> Undated and untitled memo, in Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, in Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>71</sup> “Training School for Community Workers of the People’s Institute and the Nationalization of Local Communities,” by John Collier, May 7, 1918, in Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, in Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>72</sup> “Training School for Community Workers of the People’s Institute of New York,” November 12, 1917, in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1917 Nov-Dec, Box 2.

<sup>73</sup> “Report of John Collier,” May 18, 1918, in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1918 Jan-Mar, Box 2.

confident that such courses would have appeal beyond the immediate crisis of the American entry to the war.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the war seemed to promise the final convergence of his 1914 Pageant of Nations' multiculturalism and the Training School's pedagogy. Collier pronounced that "what the Training School offers in drama, in Americanization, in forums, and in social health, and in community organization at large" would be vital to the reconstruction of American life in the wake of industrialism, urbanization, and now, the War to End All Wars.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, the escalating war had broadened Collier's aspirations for reform work, which ultimately pulled his attention away from the Training School. In 1916, Collier began to form an organization called the National Convention for Community Centers, which could spread his progressive synthesis of education and democracy from New York across the country through a national network of community centers. He sought the endorsement of prominent community leaders Lillian Wald, Margaret Wilson, Franz Boas, Charles McCarthy, Charles Beard and, of course, John Dewey.<sup>76</sup> When the group convened a conference in New York in April of 1916, it was largely the work of Collier's organization which, in keeping with Deweyan influence, envisioned using schools as the basis for such community centers. "The school-community center movement," Collier wrote as the newly appointed president of the National Conference of Community Centers, was the "newest embodiment of the democratic idea."<sup>77</sup> One of Collier's Community Councils of National Defense missives survives in Dewey's papers, which proclaimed that "problems of vast nature ... will be faced by the nation—by this community—in the months immediately ahead; they will be no less urgent in case the war

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<sup>74</sup> "The Training School for Community Workers of the People's Institute of New York," December 12, 1917 in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1917 Nov-Dec, Box 2.

<sup>75</sup> "Training in the Organization of Community Life in Industrial Centers," p. 4, Community Workers Training Center Reports 1916-1918, Box 12, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 65.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

terminates soon. The preservation—the discovery—of our American national genius after the war, is the aim of Community Councils—of neighborhoods nationalized and yet free.”<sup>78</sup> It was at this juncture that Collier’s and Dewey’s politics most decisively aligned.

While scholars have previously detailed Collier’s short-lived career in national community center work (his National Conference of Community Centers folded in 1919), it is worth further emphasis that immigrant people were always at the heart of Collier’s interest in national reform work and his vision of cultural pluralism. Collier was confident his school had accomplished a balancing act akin to what Dewey imagined between a diverse cultural nationalism and a homogenous political nationalism. “We have kept to the fore our conception of Americanizing the immigrant through bringing his group into a vital relation with the community,” he wrote with pride.<sup>79</sup> During his effort to realize this ideology through the Training School, Collier corresponded with Charles McCarthy and Sidney L. Gulick, brother of Luther Gulick, regarding national immigration policy. These men began to hatch a proposal not only for a reformed national quota system, but more importantly, changes in the legal and economic infrastructure that would allow for the relocation and settlement of newly arrived immigrants across the country.

Soon, even such a polyglot metropolis as New York struck Collier as increasingly provincial. In a letter to Collier, McCarthy explained how private organizations like the PI could help solve the national problem of concentrated immigration to urban areas by facilitating the settlement of immigrants not in blocs within urban neighborhoods, but across “open” land in the West: “It is nonsense to think of a restricted plan merely. We must have a distributive plan as

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<sup>78</sup> John Willis Slaughter to John Dewey, November 4, 1918, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>79</sup> John Collier to the Trustees of the Training School for Community Workers and of The People’s Institute, November 14, 1918, 3, in *Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1919*, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.



well,” McCarthy lobbied Collier. “The Italians, Jews, and other races do not want to see the congestion in the cities. In the western part of the country there are people ... who are working on the problems of distribution and land problems and all the rest of it in an Immigration Policy.” McCarthy went on: “You cannot put a Jew or an Italian on the land today and hope to have him stay there unless he can make money out of it. When men are going off the land and rushing toward the city, we cannot put men on the land unless we have a thorough reorganization of the business of agriculture and machinery and credit to keep them there.”<sup>80</sup> Settlement houses, not just the federal government, would play a crucial part in raising this infrastructure of settler colonialism not just in New York, but across the country.

At first, Collier was floored by such ideas. Collier reported in May 1916 that “during the past month, I have been active in conjunction with Sidney L. Gulick, Edward A. Fitzpatrick and Charles McCarthy, on a plan having to do with the formation of a committee on constructive immigration policy.” They made plans to meet in Chicago to discuss their plans to better utilize the community center movement to solve the “fundamental importance of the immigration question.”<sup>81</sup> Collier later joined Gulick’s National League for Constructive Immigration Legislation, a group that held that the “regulation, distribution, and treatment of immigrants and the education of resident aliens for citizenship are matters of paramount importance.” Once again, Collier’s concern—like so many settlement house reformers—was that without the intervention, immigrants would, in the words of the National League, “settle in congested masses and become voters without becoming properly qualified.”<sup>82</sup> However, at the end of the decade,

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<sup>80</sup> Charles McCarthy to John Collier, October 4, 1916, in Community Workers Training Program Correspondence 1916-1917, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>81</sup> “Report to the Trustees for the Month Ending,” Reports to the Board of Trustees 1916 May-Dec, Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 93.

the National League took on a more overtly restrictionist position, calling for federal immigration quotas because immigrants “menace our democracy and lower our standards of living.” With such rhetoric at odds with his brand of multiculturalism, Collier quit the National League.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, Collier did not give up his interest in the role of national schooling for citizenship training for immigrants, going so far as to address the National Education Association at its annual meeting in New York in July of 1918. His theme: “The Community Council—Democracy Every Day.”<sup>84</sup>

Collier’s divided attention meant that the perennial issue of the funding of the Training School was badly neglected. In March of 1917, Collier tried to downplay such concerns, telling the board of trustees that “I would call your attention to the fact that we are this year doing more than three times the amount of field work which we did last year, although our student body is only a third as large as it was last year.”<sup>85</sup> However, the simple fact of the matter is that the director of the Training School refused to raise funds for his school. Collier wrote that he had “not felt equal to the struggle of raising ten thousand dollars for the Training School, inasmuch as my ability does not run toward getting financial support.”<sup>86</sup> He concluded that “it seems reasonable, therefore, for the Institute to make a campaign for funds for its own work and that of the School.”<sup>87</sup> In a May 15, 1918 meeting, Collier tried to pressure PI leadership to cover the majority of the school’s expenses, moving the board of trustees to vote on a resolution to “approve the idea of concentrating more effort on the Training School next year, even though it

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> “Report to the Trustees of the New York Training School for Community Workers for the Month of February, 1917,” March 13, 1917, in Reports to the Board of Trustees 1917 Jan-Apr, Box 2, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from John Collier to Edward Sanderson, January 6, 1919 and June 13, 1918, in Community Workers Training Center Correspondence 1918-1922, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>87</sup> Untitled and undated memo by John Collier, in Community Workers Training School Reports 1916-1918, in Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

entails cutting down the budget on other work in order to increase the budget of the school.” (The minutes tactfully noted in parenthesis, “It being understood that this vote was permissive and not mandatory.”) The nonbinding nature of this vote seems to suggest that Collier’s proposal to guarantee the future of the Training School was hardly a consensus position.<sup>88</sup>

By the twilight of the 1910s, Collier’s investment in the settlement house movement began to falter. By 1919, Collier’s accumulated frustration from the budgetary crisis, the exhaustion of the patience of his colleagues, and his growing tensions about his work at the PI and the community councils convention weighed heavily on him. Collier eventually resigned from his position as the director of the Training School in June of 1918 to focus entirely on his new work for the national community center movement. He wrote to PI Director Edward Sanderson that “I am fully decided as to the necessity of my giving undivided time and undivided concern to the Community Council Movement.”<sup>89</sup> He believed that he left a group of capable educators in his place at the Training School, including his wife Lucy. “I am convinced that Miss Freeman and Mrs. Collier, with your help ... can develop the Training School in a thoroughly adequate way next year. I can serve the Training School in all sorts of ways but should not have any titular relation to it other than that of a lecturer among other lecturers.”<sup>90</sup> Tired of catching criticism as a pedagogue, Collier was also simply burnt out: “I must for my health and my efficiency get my work-life on to a simpler basis.”<sup>91</sup> He asked for an indefinite leave of absence.

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<sup>88</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the People’s Institute, May 15, 1918, in Transcript of Minutes 1916-1919, Box 1, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>89</sup> John Collier to Edward Sanderson, June 13, 1918, in Community Workers Training Center, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

His departure put the future of the school in jeopardy. At a special meeting of the board of trustees, Collier along with five others voted to try to spin off the Training School to another progressive organization or shutter it altogether. In order to find a prospective partner, the trustees funded the school through February of 1919 on a budget of \$10,828 and further resolved “that every effort be made to transfer the work of the Training School to some existing educational institution in the city before February 1, 1919.”<sup>92</sup> It was then that Valentine Everett Macy, a philanthropist who was the chairman of the board of the Teacher’s College and treasurer of the Training School, stepped forward with a solution. As Kelly writes, “In the fall of 1918 he approached Collier with a proposal that the Training School, leaderless since Collier’s resignation in June, be incorporated into Teacher’s College.”<sup>93</sup> An alliance with the Teacher’s College might secure the Training School in perpetuity.

On the verge of a solution, Collier derided Macy’s plan. Collier used the opportunity to lash out against what he deemed as the insufficiently progressive formal pedagogy of higher education. To ally the Training School with these established bureaucracies would be a detriment to the school’s experimental and practical pedagogy in the immigrant neighborhoods it anchored. “The staff of the Training School appear to be a unit in believing that the important connection of the school lies in the direction of practical movements,” Collier wrote as if he spoke for the entire staff of the Training School.<sup>94</sup> Macy was taken aback at Collier’s obstinacy. As Kelly documents, “After Collier’s refusal, Macy withdrew his financial support from the Training School, placing its future in jeopardy.” In the wake of Collier’s fit, PI leadership scrambled to find another solution. They suggested the PI could find funding for the school “if Collier’s salary

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 85.

<sup>94</sup> Untitled and undated memo on the Training School, Community Workers Training School Reports, 1916-1918, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

as director, which had run about \$5,000 annually before his resignation was not included.”<sup>95</sup> This cost-cutting measure effectively pitted Collier against the PI leadership, and the relationship between Collier and the organization he once described as having “enabled me to work over into social practice enough of nearly everything vital in me” became irreparably strained.

Collier officially resigned from the Training School and all other PI positions in February 1919. He cited the PI’s inconsistent funding for the school, their unwillingness to pay him the salary he wanted, and that no one at the PI was willing to negotiate with him as grounds for his decision. “This is an important work with which I have had much to do in the past five years, and while it goes exceeding hard for me to draw out from the Institute or Training School or community council work, I apparently have no option.” He closed his letter on a reflective note: “Not only has the Training School been a truly creative institution, but the Institute in a larger way has more completely fathered the community movement than any other organization or institution in America.”<sup>96</sup> Collier was thoroughly sidelined when the Training School for Community Workers was finally suspended by the PI in the fall of 1919. Students and staff organized a meeting with alumni, staff, and other supporters to try to convince PI leadership to keep the school open. “The feeling of [*sic*] the students, certain educators and other friends of the School is that not only is it deplorable that the School be discontinued, at a time when trained workers are more needed than ever before, but than [*sic*] effort should be made to attract more students and enlarge the scope of its work,” a student petition pleaded.<sup>97</sup> When these same students called on Collier for assistance, he laid out a revised pedagogical plan for the

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<sup>95</sup> Kelly, *Assault on Assimilation*, 85.

<sup>96</sup> John Collier to Edward Sanderson, January 6, 1919, and June 13, 1918 in Community Workers Training Center Correspondence 1918-1922, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to Edward Sanderson, May 12, 1919, in Community Workers Training Center Correspondence 1918-1922, Box 12, People’s Institute Records, New York Public Library.

resuscitation of the school which would preserve its experimental spirit in line with his Deweyan commitments to a school embedded in a community, not in the ivory tower of the Teacher's College.

However, the trustees were not to be deterred. While Collier's difficult personality had encumbered the efficient operation of the school, it was also clear that he was the driving force behind its operation. Without him, it would not survive.<sup>98</sup> Soon after the school foundered, Collier left New York altogether. Bitter and dejected, Collier was convinced that in allowing his school to collapse, the PI had in part given up on its mission "to bring to the common folk of New York ... the *gemeinschaft* mode of life" and had instead "faded before the scorching onset of the *gesellschaft* mode of life—before the shattering, aggressive drive toward competitive utility."<sup>99</sup>

When Collier left New York in 1919, he left settlement house work behind to become a full-time teacher. Part of Collier's interest in Dewey dovetailed with his own determination to shape his post-New York career as that of a teacher.<sup>100</sup> Specifically, Collier went to California to teach Americanization courses as part of the State Immigration and Housing Commission. There he was eager to continue a Deweyan-inspired emphasis on experiential learning that he had tried to enact at the Training School. "The California community organization work, which was my purpose, started as adult education, but soon my classes became forums," Collier wrote later. "These forums were much like those of The People's Institute, and we discussed all of the

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<sup>98</sup> Letter from John Collier to Students, January 23, 1919, in Community Center Training School Course Information 1919, Box 12, People's Institute Records, New York Public Library.

<sup>99</sup> Cited in Kelly, *The Assault on Immigration*, 96.

<sup>100</sup> For example, Collier was inspired to become a teacher in part by his earlier friendship with Celeste Parrish. Parrish had been the leader of the Georgia State Normal School in Athens, Georgia, and Collier had met her during his stalled early attempts to become a sociologist prior to working at the People's Institute. Collier found her to be an innovative teacher, who "had made her own, and into her philosophy, the whole of John Dewey and the whole of Stanley Hall." Their meeting, he wrote, "entered into and modified the permanent fabric of my thought." Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 47.

significant issues of the day, issues of practical community action, of public policy, issues in the realm of theory.”<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the whole reason Collier had come to California to explore a new career in education was at the behest of the likes of Frederick Burk—whom Collier described as “thoroughly a John Dewey progressive educator”—who had convinced Collier to leave the Housing Commission for a job as a teacher of teachers at the San Francisco State Teachers College.<sup>102</sup> Collier’s philosophical project in California deeply resonated with one of Dewey’s most important ideas about democracy as a form of associated life: “The most universal problem of man,” Collier wrote, “is, and has been, throughout his hundred thousand or more years of history, that he is primordially, positively, undefeatably social.”<sup>103</sup> But by the dawn of the 1920s, he was losing faith that Americanization at settlement, as was done at the PI, was the right tool to bring about the end of community disintegration he felt ravaged American society. The failure of the Training School was Collier’s first step toward the discovery of a Red Atlantis at Taos Pueblo, New Mexico.

### **Collier’s Lesson from Frank: Anti-Modern Primitivism**

As the story goes, on the evening of December 24, 1920, change was on the winds that swirled over Taos, New Mexico. That night, not only did strong gusts bring bitter cold to the denizens of Northern New Mexico, but a stranger was blown into town as if on the winds of fate. In the brilliant fading light of the winter sunset, the figure of a man emerged from the shadow of a looming stagecoach and stepped out onto the mesa above the town of Taos. He remembered the moment of his arrival years later, writing of the sunlight that night receding along the mesa that “there amid silent reaches, that pale rose burns to gold.” As the sun diminished below the

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<sup>101</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 117.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

horizon, the man was ushered into the home of his friends awaiting him below. The hosts beckoned him to come indoors and sit before the snapping of “a glowing fireplace” to warm himself. However, his respite from the “blinding snowstorm” was short-lived. The man’s hosts quickly ushered him back outside into the cold and led him down to Taos Pueblo. There was no time to lose. The man was soon led to the ancient home of the Pueblo people, where he caught a glimpse of a contingent of the Indigenous people of Taos as they emerged from the dusk illuminated “between blazing fires” as part of a commemoration of Christmas Eve. “Along an avenue between those wind-swept ground torches—the Virgin was borne on blanketed shoulders, from the church to her union with a ritual dance and song a thousand or three thousand years old,” he recalled. In the snowy darkness illuminated by torch-fire, the man looked on in amazement at these Indian people and their flickering shadows against the adobe walls and was suddenly struck by a life-altering vision:

The discovery that came to me there, in that tiny group of a few hundred Indians, was of personality-forming institutions, even now unweakened, which had survived repeated and immense historical shocks, and which were going right on in the production of states of mind, attitudes of mind, earth-loyalties and human loyalties, amid a context of beauty which suffused all the life of the group.... It might be that only the Indians, among the peoples of this hemisphere at least, were still the possessors and users of the fundamental secret of human life—the secret of building great personality through the instrumentality of social institutions. And it might be, as well, that the Indian life would not survive.<sup>104</sup>

The man who had discovered the secret to human collectivity in the Indigenous people of Taos was John Collier.

Collier’s “discovery” of Indians at Taos Pueblo changed the course of his life—and much of federal Indian policy of the twentieth century. That story is typically narrated in a way that turns around Collier’s near-mystical visit to Taos, New Mexico. As historical hinge, it makes

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<sup>104</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 126.



sense; prior to Taos, Collier rarely even considered Indigenous people in his work. As Collier made a new career as a teacher in California in the 1920, he began to be recruited by Euro-Americans at the periphery of the political movement for the reform of federal Indian policy.<sup>105</sup> Mabel Dodge, Collier's acquaintance through the New York salon circuit in the 1910s, invited him and his family to come to Taos, New Mexico. Feeling unmoored, Collier loaded up his family on a camping trip—much like the kind he had taken in the Appalachians when he wished to commune with nature—and went to New Mexico. It was there that Collier's enthusiasm for Indians was stoked as a new outlet of his anti-modern primitivism.

Collier's passion for promoting democracy led him to devote his career to Indian activism. When he returned from Taos to California, he partnered with Stella Atwood and the General Federation of Women's Clubs Indian Welfare Committee in 1922 to protest the Bursum bill which threatened Pueblo lands. The Pueblo land issue captured Collier's indignation and his imagination in equal measure. In the 1920s, the Pueblos had been described by reformers such as Collier's American Indian Defense Association as one of "the oldest democracies on the face of the earth."<sup>106</sup> Then when the bill was killed, he began a campaign against the 1923 Indian Omnibus Bill, which was a pro-termination bill. Collier took up the debate over Indian ceremonial dancing, which the Board of Indian Commissioners had proposed outlawing in 1918, arguing that Native people should have the right to maintain this important cultural practice. Collier proved to be loud and outspoken, going on to lead the American Indian Defense Association and its criticism of the government's assimilation, wardship, and paternalism in

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<sup>105</sup> For more on Collier's career in California, see Karin L. Huebner, "An Unexpected Alliance: Stella Atwood, the California Clubwomen, John Collier, and the Indians of the Southwest, 1917-1934," *Pacific Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (2009): 337-66.

<sup>106</sup> Richard H. Frost, "The Romantic Inflation of Pueblo Culture," *American West* 17 (Jan-Feb. 1980): 4-9, as cited in Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 277.

Indian affairs. Eager to put one of their loudest critics out of business, the Roosevelt administration in 1933 tapped Collier to be Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

As commissioner, Collier soon found himself in charge of Indian education. As the leader of the subsequent Indian New Deal, Collier's tenure as commissioner was arguably the most significant moment for the readjustment of federal Indian policy in the twentieth century. Under Collier's leadership, the federal government ended the policy of the allotment of reservation land; commissioned a comprehensive study of Indian law; closed several industrial boarding schools; and wrote the Indian Reorganization Act, a measure to restore tribal governments from under the first wave of settler colonial expansion, treaty-making, and confinement to reservations in the nineteenth century. Collier is therefore often remembered as the man who brought multiculturalism to federal Indian affairs, particularly in education policy.<sup>107</sup>

Many scholars suggest that Collier simply adapted his cultural pluralism defined at the PI to Indians. The result was Collier's critique of assimilation and allotment policy in Indian Affairs. "Collier's chief interest had been in the Americanization of immigrants," writes Roger Daniels. "Unlike most Americanizers of the era, however, he stressed a pluralistic point of view which emphasized immigrant cultural values as well as those of their adopted country. Accordingly, Collier rejected the assimilationist position which held that the Indian's only hope was to emulate the white man; instead he stressed Indian cultural values."<sup>108</sup> On this reading, Collier quickly became a leading—albeit self-appointed—advocate for Pueblo people of New Mexico. This launched his second career as a loud critic of the government's policies of

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<sup>107</sup> Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 182-98.

<sup>108</sup> Daniels, *Not Like Us*, 125.

assimilation amidst the various progressive organizations that battled over the shape of federal Indian policy.<sup>109</sup>

In his new job, Collier is often depicted as leading the charge into the new gestalt of cultural conservation in federal Indian policy.<sup>110</sup> In his book *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, Tom Holm casts Collier as the leading critic of the federal Indian school system's nineteenth-century assimilation policy. As a result, much of the literature on Collier portrays his reforms in Indian affairs as a departure from older ideas about assimilation. Holm suggests it was because Collier had a clear alternative to what came before, not just in terms of policy, but in philosophy: "Collier came to the forefront of a new Indian reform movement, bypassing Native American spokespersons and other whites ... because he formulated a new philosophical basis for the direction of American Indian policy," Holm writes.<sup>111</sup>

And yet, Collier's tenure as commissioner remains something of a riddle for historians of American Indian history. Collier is often regarded as a paradox: a progressive romantic, who used the rhetoric of democracy to force his policies on many Indigenous communities in a manner similar to his unilateral administration of the Training School. Jodi Byrd calls his positions "contradictory in his fundamental support of indigenous communities and people."<sup>112</sup> While he held Native culture in great esteem, he also "thought that there was a vacuum in Indigenous governance in most communities that needed to be redressed through the imposition

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<sup>109</sup> Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 222-96; Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 239-44; Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans and Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 153-81.

<sup>110</sup> Holm makes an important caveat to this Collier-centric narrative: "The vanishing policy broke down before John Collier discovered Indians. The underlying ideas of assimilation collapsed because Natives simply refused to vanish as people or as individuals into the American mainstream. The resiliency of peoplehood militated against assimilation and caused whites to rethink the policy." Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, xiv.

<sup>111</sup> Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 182.

<sup>112</sup> Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 192.

of democratic and bureaucratic structures.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Collier would prove to be a particularly authoritarian promoter of democracy.

I suggest that the riddle posed by Collier’s authoritarian democracy is somewhat lessened if we think of Collier’s path to Commissioner of Indian Affairs less as a bridge between the gestalts of assimilation and conservation, but rather as a translation of his Deweyan commitments forged during his settlement house work in New York. Simply put, Collier first honed his anti-modern primitivism not at Taos Pueblo, but through his cultural conservation of immigrant cultures at the PI. Settlement houses might aid immigrants, but they ultimately served progressives and their often utopic and always idiosyncratic visions for democracy. By the time federal Indian educational policy was looking for a method in the 1930s, Collier would bring one not from Taos, but from New York.

Even before Collier came to Taos, New Mexico, his interests in community formation and John Dewey were already intertwined. In fact, in his memoir, Collier reflected on his interest in education as entangled with his interest in human sociality. “I realize that the impulse and the attempted method of the Training School for Community Workers, back in 1915-1919 in New York, entered into all my subsequent teaching,” he wrote. “From first to last, my central theme was the community—the human and ecological community—the lapsed community which was being renewed, and sometimes even deepened, in many parts of the world; and the forces which had dissolved, in large part, the Occidental community; and finally, the lines of hopeful endeavor which might bring community alive again in America.”<sup>114</sup> Collier came to Taos primed to see Indians through a lens first ground in New York. “Until economic and social revolutions, even today, had changed America and Western Europe to their foundations, deep community as a

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 411.

general possession could never be born,” Collier reflected in his 1963 memoir. This insight, Collier recalled, “prepared me for the discovery that deep community yet lived on in the embattled Red Indians.”<sup>115</sup>

As we have seen, throughout his career, Collier was searching for a renewal of community life in the modern United States. “The *gesellschaft* mode of existence is a lonely one,” Collier reflected in his memoir. “Mechanisms and social organizations for shared, sustained public greatness, which could unite men, great and humble, within common purposes and endeavors, exist no longer. Can such mechanisms for community existence be recreated within the socio-economic order which engulfs us now,” Collier wondered. “Much of my life has been lived in search of the answer to this question.”<sup>116</sup> It was anti-modern primitivism which led Collier and other ethno-romantics to declare that “‘Indians’ is not America’s ‘problem,’ their ‘social genius’ is America’s solution.”<sup>117</sup> And yet, by Collier’s own admission, this inquiry did not begin at Taos with Indians; instead, it began in New York with immigrants:

The New York years were followed by a stormy experience of community endeavor in California.... Then came the earth-shaking discovery of the American Indians ... and my work in their behalf. Would these enterprises following The People’s Institute years have become for me what they did become—the central commitment of my life—had I not experienced so profoundly the manifold ventures of The People’s Institute, the great spirit illumining all its works and participants, and the many great individuals whom I came to know, in personal and in professional life?<sup>118</sup>

We should pay greater heed to Collier’s narrativizing of his own career. Collier suggests that the tribal life of Indians such as he witnessed at Taos Pueblo became his solution to a problem that he first began to grasp through a settlement house in New York. Not only does this suggest that Collier’s arrival at Taos was less a beginning than an end, it also implies that

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>117</sup> Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated*, 193.

<sup>118</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 94.

Collier's appreciation of Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy played a part in constructing the appeal he found in Indians at Taos as a solution for the renewal of associated living as modern democratic culture in the United States. In other words, Collier's longstanding interests in affecting what Dewey called "a great community" through a settlement house in New York found a totally new expression through Indian people. He came to New Mexico ripe for a critique of atomistic, industrial, and urban civilization, and he found it in Taos.

Collier was hardly alone in many Euro-Americans' sudden reappraisal of the utility of Indian cultures to solve American problems in the early part of the twentieth century. The early decades of the twentieth century saw changing attitudes among Euro-Americans about Indian people, their culture, and the purpose of Indian education. Tom Holm argues that in this period, Indian policy was in tension between two paradigms, one of assimilation and erasure to idealization and conservation. According to Holm, the nineteenth-century regime of assimilation was predicated on one mission above all others: solving 'the Indian problem' by erasing any and all appendages—political, cultural, and spiritual—of tribal society. This gestalt of assimilation rested on the ethnocentric conviction that Euro-American pioneers and the civilization they had created represented a superior form of sociological development than that of the Indians.

The announcement by the Census Bureau of the closure of the frontier in 1890, however, precipitated a crisis of confidence in civilization. This "civilization anxiety" led to the coalescing of a new intellectual movement that scholars have identified as anti-modern primitivism. In the eighteenth century, "primitivism postulated people dwelling in nature according to nature, existing free of history's burden and the social complexity felt by Europeans in the modern period," writes Berkhofer.<sup>119</sup> Now, cultural associations with savages—what Matthew Frye

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<sup>119</sup> Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian*, 72.

Jacobsen has called the “barbarian virtues”—offered a lifeline. As Holm notes, “To these Americans, primitivism and even ‘backwardness’ were not wholly negative terms.”<sup>120</sup> Attributes Euro-Americans had long projected upon Indians, now they wished to claim as their own.

For this reason, images of Indians quickly came to the forefront of anti-modern primitivist pastiche. As we have examined previously, the frontier discourse and its corollary vocabulary of savagery had long racialized Indians as an extension of the environment, rather than as sovereign people with legitimate political claims to the land. This made them appealing candidates for appropriation by anti-modern primitivists. “Native Americans had been considered ‘natural men’ for centuries. In the nineteenth century this attribute was looked upon as a sign of inferiority,” Holm notes. “But many whites during the early years of the twentieth century came to view this connection with the natural world favorably. Being in harmony with the environment, according to the new attitudes, gave Indians special qualities, such as intrinsic athletic capabilities and spiritual powers lost or overlooked by Euro-American society.”<sup>121</sup> Indians captured the imagination of anti-modern primitivists because they seemed to be “offering hope to mankind at the same time that they constituted a powerful counter-example to existing European civilization.”<sup>122</sup> This led Robert Berkhofer to observe in the later twentieth century that “modern writers employed the counter-cultural Indian in a way equivalent to the eighteenth-century *philosophes*’ use of the Noble Savage.”<sup>123</sup> Counter to Dewey’s Instrumental Indian, Joel Pfister describes how anti-modernists like Frank coined their own “therapeutic Indian,” an imagined Indian subjectivity that anxious Euro-Americans could inhabit through Playing Indian and so soothe their worried countenances over loss of vitality, energy, sociality, and connection

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<sup>120</sup> Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 117.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>122</sup> Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 72.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

with authentic experience.<sup>124</sup> Increasing alienation over modern and industrial life turned romantics towards all things Indian, an impulse that only occasionally led them to actual Indigenous people.

In the early part of the twentieth century, anti-modern primitivists led a boom in Euro-American interest in Native people, art, language, and culture. “Many important white intellectuals, artists, and scientists believed that Native American conservationist thought, athletic ability, and artistic accomplishment actually enhanced the quality of American life,” writes Holm. “According to these idealists, therefore, Native Americans should be granted the limited liberty to maintain those tribal cultural traits perceived positively by the American public.”<sup>125</sup> This new esteem for Indians, matched by an increasingly effective Native lobby in groups such as the Society of American Indians, high-profile Native veterans of World War I, and non-Indian reformers such as Collier’s group, the American Indian Defense Association, had the effect of calling into question the gestalt of assimilation. This challenge led to what Holm has labeled “the Great Confusion in Indian affairs,” where the federal policies of the assimilation of Indian people and their cultures into dominant Euro-American Protestant culture suddenly seemed to be a grave mistake. This “great confusion” led to the formation of a new gestalt in Indian Affairs, one which we might call cultural conservation. Cultural conservationists increasingly pointed to past and future Indian contributions to American society. “Conservationists of the romantic stripe flayed the vanishing policy with a series of cutting articles that essentially branded it as an attempt to loot Native American lands and destroy a culture that possessed a knowledge of the environment that could renew America and

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<sup>124</sup> Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated*, 24, 145-52.

<sup>125</sup> Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 152.



counterbalance the deleterious effects of industrialization.<sup>126</sup> Among these conservationists, Collier led the way.

Taos Pueblo people appeared on Christmas Eve 1920 as possessors of the community for which Collier yearned for all Americans. “Collier, like many of his contemporaries in the New York bohemian community, thought himself alienated from mainstream American life. He was decidedly critical of industrial and urban culture because he thought it contradicted the basic tenets on which the nation was founded,” noted Holm. “Any kind of cohesive communal life was nullified within the competitive structure of American society.”<sup>127</sup> As a consequence, Collier came to believe that Indians were the solution to democracy’s ills. “They had what the world has lost,” Collier concluded. “What the world has lost, the world must have again, lest it die.”<sup>128</sup> Collier ultimately offered a Deweyan vision of New York inverted for the pueblos: “True democracy, founded in neighborhoods and reaching all over the world, would become the realized heaven on earth.”<sup>129</sup> America’s Indian problem might become America’s democratic solution.

Unlike Dewey, however, Collier shared with Frank and the Young Americans an idealist commitment to anti-modern primitivism that bordered on the mystical. While Collier and Frank did not appear to know one another personally, scholars have glimpsed the commonalities in their ideas. Frederick Pike noted that “the mystical visions that Collier brought to the formulation of Indian policy” resembled “the attitudes that shaped Waldo Frank’s attitudes toward Latin Americans.”<sup>130</sup> Wilbert Ahlstedt observes that in conjunction with their pilgrimages to Taos, “the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>128</sup> John Collier, “Indians of the Americas,” cited in Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, 193.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Pike, “Latin American and United States Stereotypes,” 139, FN 23.

writer Waldo Frank” and John Collier came to regard Mexico as “a laboratory of socioeconomic innovation.”<sup>131</sup> Both shared the idea that Indians held the secret key to unlock a modern malaise. Both men believed that should nothing change in the course of modernity’s unfolding, Indians would be fated to disappear. Unlike Frank, however, Collier did not resign himself to accept Indian vanishing as inevitable; instead, he felt that Indians and the wisdom they possessed could be conserved. The solution was to end the government’s federal Indian school’s erasure of Native cultures and use schools to conserve them instead.

In this fashion, Collier ended up somewhere between Dewey and Frank. From Dewey, Collier learned the central importance of the synthesis of education and democracy, an emphasis on experiential learning, and the concept of a school as a social center. With Frank, the Young Americans, and the anti-modern primitivism that they represented, Collier shared a romantic valorization of Indians and their communal cultures. Taken together, Collier made a plan for federal Indian schools that was a blend of Dewey’s reconstruction of local control and Frank’s anti-modern primitivism. Using a Deweyan template of schools as social centers and drawing on his tenure at the PI, Collier would reverse federal Indian schools’ function from cultural erasure into cultural conservation.

## **Conclusion**

Although Collier’s philosophy was once configured towards immigrants in New York, Indians at Taos offered a new vehicle for it. Holm is one of the few who rightly emphasizes the importance of his New York settlement house work in shaping his anti-modern primitivism:

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<sup>131</sup> Wilbert T. Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy: 1934-1945” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2015), 142.

“Collier was a social scientist and a theorist in his own right.”<sup>132</sup> “[Collier] became a social worker among immigrant populations in New York, a proponent of cultural preservation and community, and at the same time a firm believer in the protection of personal liberties as a method of maintaining cultural plurality,” Holm explains. “Among the Pueblo people he found exactly the type of communities he thought should be emulated by all Americans.”<sup>133</sup> This suggests that his ideas about democracy and education were ideas forged less in dialogue with Indigenous people, and more out of his own idiosyncratic philosophical priorities from New York. In particular, in the Taos Pueblo people, Collier found Dewey’s associated individualism: “To him, the tribal community at Taos represented a perfect example of *gemeinschaft* relationships, which combine communal living with individualism.”<sup>134</sup> Indians just presented a vehicle for expression; in other words, they became instrumental for Collier as they had been for Dewey.

The inspiration for a rejuvenation of American democracy that Frank and Collier found at Taos is more than a little ironic considering the history of not only Taos, but the nineteen Pueblo nations in what has become the state of New Mexico. As Maurice Crandall has recently shown, Pueblo nations have had a long history practicing democracy. In fact, Pueblo electorates predate the formation of the United States, let alone New Mexico’s admission to the United States. Since time immemorial, Pueblo democracy was enacted in communal practices of “dialogue, persuasion, and the power of words.”<sup>135</sup> This tradition of democratic governance endured three subsequent eras of colonialism, including Spain, Mexico, and the United States. This led to the formation of Indian republics in what Crandall calls the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As Crandall

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<sup>132</sup> Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 195.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>135</sup> Crandall, *These People Have Always Been a Republic*, 6.

notes, many Pueblo communities actually rejected the franchise in the New Mexico territory, choosing the status of wardship under U.S. law in the 1840s and 1850s as a means to retain their earlier political distinction as republics. In the same decade that Andrew J. Blackbird and his Odawa community in Michigan experimented with the adoption of state citizenship, so too were Taos Pueblo people fighting to retain their own electorates formed by the introduction of the imposition of the *ayuntamiento* (the Spanish town governance model), under the specter of incorporation by the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. On their face, while the Anishinaabe and Pueblo strategies were seemingly at odds with one another, they each represent a long engagement with democracy, both endogenous and exogenous, to their communities. While the pattern of settler colonialism might have been different in the Great Lakes and in the Southwest, Indigenous responses were similarly grounded in experimental forms of democratic organization.

Little of this history, however, was illuminated by the refractions of the various philosophical interests of the Euro-Americans, including Collier, who came to places like Taos in the early twentieth century.<sup>136</sup> Collier was convinced such Indians were the perfect manifestation of the kind of associated living Dewey and others had in mind because of the promise that tribalism seemed to hold for democracy. Writing in the early 1930s, Collier pontificated that “the face-to-face group and its *fateful* [original emphasis] importance has been obscured, even to the point of being held by some thinkers to have been superseded, under the industrial system and the systems of rapid communication of the last hundred years.” He observed that “it is easier to realize the importance of the above propositions and view in these

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<sup>136</sup> Crandall, “Refusing Citizenship: Pueblo Indians and Voting During the United States Territorial Period,” in *These People Have Always Been a Republic*, 177-225.

Indian situations where ancient culture, custom, value, and world view are still paramount.”<sup>137</sup>

For Collier, this meant teaching Euro-Americans the wisdom of the *gemeinschaft* of tribalism he had witnessed at Taos Pueblo. “Call it the agency group or the local or neighborhood group,” Collier later insisted. “Here ... is the primary social group’s potency in releasing energy and forming sentiments, opinions and habits.”<sup>138</sup>

These ideas—let alone the phrase “the face-to-face group”—were very similar to Dewey’s. As Dewey would come to write in his 1927 *The Public and its Problems*, “Local face-to-face community has been invaded by forces so vast, so remote in initiation, so far-reaching in scope and so complexly indirect in operation that they are, from the standpoint of the members of local social units, unknown,” he declared.<sup>139</sup> “We have passed, so to speak, from a face-to-face contact with nature to a contact with the results of machines and artifice; from a world, social and physical, that was in process of making to one that is for most of us made; and hence from a world that was a constant stimulus to some kind of originality and inventiveness to one that puts a premium upon receptivity and reduplication,” Dewey wrote.<sup>140</sup> While we cannot say for certain when this phrase “face-to-face” community entered Collier’s lexicon, it is clear that Collier regarded Indians as a potential solution to the degrading effects of modernity on American community life he had first witnessed among immigrant communities in New York.

Dewey himself was hardly an anti-modern primitivist. However, Dewey and Collier ultimately represent a similar instrumentalization of Indians. Dewey used Instrumental Indians in his philosophy to articulate the distinction between education and schooling, his naturalistic

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<sup>137</sup> John Collier, “The Face-to-Face Group in Indian Service,” October 24, 1944, “Beatty,” in John Collier Letters 1922-1968, Microfilm Reel 11, New York Public Library.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *Later Works*, 2: 317.

<sup>140</sup> John Dewey, “Construction and Criticism” (1930), *Later Works*, 5: 131.

account of the development of experimental psychology, and the historical origins of democracy in U.S. frontier history. This instrumentalization of Indians allowed Dewey to illustrate the contours of philosophical problems he hoped to solve. Whereas Dewey held up the pioneer as the model for associated life, Collier valorized the Indian as the possessor of the secret for democratic renewal. In contrast, Collier instrumentalized Indians as a solution to the problem of the *gesellschaft* versus *gemeinschaft* quality of democratic life in the modern United States. To put this another way, where Dewey instrumentalized Indians to construct his problems, Collier instrumentalized Indians as solutions to his problems.

One of the reasons why scholars generally locate the origins of Collier's multiculturalism in Taos, New Mexico, is because the nature of his decade of work for the PI has been mischaracterized. While most scholars acknowledge that Collier began his career at a settlement house organization, they offer only a cursory account of what Collier's work there actually constituted.<sup>141</sup> Lawrence Kelly offers the most detailed account of Collier's career at the PI. Kelly concludes that the most important feature of Collier's stint in New York was as a preview of Collier's administrative demeanor when he would assume the mantle of Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933, highlighting the various quarrels which he fought surrounding this work. However, upon closer inspection of the PI's records, it is clear that Collier was more than just a general administrator; instead, Collier's work at the PI focused on the settlement house's education programs. By casting Collier's career in New York as that of an educator, a formerly overlooked direct connection between John Collier and John Dewey becomes visible.

This interpretation dramatically renarrates the story of Collier's multiculturalism in Indian affairs. Collier's multiculturalism came not from concerns over Indigenous people and their place

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<sup>141</sup> Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated*, 193.

in American democracy, but from concerns over immigrant assimilation—and with it came the same philosophical baggage of the settler colonial elimination of the Native that plagued Dewey since his earliest days in Michigan. Collier’s educational reforms for Indian schools represent an “Indianizing” of the settlement house synthesis of education and democracy he learned in part from the likes of John Dewey. Both Dewey and Collier failed to articulate a progressive synthesis of education and democracy in New York’s settlement houses that could realize a vision for democracy that recognized the importance of self-determination and local control in schooling for Indigenous peoples. This was a flaw shared by both Dewey and Collier, a result of the fact that their synthesis of education and democracy was intertwined at the settlement house, wrought in an urban context of immigration and ethnicity, not Indigenous sovereignty and land.<sup>142</sup> Unlike Dewey, however, Collier’s progressive synthesis of education and democracy would come to define much of the twentieth-century struggle for Indigenous self-determination in education. As we shall see, Waldo Frank’s excavation of Dewey’s reliance upon the frontier discourse and his ensuing critique of pragmatism may not have been very far off the mark.

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<sup>142</sup> The discourse of the frontier is linked to a colonial ideology of Native assimilation; a discourse of modernity is often associated with an ideology of Native conservation. In the intellectual circuit between New York’s settlement houses and Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, the lines separating the two paradigms were not distinct. Philip J. Deloria, “Historiography,” in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 6-24.

## CHAPTER 7:

### Frontier: Frederick J. Turner and the Problems of the Frontier, 1893-1933

As the decade of the 1920s dawned, New York progressives found themselves fractured. They had once gathered like moths to a flame around organizations such as the People's Institute (PI) and the promise of a progressive social order to achieve a pluralistic democracy. After Dewey's support of U.S. entry to World War I, the Young Americans had declared their independence from Dewey's orbit. The Young Americans seemed to offer a powerful philosophical and cultural alternative to pragmatism. What had started as a rift over World War I was now a chasm. Waldo Frank's *Our America* marked the beginning of a falling out between Frank and Dewey. If Frank's method of "revelation" was not quite mainstream, then his idealism and anti-modern primitivism writ large seemed to be on the cultural upswing. By all indications, Frank and the Young Americans had set pragmatism on its heels with a more penetrating cultural critique of American life.

While Frank and John Collier made journeys to Taos to hone their anti-modern primitivism, Dewey looked "eastward" towards Japan and China. He journeyed to both places in 1919 on a lecture tour until the winter of 1921, when he returned to New York. His return to New York was not just a literal arrival, but a figurative one as well; it seemed as if the decade would mark a turning point in Dewey's career. Dewey had been chastened by his zeal for U.S. participation in World War I. On the heels of the publication of *Reconstruction in Philosophy* in 1920, it was time to imbue his pragmatism with new energy, to fend off its critics, put its



mistakes in the past, and reinvigorate his political theory in order to chart a new future for American democracy. He found such a renewal in a familiar intellectual resource: the frontier discourse.

The frontier discourse experienced a shot in the arm in 1921 with the republication of Frederick Jackson Turner's original frontier thesis. In 1921, Turner published *The Frontier in American History* with Henry Holt & Co., which contained a reprinting of his original article "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" originally from the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Dewey had almost crossed paths with Turner at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. Dewey delivered a lecture at the Philosophy Conference in June of 1893 at the exposition, the same venue where Turner first unveiled his seminal essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in United States History," to the American Historical Association a month later. Turner's thesis certainly fit the theme of the venue. A confluence of spectacle, boosterism, scholarship, tourism, and entertainment, the exposition (which nominally marked the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus' landing in the New World) seemed to spell the end of the Great Lakes as a frontier region once and for all.<sup>1</sup>

While Dewey was not present when Turner gave his talk, Turner's frontier thesis would soon become a feature of Dewey's own thought. It seems likely that Dewey was familiar with Turner's frontier thesis not long after he delivered his remarks at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. Laura Runyon took note that her instruction of U.S. history at Dewey's Laboratory School conformed to Turner's account of the westward migration of pioneers. "Professor Frederick J. Turner, in his article on 'The Significance of the Frontier in History,' in the *Fifth Herbart*

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<sup>1</sup> Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 203.

*Yearbook*, carries this idea out in explaining the expansion of the middle Northwest,” she noted.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, after several years running the Laboratory School, Dewey wrote to Turner in the fall of 1900 to convince him to lead the university’s history department. “I hope you will see your way to taking the chair of history in this University,” Dewey wrote as one Hopkins PhD graduate to another. If Turner were to take the job, Dewey was confident the history department at Chicago would “not be equaled in the West.”<sup>3</sup> While this recruitment letter is the only extant communication between Dewey and Turner, it is nevertheless an important link between the two men. Not only does Dewey’s letter imply that he was familiar with Turner’s scholarship in the waning days of the nineteenth century, but it foreshadowed Dewey’s own later invocations of the frontier in the twentieth.

In my survey of Dewey’s corpus, I have found that most of his explicit invocations of the term “frontier” come in the later part of his career in the 1920s and 1930s. In these decades, Dewey increasingly incorporated the lesson of the frontier’s closure from Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis into his own understanding of the history of the United States.<sup>4</sup> The nation’s pioneer forefathers, Dewey recounted, “were engaged in subduing a new country. Industry was at a premium, and instead of being of a routine nature, pioneer conditions required initiative, ingenuity, and pluck. While the citizens of old-world monarchies had no responsibility for the conduct of government, our forefathers were engaged in the experiment of conducting

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<sup>2</sup> Runyon, “Elementary History Teaching in the Laboratory School,” 43.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey to Frederick Jackson Turner, March 29, 1900, *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>4</sup> There are many parallels between Turner’s and Dewey’s politics in the 1920s. Dewey and Turner had little patience for Protestant nationalism and their depiction of religion’s central role in the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Both Turner and Dewey backed Wilson’s intervention in World War I. By the 1920s, both returned to the frontier to help make sense of the post-war order. Like Dewey, Turner himself “rejected efforts by capitalists to apply the frontier metaphor to capital itself as a way to mollify social protest with the promise of endless economic growth,” notes Grandin. For both men, the lesson of frontier by the 1930s was not infinite growth, but a call for attention to limitations of modern life. Grandin, *The End of the Myth*, 125.

their own government.”<sup>5</sup> Like Turner, Dewey suggested that what made America distinct from Europe could be found on the frontier. Dewey believed that the settlement of the frontier created a pattern for the development of schooling in progressively larger communities. “A little colony, the members of which are probably mostly known to one another in advance, settle in what is almost, or quite, a wilderness,” Dewey wrote. “They get a schoolhouse built, perhaps by their own labor, and hire a teacher by means of a committee, and the teacher is paid from the taxes. Custom determines the limited course of study, and tradition the methods of the teacher, modified by whatever personal insight and skill he may bring to bear. The wilderness is gradually subdued.”<sup>6</sup>

Between 1922 and 1938, Dewey translated the frontier thesis into the vocabulary of his own method of experimentalism. For Dewey, the problematic nature of the history of the settlement of the frontier was that what had once been a matter of primary experience, reflection, and intelligence had become one of secondary experience, routine, and habit. Dewey ultimately told a history of the United States as a nation with a “dual heritage.” In the nineteenth century, pioneers who struggled to re-create society in the wilderness turned the frontier into a problematic situation. But in the twentieth century, atomic individualism, material acquisition, and an appetite for continual expansion were now outmoded habits.

These were inclinations that had been co-opted, abused, and taken advantage of by the forces of mass consumption. In the context of the wilderness, the pursuit of material comfort had led to the construction of new communities bound together by community. Removed from that situation, the same traits now played into the hands of employers, mass marketers, and “pecuniary culture.” In the modern era of the twentieth century, the pioneer legacy of the United

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<sup>5</sup> Dewey, *The Schools of To-morrow*, 359.

<sup>6</sup> Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 306-307.

States, once an asset for democracy, had by the 1920s become a liability. When the frontier was open, it had functioned in what he called a “problematic situation”; in the post-frontier United States, Dewey came to believe that the frontier was increasingly just a plain old-fashioned problem. Democracy as a form of associated living required constant renewal with experimental intelligence in order to maintain a “great community.” Where would the problematic situations that would once again provoke a nationwide exercise in experimental intelligence come from, if not the physical settlement of the frontier?

For this reason, the frontier became Dewey’s diagnostic for democracy’s ills. He was not alone. As David Wrobel has argued in *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal*, republication of Turner’s essay reignited many progressives’ interest in the frontier thesis as early as the 1920s. The crash of 1929, the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the ensuing New Deal generated great concern about the frontier and democracy. In fact, Dewey wrote the most about the frontier after 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, an event which Dewey tried on several occasions to diagnose through the lens of the western expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century. The frontier provided a rejoinder for many progressive and liberal responses to the unprecedented crisis at the heart of the American experiment that was distinct from the Young Americans and their romanticism and idealism. In this fashion, Dewey was part of a generation of thinkers who sought to understand the democratic crises of the 1920s and 1930s through the nineteenth-century settlement of the frontier.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> To frame this intellectual history of the idealist Young Americans and the pragmatic reconstructionists, I draw principally on the work of David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993).

Beginning in the 1920s, Turner's reprint of his frontier thesis inaugurated a boom in frontier studies. The frontier discourse was reinvigorated by historical and literary works such as Lucy Lockwood Hazard's *The Frontier in American Literature* (1927), Ralph Henry Gabriel's *The Lure of the Frontier* (1929), James Truslow Adam's *The Epic of America* (1931), and Percy H. Boynton's *The Rediscovery of the Frontier* (1931) and was synthesized by Fredric Logan Paxon's *History of the American Frontier* (1924) and his article "A Generation of the Frontier Hypothesis, 1893-1932" in the pages of the *Pacific Historical Review*. "A strong current running through many of the discussions of the vast changes that have been taking place in the United States during the last half-decade is the historical interpretation epitomized as 'the significance of the frontier,'" Everett E. Edwards, a government researcher in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, wrote in 1935. "As an active intellectual force this explanation of America's development began with the essay ... presented by the late Professor Frederick Jackson Turner ... before the American Historical Association at its meeting with the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893." In the intervening four decades, however, Turner's frontier thesis was not just for historians anymore, but for agriculturalists, literary critics, social commentators, politicians, and philosophers.<sup>8</sup>

Dewey was a leading member of this emerging cohort of frontier progressives who emerged in the 1920s. Grandin calls this movement a "centrist pioneer progressivism."<sup>9</sup> As Grandin explains, "New Dealers attached the adjective 'social,' or 'socialized,' to old Turnerian categories."<sup>10</sup> Some of these progressives told glory-stories about the frontier; others castigated its legacy. Dewey did both. In his critique of the frontier's atomic individualism,

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<sup>8</sup> Everett E. Edwards, "References on the Significance of the Frontier in American History" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1935), iii.

<sup>9</sup> Grandin, *The End of the Myth*, 131.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

Dewey is best regarded not as “anti-Turnerian” so much as “social Turnerian.”<sup>11</sup> Regardless, such critiques were framed by ideas about the frontier.<sup>12</sup>

The heyday of the frontier progressives lasted the better part of the decade between 1921 and 1934. In 1934, the frontier progressives founded *The Social Frontier*.<sup>13</sup> The journal, which ran from 1934 to 1943, was the brainchild of George S. Counts and many educators affiliated with the Social Foundation of Education program at Teacher’s College. The journal attracted an eclectic mix of education, political, and literary writers who took great interest in making sense of the New Deal through various elements of the frontier thesis. As a result, the ranks of the journal included many Deweyan allies, including William H. Kilpatrick, Carl Bode, and Harold Rugg. Other notable contributors included Merle Curti, Margaret Mead, and Leon Trotsky.

As Sonia Murrow notes, “Those allied with the journal were associated with the social reconstructionists, or ‘Frontiersmen.’” Eugene F. Provenzo Jr. used the term “Social Reconstructionists”<sup>14</sup> to refer to them as well, but due to their reliance on the frontier discourse as a democratic diagnostic, I dub them frontier progressives.<sup>15</sup> Murrow commented that “many of them agreed with Dewey when he suggested in his book *Democracy and Education*, published in 1916, that schools could bolster democratic processes and so could be focal points for positive changes in society.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> On the endurance of local control and its conflation with the frontier during these decades, see David Goodman, “Democracy and Public Discussion in the Progressive and New Deal Eras: From Civic Competence to the Expression of Opinion,” *Studies in American Political Development* 18, no. 2 (October 2004): 81-111.

<sup>13</sup> C. A. Bowers, “The *Social Frontier*: A Historical Sketch,” *History of Education Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (September 1964): 167-80.

<sup>14</sup> Eugene F. Provenzo Jr., *The Social Frontier: A Critical Reader* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2010), 10.

<sup>15</sup> Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism*, 69-85.

<sup>16</sup> Sonia E. Murrow, “Depicting Teachers’ Roles in Social Reconstruction in *The Social Frontier*, 1934-1943” *Educational Theory* 61, no. 3 (2011): 311-33. See also Maureen O’Neill, “The Social Frontier and the Frontiers of Democracy, 1934-1943: Visions for Curricular Reconstruction” (PhD diss., New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985).

For his part, Dewey staked a position in a number of contributions to *The Social Frontier*, including “Can Education Share Social Reconstruction?” “The Meaning of Liberalism,” and “Education and Social Change.” In 1937, Dewey joined the editorial board of the journal. Eugene F. Provenzo Jr. described *The Social Frontier* as “a conscious act of educational criticism and social and political reconstruction.”<sup>17</sup> By and large, *The Social Frontier* called on teachers, educators, and administrators in schools across the country to actively engage in politics. Sonia Murrow calls Dewey “the most influential and regular contributor to the journal” who “modeled for the journal’s other contributors a notional approach that focused on the social context of education.”<sup>18</sup> Schools ought not to be set aside, on a parallel track, to social problems, but should rather tackle them head on. This was perhaps the apotheosis of Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy. Students, teachers, and pedagogues would embrace their critical role in the part of social reform. If schools were designed to generate experimental intelligence in their students, then they should also be prepared to use it on behalf of the nation.<sup>19</sup>

To many progressives like Dewey, the frontier thesis proved to be a helpful diagnostic for what they felt was a growing crisis in American democracy.<sup>20</sup> The frontier thesis located the problem of the modern conditions of democracy with the closure of the frontier in 1890. For

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<sup>17</sup> Provenzo Jr., *The Social Frontier*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Murrow, “Depicting Teachers’ Roles in Social Reconstruction in *The Social Frontier*,” 332.

<sup>19</sup> Though some of the journal’s submissions skirted the edge of Marxism, *The Social Frontier* expressed a collectivist disposition that emerged from the frontier discourse. This was not socialism, either, but was rather the kind of associated or corporate individualism Dewey and others had theorized might occur from a reconstructed post-frontier community like Muncie. Yet this was lost on many conservatives and anti-communists, who pilloried the journal for espousing a communist revolution of U.S. schools. The critics of the journal often mistook the frontier progressives for communism.

<sup>20</sup> As Slotkin incisively notes, the frontier discourse “was not fully codified as the dominant American historical explanation until the turn of the century in the work of the Darwinists, the Turnerians, and the Progressives. It was this series of historical movements that established as fact the dependence of American democracy and republicanism on an exceptionally fortunate material condition: namely, the existence on the Frontier of a reservoir of cheap, unappropriated, and abundant natural resources, especially in the form of land.” Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 36.

many frontier progressives, “the end of the frontier meant that Americans began to turn to the federal government for economic regulation and even socialist policy prescriptions instead of relying on the pioneer democracy of the nation’s traditional spirit,” writes Paul Frymer.<sup>21</sup>

According to Greg Grandin, “Turner imagined the experience of westward expansion overcoming sectional loyalties and racial animosities, leading to a true humanism, nurturing open-minded citizens capable of addressing the problems of mass industrial society with applied, progressive, and responsible policies.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, the threat to democracy posed by the closing of the frontier was clear. The United States was in need of “substitutes for that former safeguard of democracy, the disappearing free lands.”<sup>23</sup> What kind of experience could replace settlement of the frontier that could possibly rival its democratic potential? Dewey believed he had an answer: schools.

According to Dewey, schools had played an important function in the settlement of the frontier and the construction of American democracy. It was there that pioneer pedagogues teaching beyond the boundary of the frontier worked to prepare their communities for their entry into the larger polity of the United States. As civilization increasingly rose out of the wilderness by the labors of Euro-American pioneers, these new settler communities grew first into territories and then into states, which were finally incorporated into the United States under the principles of the Northwest Ordinance. Like the polities themselves, individual citizens who composed these territories also joined the new political community with legal standing equal to that of all

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 266.

<sup>22</sup> Grandin, *The End of the Myth*, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick J. Turner, “Social Forces in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1920), 321.



other U.S. citizens.<sup>24</sup> “An acquaintance with the history of educational theory shows that there have been two explanations of the purpose and nature of education,” Dewey wrote. “One of these ideas is the social idea. The definition which it offers is that education is the preparation for the social position of life, the preparation of the individual to play his proper part in the community or state of which he is a member ... of the idea that the whole object and purport of instruction is to fit men for citizenship in the community to which they belong.”<sup>25</sup> Because of their citizenship training in territorial schools, this integration was affected on the basis of their legal equality, which brought them into relation with the social whole not entirely unlike what he had first imagined in his 1888 “Ethics of Democracy.” Dewey’s account of the social function of schooling which emerged from the settlement of the frontier therefore embedded citizenship training directly in the country’s historical experience of western expansion. It did nothing to account for Indigenous people, students, or citizens. In other words, Dewey’s history of schooling in the United States was a history born of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy.

Crucially, Dewey regarded schools as not just products of the frontier itself; schools would *replace* the frontier as a source for experimental intelligence for a new generation. Fortunately for Dewey, the problem of the frontier also contained within it its own solution: a new frontier, a different form of a nationwide problematic situation from which to cultivate experimental intelligence. What had once existed on the frontier could be recreated in the

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that Dewey was hardly naive about the limitations of schools to actually perform effective citizenship training. Dewey did not wax nostalgic for the nineteenth century theorists of republican schooling, nor its system of public schools. “If you have read the writings of men of those times, you know how few schools existed, how poor they were, how short their terms were, how poorly most of the teachers were prepared, and, judging from what Horace Mann said, how general was the indifference of the average well-to-do citizen to the education of anybody except his own children.” Dewey, “Democracy and Education in the World Today” (1938), *Later Works*, 13: 298.

<sup>25</sup> Dewey, “Educational Lectures before Brigham Young Academy” (1901), *Later Works*, 17: 227.

schools: classrooms, summer camps, and woodcraft outings all held promise as the next frontier in education. This was not a metaphor: Dewey's philosophy depicted students in progressive classrooms as pioneers. Schooling would be the new national source of an enduring community-wide problematic situation that had once confronted pioneers on the frontier. With schools simulating the problematic situation once posed by the frontier, Dewey imagined that the frontier itself could be reconstructed as a future source of American democracy.

Dewey's proposed solution demonstrates just how reliant his experimentalism had become on the frontier discourse. As a result, Dewey wrote his version of the frontier thesis into many of his writings, including numerous essays, letters to editors, and in such works as *Individualism Old and New*. That book in particular was shaped by the frontier discourse through a perhaps surprising source: Robert and Helen Lynd's 1929 *Middletown* study of Muncie, Indiana. In this study of a representative American town, Dewey found Muncie on the front line of the post-frontier crisis of democracy in the United States. Dewey was struck by the revelations of *Middletown*. It drove him to endorse the Pioneer Youth of America, an organization of progressive educators who opened a summer camp at Rifton, New York. The Pioneer Youth used outdoor education, experiential learning, and Playing Indian. Such education, Dewey believed, would help to relieve the post-frontier malaise heralded in *Middletown*.

What did the persistence of the frontier discourse in Dewey's philosophy mean for Indigenous people? As Thomas Fallace notes, Dewey made "an indirect reference[s] to progressive historian Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis.'" For Fallace, Dewey's use of Turner's frontier thesis "confirmed Dewey's conviction that society, if it was to move forward, must constitute its ability to subordinate the environment through the creation of more generic,

transracial knowledge. Precisely how Native American and African American cultures fit into this nationalism scheme was not addressed. They clearly represented earlier forms of living and this had little to offer the transracial culture, nor did they contribute to the subordination of the environment.”<sup>26</sup> As we shall see, once again, Dewey’s immersion in the frontier discourse crowded out contemporary Indigenous alternatives that might have complicated his backgrounding and foiling of Indian people.

As long as Dewey relied on the frontier discourse, his synthesis of education and democracy was founded on backgrounding Indigenous people to the margins of U.S. past and future. Despite a reconstructed frontier and its critiques of material waste, anti-intellectualism, and atomized individualism, it did little to view Indigenous people as a constituency of American democracy who were locked in an ongoing struggle with the federal government to square American ideals of self-determination in schooling. Dewey’s enduring reliance on the frontier discourse made Indians evidence rather than a constituency for his democratic education. The persistence of his use of the frontier overshadows Dewey’s rejection of racial recapitulation and cultural pluralism. Consequently, Dewey’s enduring use of the frontier into the 1920s and 1930s meant his instrumentalization of Indian people endured well into his mature philosophy. The frontier discourse is the major continuity that spans the gap in Dewey’s early and more mature philosophy. For this reason, even Dewey’s reconstruction of the frontier failed to reach the threshold for anti-colonial politics that could critique the frontier synthesis of education and democracy.

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<sup>26</sup> Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race*, 125.

## Frederick Jackson Turner and John Dewey



Figure 7.1. Frederick J. Turner, 1881, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. This photograph was taken in Turner's sophomore year at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, three years before Dewey arrived in Michigan.

“The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development,” Turner’s 1893 essay famously begins. To explain how this process was accomplished, Turner only briefly acknowledged Indigenous people as original inhabitants of that land: “The first frontier had to meet its Indian question, its question of the disposition of the public domain, of the means of intercourse with older settlements, of the extension of political organization, of religious and educational activity,” Turner wrote. Many of these thorny questions had been summarily and tidily disposed of in the

Northwest Ordinance, leaving Turner to conclude that “steadily the frontier of settlement advanced and carried with it individualism, democracy, and nationalism.” Handwaving past violence against Indigenous people as a part of settlement, Turner then used the frontier as a diagnostic for the democratic potential of the United States’ future: “The frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy,” he concluded.<sup>27</sup> “The rise of democracy as an

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<sup>27</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in US History,” in *The Frontier in American History*, 35.

effective force in the nation came in with western preponderance ... and it meant the triumph of the frontier with all of its good and with all of its evil elements.”<sup>28</sup>

Turner’s argument thoroughly backgrounded Indians in the course of U.S. development. While he acknowledged the presence of Indians through warfare with Euro-Americans, Turner devoted much more attention to the effects of the wilderness on European colonizers. “The wilderness masters the colonist,” Turner insisted. “It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American.” In fact, the deeper into the wilderness that pioneers ventured, Turner proclaimed, the more “American” they got—and not just as a matter of sartorial habit, but in their very psychology. “The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics,” Turner argued. He described the pioneer mentality:

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.<sup>29</sup>

But after 1890, the year the U.S. Census Bureau declared the frontier closed, there was no more “free” land along the frontier to be settled. “Never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves,” Turner concluded. While he argued that 1890 was the end of an era in America, he did not venture much of a guess about what came next. Whatever that future might look like, it was evident to many Euro-American scholars that Indians would not be a part of it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>29</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in US History,” in *The Frontier in American History*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> In the same year that the Bureau of the Census reported the frontier was closed, it also gathered statistics about the number of Indians still living in the United States. In 1850, the federal government had counted 400,764 Indians

As a philosopher, Dewey continued from where Turner as a historian had left off. Dewey took three major elements of Turner's frontier thesis to heart. First, Dewey cribbed from Turner the idea that the frontier was both a physical and a psychological boundary line between wilderness and civilization represented by Indians and Euro-Americans pioneers; second, that settlement of the frontier meant Euro-Americans crossed that boundary line, and in so doing produced a new kind of political culture unique to the United States; and third, that this frontier history powerfully defined the nation's democratic character long after the frontier was declared closed in 1890.

For one, Dewey imagined the frontier as the boundary between wilderness and civilization, a boundary that could be read on the landscape itself. "Our pioneer forefathers faced the problem of subduing a continent; of bringing fields under cultivation; of exploiting forests and mines to procure the material for homes and shops; of establishing means of transportation and communication; of pushing onward the frontier that separated what was at least a rudimentary civilization from untamed and often savage nature," Dewey wrote in "Education, the Foundation for Social Organization" in 1937.<sup>31</sup> The physical barrenness of the wilderness was what prompted settlers to a life of action: "The man who was honored on the frontier was the man who could shoot straight, fell his trees, and subdue the soil," Dewey observed. "The influence of the frontier was largely on the side of the value of work, and the reprobation of idleness."<sup>32</sup> This life of action (one wonders at whom Dewey imagined pioneers were shooting) had consequences. Instead of acting habitually, Americans thrust into the wilderness had to

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"taxed and not taxed"; by 1890 there were only a little over half that number at 248,253. Bureau of the Census, *Report on Indians Taxed and Indians Not Taxed In the United States (Except Alaska) at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, cited in Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 200.

<sup>31</sup> Dewey, "Education, the Foundation for Social Organization" (1936), *Later Works*, 11: 231.

<sup>32</sup> Dewey, "The Renaissance and Reformation to the Revolutions," *Later Works*, 7:145.

experiment. This was in part because “our forefathers were constantly moving on,” Dewey suggested:

Many of them moved on physically. Their migrations and new settlements created a constantly expanding frontier and horizon. But even those who stayed in one place always found, as long as pioneer days existed, something new to do. There was some forest to cut down to make way for grain fields; there were houses and fences to put up, and with their own hands; there were all the household articles and clothing to be made at home; skins to be tanned, soap to be manufactured, candles to be dipped, and so on in almost endless variety. They did not live in a ready-made world, but in a world they were themselves making.<sup>33</sup>

Much like Turner, Dewey believed that the frontier imperative of innovation led American pioneers to take the old political and cultural institutions of Europe and reconstruct them for a new context in a frontier situation. In Turner’s story, settling the wilderness had functioned as “breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities.”<sup>34</sup> Dewey saw this remaking of the old for new circumstances as an example of his own method of experimentalism and reconstruction in the history of the United States. Dewey explained in a 1939 essay called “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us” that the expansion of the United States by settlers in the nineteenth century was an exercise in experimentalism enabled by “a group of men who were capable of readapting older institutions and ideas to meet the situations provided by new physical conditions—a group of men extraordinarily gifted in political inventiveness.” This process of reinvention was required along the frontier rather than in America’s urban places because nothing in the way of political institutions fit to that environment existed—save, of course, for those of Indigenous people.

Instead of recognizing or borrowing from Indigenous people’s political practices in “middle ground” places such as Michigan, Dewey suggested that new democratic political forms

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<sup>33</sup> Dewey, “Construction and Criticism,” 129.

<sup>34</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in US History,” in *The Frontier in American History*, 38.

were created by Euro-Americans precisely because the wilderness beyond civilization was a land without sovereignty, political subjectivity, or institutions that could be built upon, borrowed, or integrated by ranks of an expanding nation of settlers. Dewey understood the process of creating new political institutions from the old as a fortuitous circumstance of American history; where enterprising pioneers met a land emptied of competing sovereignties, they could paint new pictures of political organization on a blank canvas, thus producing something uniquely American. Critically, Dewey regarded the possibility for the settlement of empty land as a means to alleviate social strife, similar to the function of what Turner described as a kind of safety valve.<sup>35</sup> “While the frontier was geographical and called for physical movement, it was more than that. It was economic and moral. It proclaimed in effect that America is opportunity; it held out the promise of the reward of success to all individuals who put forth the individual effort which would bring success,” Dewey wrote. “This freedom of opportunity more than political freedom created the real ‘American dream.’”<sup>36</sup> It was from this frontier legacy that Americans had developed a robust sense of social egalitarianism: “Even after conditions [of the frontier] changed and changed radically, it left its enduring impress in the distinctively American idea of freedom of opportunity for all alike, unhampered by differences in status, birth and family antecedents, and finally, in name at least, of race and sex,” concluded Dewey.<sup>37</sup> Like Turner, Dewey understood the frontier was not simply a geographic feature but a political and cultural one as well.

Furthermore, Dewey understood western expansion as personal pursuit afforded to individual pioneers by dint of the empty land that, when taken together, amounted to nothing less

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<sup>35</sup> Campbell, *Understanding Dewey*, 2-6.

<sup>36</sup> John Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us” (1939), *Later Works*, 14: 225-26.

<sup>37</sup> John Dewey, “Freedom” (1937), *Later Works*, 11:250.



than a national origin story. “There was always a frontier just beyond and the pioneer advanced to take possession of it,” Dewey wrote in “American Education Past and Future.” “His [the pioneer’s] real education came in contact with others and in struggles with the forces of nature. The aim was individualistic, but it was also in harmony with the needs of the nation.”<sup>38</sup> Possibly a consequence of a lingering deposit of Dewey’s Hegelianism, Dewey developed this idea further: “The struggle to achieve personal success and the struggle to lay the foundations of civilization in a new continent coincided.”<sup>39</sup> Dewey did not merely claim that pioneers had invented a new mode of democracy; he concluded that pioneers had created the beginning of a new “civilization.” This term, a lingering element of the frontier discourse, denoted more than simple governance; it implied a certain pattern of experimental thinking in contrast to savage mind. It was this framing that led Dewey to increasingly invoke the frontier until it became a significant topic in his writings in the 1930s.

### **The “Dual Problem” of the Frontier**

In his 1937 essay “Education, the Foundation for Social Organization,” Dewey condemned the nation’s past settlement of the frontier as the origin of the contemporary dilemma. In the nineteenth century, “an ever-beckoning frontier held out a perpetual promise of success in new fields,” wrote Dewey. “The result was a reckless waste of natural resources. Ever since the physical frontier disappeared, the nation has faced the dual problem of conserving the resources which remain and building up anew those which have suffered from the wasteful extravagance of earlier times.”<sup>40</sup> It was from this essay that I pay special attention to Dewey’s description of the frontier as a “dual problem.” For Dewey, America’s frontier history contained

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<sup>38</sup> John Dewey, “American Education Past and Future” (1931), *Later Works*, 6:97.

<sup>39</sup> Dewey, “Education, the Foundation for Social Organization,” 230.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

two sorts of problems: one that was productive, constructive, and ultimately educative, and one that was not.

The first aspect of Dewey's construction of the "dual problem" was that the frontier had offered pioneers a productive problem. Turner's frontier thesis had offered an account of how Europeans had gone into the wilderness of North America and encountered a dilemma. The material conditions of the frontier compelled these previously "civilized" people into a state of savagery. Civilized habits were rendered useless; new social patterns and institutions would have to be constructed in order for the activities to continue with minimum disruption. Subsequently, settlers of the frontier built a new kind of civilization, an American one distinct from Europe. This mapped rather seamlessly onto Dewey's concept of problematic situations, what he would later call the matrix of inquiry.<sup>41</sup>

According to Dewey's own method of experimentalism, the significance of the frontier in U.S. history was that Euro-American pioneers encountered the North American frontier as a continental-sized problematic situation. From his works *How We Think* and *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey had developed his matrix of inquiry, which rested on the resolution of problematic situations. These are situations provoked when agents cannot perform tasks or take actions in the world efficiently because their previously accumulated habits prove insufficient to resolve the uncertainty of the situation. New strategies are required to untrouble the flow of experience. After engaging in experimentation, agents will eventually find solutions that resolve these problems. When their experience becomes once again habitual, action can continue. This is the nature of learning, or what Dewey calls growth. I argue that Dewey married Turner's frontier

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<sup>41</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *Later Works*, 12. See also Pratt, *Logic: Inquiry, Argument, and Order* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 40-43.

thesis with his experimentalism: the supposed wilderness of the frontier became a problematic situation that was resolved when it was settled.

In Dewey's view, pioneers like Frederick Riggs and their enterprises such as land clearance, agriculture, home-building, and barn-raising represented the cultivation of experimental intelligence in the course of resolving the problematic situation posed by the wilderness conditions of the frontier. Taken out of the materially developed and psychologically civilized environment of Europe, life on the frontier required reflection, problem-solving, and initiative. Their social occupations, which had been more developed in Europe, had to be recreated anew in America. Indians, on the other hand, were too accommodated to their surroundings to derive similar stimulus from this environment. Unlike Euro-Americans and their agriculture, the wilderness did not present Indians and their "hunting psychosis" with problematic situations. As their social occupations were adjusted to the environment, savage psychology remained habitual. To the Indian-as-savage, wilderness was ultimately not as richly an educative experience (an environment which begged to be controlled to more intelligent ends). Pioneers controlled, while Indians accommodated. In so doing, pioneering bootstrapped experimental intelligence in the civilized psychology of Euro-Americans. Out of the primitive conditions of the frontier, they had developed a democratic culture based on a blend of individual autonomy and community interdependence. The result was the origin of American democracy.

As a result, what place contemporary Indigenous people had in post-frontier life remained an unresolved question in Dewey's philosophy. Writing in the early 1940s, Dewey outlined a solution for revitalizing American democracy now that the frontier was gone: "We now have to recreate by deliberate and determined endeavor the kind of democracy which in its origin one hundred and fifty years ago was largely the product of a fortunate combination of men

and circumstances.”<sup>42</sup> The problem of the frontier’s closure could be solved by schools which “re-opened” it in their classrooms through the use of experiential pedagogy. Schools would provide the catalyst for experimental intelligence for twentieth-century children, as the frontier environment had done for a generation of nineteenth-century pioneers. As a historical explanation for how Euro-Americans had invented democracy on the frontier while Indians had not, Dewey substituted racial recapitulation with the frontier thesis. In a telling passage from “Interpretation of Savage Mind,” Dewey writes with inadvertent insight that, for Indians-as-savages,

The land is not a means to a result but an intimate and fused portion of life—a matter not of objective inspection and analysis, but of affectionate and sympathetic regard. Plants and animals are not “things,” but are factors in the display of energy and form the contents of most intense satisfactions. The “animism” of primitive mind is a necessary expression of the immediacy of relation existing between want, overt activity, that which affords satisfaction and the attained satisfaction itself. Only when things are treated simply as *means*, are marked off and held off against remote ends, do they become “objects.”<sup>43</sup>

Because they did not treat the land and its inhabitants as objects, Indians had not developed experimental intelligence as capacious as Euro-Americans. With a psychology of accommodation, American Indian people were condemned to simply reproduce savagery. Insofar as Euro-Americans converted nature into objects, they had brought the wilderness conditions of the frontier under control. The result was that pioneers had brought far greater experimental intelligence to bear on the North American environment than Indians. What pioneers had done on the frontier, a new generation of educators might accomplish in their classrooms.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, however, Dewey ultimately did not cite America’s frontier history as a triumphal story of progress. This has led some scholars to suggest that

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<sup>42</sup> Dewey, “Creative Democracy,” 225-26.

<sup>43</sup> Dewey, “Interpretation of Savage Mind,” 45.

Dewey rejected Turner's frontier thesis. In *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, Kerwin Klein has argued that Dewey's rendition of the frontier in his philosophy stands as an important critique of Turner and the associated dialectic between wilderness and civilization. Klein suggests that Dewey's writing on the frontier differed from Turner's thesis not by quibbling with the empirical evidence for Turner's story, but instead contrasting the ultimate meaning of that history. According to Klein, "what was at issue" for Dewey "was the significance, the meaning and the moral, of frontier history." In particular, Klein draws from Dewey's invocation of the frontier in his 1922 essay "The American Intellectual Frontier," an essay where Dewey reflects on the career of William Jennings Bryan, the Scopes Trial, and the rise—and supposed fall—of religious evangelicalism in the West. In this essay, Dewey tries to square how these reactionary forces were produced from the crucible of what was once the cutting edge of innovation in the United States, the frontier.<sup>44</sup>

Klein characterizes Dewey's argument in that essay as asserting that the "dialectic of civilization and wilderness fractured the American self, generating a deep fear of wilderness disorder and anarchic individualism. This ironically undercuts the democratic synthesis that was supposed to be the frontier's legacy to the twentieth century."<sup>45</sup> In this way, Klein suggests that Dewey rejected Turner's progressive and teleological version of the democratic potential in the frontier in favor of a declension narrative more rooted in contingency. Kerwin's treatment of Dewey's critique is compelling as a philosophical analysis of Turner's version of the dialectic

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<sup>44</sup> Klein suggests that this essay is less of an outright critique of Turner than it is an intervention in political philosophy and historical methodology that serves as a corrective to dualisms between history and narration, facts and interpretation, and change and permanence. Klein's treatment of Dewey pairs his essay "The American Intellectual Frontier" in 1922 with his political philosophy of Liberalism in *Liberalism and Social Action* in 1935, and finally Dewey's historical methodology in *Logic* in 1936. Nevertheless, Klein's view of Dewey's intervention has ramifications for how we should understand Dewey's relationship with Turner's vision of the American frontier. Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 99-107.

<sup>45</sup> Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 108.

between wilderness and civilization central to the frontier thesis, but it too narrowly considers Dewey's use of the frontier discourse throughout his corpus. Based as it is on a single essay that Dewey wrote as a reflection on populism, religion, and science in American life in the 1920s, Klein's analysis does not sufficiently treat Dewey's many and sustained references to the frontier across his work. Instead, Dewey began thinking about the frontier, history, and democracy—and, by extension, Indigenous people's place in this history—in the first decades of his career in Michigan. Dewey's lived frontier discourse in Michigan and his relationship with Frederick Riggs cannot be underestimated. Moreover, Turner's thesis gave shape to his history curriculum at the Laboratory School. And the frontier discourse profoundly molded Dewey's backgrounding and foiling of Indians-as-savages that led to the figure of the Instrumental Indian. Dewey did not so much reject Turner's frontier thesis as he experimentalized it.<sup>46</sup>

To Klein's point, it is important to note that Dewey's invocation of the frontier was typically in the service of humane and democratic ends: specifically, as he critiqued Americans' turn from science in the 1920s or the failure of the New Deal to finally secure economic equality for all in the 1930s. Dewey did point to America's settlement of the frontier to excoriate the result of economic speculation in the West, a land ripe for individual get-rich-quick schemes, primitive accumulation, and the corporate exploitation of labor. However, rather than renounce the idea of the frontier altogether, Dewey attempted to reconstruct it.

Dewey's warnings in the 1920s and 1930s about the crisis of democracy were made from his prominent position among the frontier progressives. Dewey evoked the frontier as a cautionary tale, especially in light of the upheavals of the Great Depression, to signal that American democracy was under threat. Dewey believed that as late as 1929, Americans were

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<sup>46</sup> John Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

riding the high from the innovation produced by expansion, resource extraction, and opportunity afforded by the frontier as a safety valve. By the time of the Depression, however, Dewey felt that this frontier legacy was spent; the rugged individualism and initiative that had worked so well on the frontier to deliver material wealth and social stability were now obsolete in the face of modern industrial life and mass culture. Dewey argued that the rugged individualism Americans associated with the frontier needed to be replaced with a communalism that he called “corporate individualism,” where entire communities could come together to navigate the challenges of a large, complex, and interconnected modern industrial world.<sup>47</sup> Only then could Americans recreate a “great community.”

In “Creative Democracy,” Dewey invoked the frontier to hitch the wagon of economic equality and upward mobility to the frontier discourse: “At the present time, the frontier is moral, not physical. The period of free lands that seemed boundless in extent has vanished. Unused resources are now human rather than material. They are found in the waste of grown men and women who are without the chance to work, and in the young men and young women who find doors closed where there was once opportunity.”<sup>48</sup> For Dewey, it was the Depression of the 1930s that signaled the real crisis of the closing of the frontier, and the end of the first great era of American experimentalism. By the 1920s, the frontier had become quite problematic in a different sense. Whereas the frontier had once been a problematic situation for pioneers, now the United States faced a post-frontier problem. Nowhere did Dewey believe the frontier was more problematic than in Muncie, Indiana.

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<sup>47</sup> The belief that the “frontier energy” of nineteenth century America could be channeled into Progressive-era reform is an attitude shared by both Dewey and Turner and their cohort of frontier progressives. See Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism*, 53-68, 122-42.

<sup>48</sup> Dewey, “Creative Democracy,” 225-26.

### ***Middletown: A Study in Modern American (Frontier) Culture***

In 1929, Robert and Helen Lynd put Muncie, Indiana, on Dewey's scholarly map when they published *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*. This groundbreaking study was the result of the Lynds' eighteen-month research in Muncie in 1924. Using the methods of anthropology they had acquired during their training at Columbia University, the Lynds found that Muncie stood as a representative community for America. In so doing, they concluded the local community was being torn apart, disintegrated, and made insular by its seemingly overwhelming interest in individual material acquisitiveness. This spirit, which had served Muncie well in an era as a pioneer outpost on the frontier, was now eating Muncie from the inside out. *Middletown* was a story of how America's early desire to get ahead was now setting it back. The work, purported to be a stand-in for any community in the United States, fit Dewey's growing concerns about the "double heritage" of the frontier like a glove.

*Middletown's* authors had their own frontier origins. Robert Lynd was born in 1892 in New Albany, Indiana, on land that was seized late in the Revolutionary War by George Rogers Clark from Indigenous people living in the Ohio River Valley region who had allied themselves with the British. Much like the Riggs family who had moved from New York to Fenton, Michigan, the town of New Albany was founded by pioneers from New York in 1813. Robert went on to earn a bachelor of arts from Princeton in 1914 and attended the New School for Social Research in the early 1920s, before making his way to Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1920. In 1921, while hiking Mount Washington, Robert met Helen Merrill. Helen was a fellow Midwesterner, born in La Grange, Illinois, in 1896. La Grange, a town quickly subsumed by Chicago, made Helen a virtual next-door neighbor to Dewey's Laboratory School when it opened that same year. Leaving the Great Lakes for New England, she attended



Wellesley College and earned her bachelor's degree in 1919. After graduation, Helen took up a job as a teacher at a Euro-American boarding school in New York, and not long after, she met Robert. After the two Midwestern transplants were married in 1921, the Lynds also cemented their relationship as a formidable scholarly partnership when they both enrolled at Columbia University.<sup>49</sup>

Columbia was appealing to both the Lynds as a place where they could receive graduate training from the practitioners at the cutting edge of social scientific research. In particular, both Robert and Helen were interested in matters of social morality, ethics, and community values. For Robert, this interest had originated in his earlier consideration of joining the ministry. As part of his education at Union Theological Seminary, Robert had been dispatched to the Far West for summer missionary work. He wound up in Elk Basin, Wyoming, near an oil camp operated by Standard Oil. According to his son Staughton Lynd, Robert was initially skeptical of Rockefeller and his operation. The feeling of distrust among the local oilmen was mutual, which led Robert to take up "a job as a pick and shovel laborer" in order to make them more amenable to his Sunday night preaching at a nearby school.<sup>50</sup> After he left Wyoming, Robert wrote an essay critical of the working conditions at Elk Basin, leading to an exchange with Rockefeller himself in pages of *The Survey*.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, Robert was slowly won over by the Rockefeller Foundation for its support of the Interchurch World Commission.

Yet Robert's early interest in religion was slipping; his work at Columbia had made him far more interested in the broader social forces that shaped the values of community life. As Sarah Igo relates, "His major influences were not the faculty at Union Theological, but his

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<sup>49</sup> Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 32.

<sup>50</sup> Staughton Lynd, "Making Middletown," *Indiana Magazine of History* 101, no. 3 (September 2005): 226-38.

<sup>51</sup> Igo, *The Averaged American*, 33.

teachers at Columbia: philosopher John Dewey and economist Wesley Mitchell.” During their graduate training at Columbia, the Lynds were influenced by the likes of Veblen, Mitchell, and Dewey. Like Dewey, “Robert harbored strong opinions about the impoverishment of modern life and the inequities of social organization,” Igo notes. Perhaps this is why the Lynds ultimately came to embrace a Deweyan term for the target of their critiques: the “pecuniary civilization” that seemed to be usurping all other forms of social goods in American life.<sup>52</sup>

An opportunity to put their research interests into practice soon arose in 1923. It came from an unlikely source: Robert’s former adversary in John Rockefeller. The Rockefeller Foundation’s Institute for Social and Religious Research (ISRR) approached the former critic to commission him for a study that would “drop a plumb line into American Christendom via the Small City.”<sup>53</sup> Robert agreed to take it on, and Helen joined the effort soon after. As the Lynds began to design their study, it became clear that there was tension between what the ISRR had commissioned them to do and what they wanted to study.<sup>54</sup> Informed by Rockefeller’s Baptist philanthropy, the ISRR sought a study of churches and church life. The Lynds believed that not only would such churches have to be properly contextualized within the wider context of community life, but that church life hardly captured what was truly representative about small town life in the United States. “What underlay the dispute between the Lynds and the committee sponsoring their study was not religion, but anthropology,” argues Straughton Lynd. “My parents were convinced that any single facet of a community life, such as religion, could only be

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Igo suggests that hiring a former critic of Rockefeller would have been an appealing way to demonstrate the institute’s “commitment to ‘disinterested research.’” Igo, *The Averaged American*, 33. Lynd, “Making Middletown,” 229. Robert Lynd and John Rockefeller had a written exchange in the pages of the *Survey* journal. See Robert S. Lynd, “Done in Oil,” and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., “A Promise of Better Days,” *The Survey: Graphic Number 49* (November 1, 1922), 137-175.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Harvey, “Robert S. Lynd, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and *Middletown*,” *Indiana Magazine of History*. 79, no. 4 (December 1983): 330-54.

understood in the context of the total life of the community.”<sup>55</sup> The tension between ISRR and the Lynds was a matter of method.<sup>56</sup> According to Igo, “The Lynds made not the Protestant church, but the entirety of modern American life the object of their inquiry.”<sup>57</sup> Where the ISRR had supplied the Lynds with their mission to find a representative town, it was their Columbia training with the likes of Dewey that had supplied their anthropological method.

As a result of this mixed methodological genealogy, *Middletown* had two important features. First, *Middletown* had claimed to have revealed this American “middle” by means of anthropology. As Sarah Igo argues, when the study was inaugurated in 1924, anthropology was regarded as a method typically associated with the study of savage peoples. That anthropologists typically left civilization behind to insert themselves in a foreign culture was a core tenet of the method. As outside observers, anthropologists claimed they could be more objective than cultural insiders. Retooled for the United States, such anthropology seemed to offer an objective vision of American society. *Middletown* purported to use the method of anthropology at home. Second, this anthropological research in Muncie, Indiana, purported to reveal a “representative” town in the United States. Whereas most anthropological research at the time tended to focus on people and factions on the fringe of a larger cultural group, the Lynds aimed at the center. In the case of *Middletown*, the middle was both cultural and geographical. At the same time Muncie appeared on maps as the center of the country, its residents seemed to give credence to the image

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<sup>55</sup> Lynd, “Making Middletown,” 231.

<sup>56</sup> Rockefeller and the Phelps-Stokes fund also funded other projects in education. They sought to embrace the same rise in social science methods; Lewis Meriam from the Census Bureau and the Government Research Institute shared similar methodological commitments to the Lynds’ pursuit of social sciences to solve social problems. In this case, it was the problem of Indian administration. The Phelps-Stokes fund also was a major institutional partner to the New York People’s Institute. See Khalil A. Johnson Jr., “Problem Solver or ‘Evil Genius’: Thomas Jesse Jones and *The Problem of Indian Administration*.” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 37-69.

<sup>57</sup> Igo, *The Averaged American*, 35.

of an “average American.” In this fashion, Muncie became a stand-in for an imagined “middle America.”<sup>58</sup>

While many factors contributed to the selection of Muncie, Indiana, as their research site, the historiography on *Middletown* emphasizes that the primary reason the Lynds chose Muncie was their intention to find a community that could best represent American life. “Nothing can be more enlightening than to gain precisely that degree of objectivity and perspective with which we view ‘savage’ peoples,” the Lynds wrote of their method. Helen Lynd later wrote that “we were very much interested in what it would look like for an anthropological technique to be applied to an American city.”<sup>59</sup> In an oft-quoted passage from *Middletown*, the Lynds explained their method:

It seemed a distinct advantage to deal with a homogenous, native-born population, even though such a population is unusual in an American industrial city. This, instead of being forced to handle two major variables, racial change and cultural change, the field staff was enabled to concentrate upon cultural change. The study thus became one of the interplay of a relatively constant native American stock and its changing environment.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, the primary reason Muncie became *Middletown* was in part because the Lynds believed the majority White population of Muncie could make race a control variable in the study of representative American life. At the same time, the Lynds largely excluded the Black residents of Muncie from their study altogether. This means there were very few Black informants in the study of America’s supposedly most “representative” town.<sup>61</sup> While the Lynds attempted to address this problem in a follow-up study, few contemporary scholars believe they

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<sup>58</sup> Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American*, 23-102.

<sup>59</sup> Helen Merrell Lynd and Staughton Lynd, *Possibilities* (Bronxville, NY: 1983), 36.

<sup>60</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> This flaw in the method has inspired several sociological correctives since the 1930s. See Luke Lassiter, “‘To Fill in the Missing Piece of the Middletown Puzzle’: Lessons from Re-Studying Middletown,” *The Sociological Review* 60, no. 3 (2012): 421-37. However, these focus primarily on the exclusion of African Americans and Jewish people from the Lynds’ original study.

adequately repaired their mistake. This flaw at the heart of *Middletown* remains one of the most important legacies of early anthropology and sociology. In their hopes to find a representative community, the Lynds had made *Middletown* an instrument of Whiteness.<sup>62</sup>

However, this racial critique of the Lynds' method largely ignores the fact that another important factor in the methodology was the logic of Native erasure embedded in the selection of Muncie as a research site in the first place. Muncie was appealing, as it represented the U.S. settlement of the frontier. Muncie was an ideal place for the Lynds' study not only because they thought it would allow them to control for race, but also because Muncie was a former frontier town. Citing Brian Dippie's *The Vanishing American*, Sarah Igo notes that "much like contemporary ethnographers busily documenting the 'vanishing' American Indian, the Lynds captured in the study's pages the demise of an earlier, seemingly more authentic, American community."<sup>63</sup> By controlling for race, they could isolate for history and reveal cultural change over time. In so doing, the Lynds placed the frontier discourse at the center of their representative America community and its culture.<sup>64</sup> *Middletown* was mostly a study in Whiteness not only because it ignored the Black residents of Muncie, but because the Lynds believed that Muncie itself was a product of the frontier.

The frontier discourse helped to harmonize *Middletown*'s methodological innovations. First, an ideal research site for the Lynds would be one where they could try to isolate cultural change over time by demonstrating how a changing natural and social environment had wrought

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<sup>62</sup> The need to decolonize Dewey is evident even in anti-racist reconsiderations of *Middletown*. For example, Campbell and Lassiter's study of collaborative ethnography as pedagogy in revisiting *Middletown*'s missing Black informants cites Dewey's influence in the Lynds' "collaborative" ethnographic method. See Elizabeth Campbell and Luke E. Lassiter, "From Collaborative Ethnography to Collaborative Pedagogy: Reflections on the Other Side of *Middletown* Project and Community-University Research Partnerships," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (December 2010): 381.

<sup>63</sup> Igo, *The Averaged American*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Lynd, "Making *Middletown*," 235.

a subsequent psychological change in the members of its community. The frontier thesis offered a useful temporal framework for selecting such a community. It was no accident that the periodization of *Middletown* was 1890 to 1924. Because the frontier thesis pointed to the threshold of 1890 and the closure of the frontier by declaration of the U.S. census, many of the distinctly American communities in the United States could be divided into supposedly premodern and modern periods. The Lynds were pretty clear about their rationale: “The year 1890 was selected as the base-line against which to project that culture of today because ... this narrow strip of thirty-five years comprehends for hundreds of American communities the industrial revolution that has descended upon villages and towns, metamorphosing them into a thing of Rotary Clubs, central trade councils, and Chamber of Commerce contests for ‘bigger and better’ cities.”<sup>65</sup> From log cabins to the chamber of commerce, Muncie could tell the story that was representative of America because it was a frontier town.

While there were many factors in the Lynds’ rationale for choosing a research site, the Lynds’ attention seemed inexorably drawn away from the East Coast and towards the Great Lakes in large part because of the idea that frontier towns were a quintessentially unique part of America’s history. They selected Muncie in part because it supposedly offered a dramatic yet representative pattern of historical development from frontier outpost to regional industrial center. Having grown up in the Great Lakes themselves, the Lynds regarded Muncie as emblematic of the mode of settlement of the region. The state of wilderness became the environmental baseline from which Muncie had since grown. Due to its clear temporal markers in the history of the United States, the frontier thesis made Muncie an appealing site for analysis.

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<sup>65</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), 6.

But the larger frontier discourse also made Muncie an alluring place for the Lynds to convert their anthropological method from the study of a savage-periphery to civilized center. This was not just a matter of time, but of psychology. Muncie was a window into the psychological continuity of the frontier. Because their ancestors had lived the transformation of the wilderness to civilization, Muncie's Euro-Americans had a seemingly direct lineage to the psychological origins of civilization in the United States. If anthropology was the study of savage peoples who had lived in the wilderness, and civilization the product of the settlement of that wilderness by pioneers, what could be a better research site for anthropologists to make the leap from Indians-as-savages to civilized Euro-Americans? After all, were not Muncie's pioneers first reduced to "savage mind" when they found themselves in the wilderness, a problematic situation that led to the development of experimental intelligence? Muncie's past as a frontier outpost seemed to also offer a proximity to Indians-as-savages that made it amenable to their method of anthropology.

The term "frontier" only appears once in *Middletown*. Ironically, it appears in the Lynds' citation of Dewey's 1922 article in *The New Republic* called "The American Intellectual Frontier." While the term itself may have been absent from their study, ideas about the frontier directly shaped their method. As told by the Lynds, history began in Middletown in the year 1820. Four years after Indiana statehood as organized by the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the first Euro-American people arrived in the region, aiming to settle on land that they hoped was devoid of Indians. Their aims were facilitated by the organization of the Delaware County of 1827, which transformed what had been Miami land into parcels for non-Native settlers by the provisions of the Land Ordinance of 1785. Like hundreds of other such counties across the frontier, these jurisdictions were formed out of Indigenous territory and set

on a legal path to incorporation in the United States. While this history was occluded by the Lynds' telling, just as much as Muncie stood for "Middletown," Delaware County could rightly be understood as "Middlecounty," as it had been formed by the same processes set in motion by the Northwest Ordinance.

*Middletown* depicts Muncie in 1840 as typical of the "rude pioneer villages of the state."<sup>66</sup> The Lynds present this history through an interview with a local physician who was old enough to remember the Middletown home of his youth lived in a "log farmhouse ... walls bare save for three prized pictures of Washington, Jackson, and Clay." The Lynds reveled in the frontier detail provided by their pioneer informant; they told a story of Middletown's origins in log cabin homes where food was cooked over an open fire and candles illuminated the room at night.<sup>67</sup> Middletown was a community made of homesteads, where animals like pigs and cattle were raised by families, folk remedies were brewed for sickness, and a frontier community got along without newspapers by relying on religious revivals to pass gossip back and forth. The Lynds even captured some of the old-timers' references to the Great Meteor Storm of 1833, an occurrence in Middletown where "men would talk together for hours on the Providential portent of the great comet of 1843, or of the time ten years before when the 'stars fell.'"<sup>68</sup> Clusters of pioneer homesteads, oases in the vast desert of wilderness, took the place of the baseline condition from which Middletown had outgrown.

But the Lynds' historical narrative suddenly jumps from the frontier scene of the log cabin in the 1840s to the year 1885. This decade, they imply, saw the last days of Muncie as a frontier town. No longer would the community be preoccupied only with such provincial

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<sup>66</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



concerns as keeping cows out of their neighbors' fields or struggling to install sewer pipes; the small "placid country-seat" was about to cross the threshold into the "helter-skelter" of modernity.<sup>69</sup> Just like Frederick Jackson Turner, the Lynds cited the federal census as evidence for the westward migration of industry, a new industrial frontier that "by 1890 ... had pushed on until it was eight and one-half miles west of Canton, Ohio." The first signs of its arrival in Middletown came in the form of a factory for converting flax into bags; then dry goods stores expanded into retailers; "and then in the fall of '86 came gas."<sup>70</sup> Wage work opportunities from the refinement of gas exploded, and Middletown saw an influx of workers from 1887 to 1892. With increased population, real estate prices skyrocketed. New financial institutions appeared. These were followed with new industries—an iron mill, a bridge manufacturer, a nail works. "The boom was on," the Lynds concluded.<sup>71</sup>

The Lynds were clearly of two minds about the frontier history of Muncie. In the beginning of Muncie's history, pioneers who exhibited "rugged individualism" were rewarded. Pioneering families that focused entirely on acquiring the material wealth to survive on the frontier were well suited for living in such places as Muncie. Frontier associations had necessitated face-to-face relationships, the bedrock of democratic culture. But when the gas industry came to town in the late 1880s, the nature of the social environment was forever altered. Gone were the homesteads, fields, and stables of premodern Muncie, replaced by the factories, refineries, and railroads. In this modernization, Muncie had lost the close, local community that had held it together as an outpost of civilization on the frontier. However, the Lynds concluded that while Muncie's former frontier social occupations were diminishing, the pioneer ethos

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 14.

remained. This vestigial psychology was then ripe for co-option by the powers of capital. By dividing the town's history into two periods upon the wedge of the year 1890, the closure of the frontier offered a clear beginning for the Lynds' declension story. Prior to 1890, Muncie's pioneer character had led to a sense of authentic American community; after 1890, the town began to eat itself alive.

While life on the frontier had prompted the creation of face-to-face social occupations which had created a community out of rugged individualists, the problems now confronting Middletown were also partially the fault of the frontier legacy itself. That history had encoded the habits of the pioneer that were no longer likely to serve contemporary community nearly as well. "The pioneer tradition that 'you can't keep a good man down' and the religious tradition of free rational choice in finding one's 'calling' have helped to foster a *laissez-faire* attitude toward matching the individual and the job."<sup>72</sup> At the same time, the Lynds blamed a "strong pioneer individualism which clings to health as a private matter," rejecting public health measures and viewing government involvement with its administration with suspicion.<sup>73</sup> The frontier had made Middletown residents too quick to fall back on self-reliance. "It was contrary to the traditions of this pioneer community that anybody be habitually dependent upon the group; if he was, it was certainly 'his own fault.'"<sup>74</sup>

The Lynds laid much of the blame for this investment in the pecuniary culture at the feet of the town's misplaced priorities. For example, the Lynds studied the catalog of the public libraries, their circulation among patrons, and the integration with public schools. They surveyed this material in an attempt to discover patterns about what Muncie was reading. They found that

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<sup>72</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 48.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

a preponderance of the books checked out to patrons was “entirely confined to a limited number of the business class.”<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the corollary disappearance of groups such as Muncie’s Young Ladies Reading Circle, Christian Literary Society, Literary League, Literary Home Circle, and Literary Fireside Club heralded a loss of local communities that supported a democratic society.<sup>76</sup> “Every one in Middletown runs absorbed in keeping *his* job or raising *his* wages, building *his* home, ‘boosting’ *his* club or church, educating *his* children,” the Lynds wrote with barely veiled contempt.<sup>77</sup> All of this led Robert and Helen Lynd to conclude that “Middletown’s philosophy is essentially personal—a philosophy of the pioneer.”<sup>78</sup>

### **Individualism Old and New**

Dewey quickly found Middletown’s findings to be amendable to his own emerging critique of American democracy.<sup>79</sup> Part of his amenability to the Lynds’ findings was that they had brought lessons they had learned from Dewey at Columbia to their study of Muncie. For example, in their analysis of Muncie’s sartorial trends, the Lynds cited Dewey’s method for their analysis. “John Dewey speaks of the origins of clothing ‘in situations of unusual awe or

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<sup>75</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 230.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.

<sup>79</sup> On this count, the Lynds might have been on to something. Muncie residents did seem to cling to the frontier legacy of their town. In a survey of the digital collection “What Middletown Read,” an archive of every book checked out by the Muncie Public Library between 1891 and 1902, it is clear that it was not just business books that Muncie read, but books that reflected the frontier discourse. James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* was added to library shelves in 1896. By the end of 1902, it had been checked out 58 times. (His novel *The Pathfinder* earned Cooper another 48 checkouts.) Other works that depicted Indians circulated by the Muncie library system include George Bird Grinnell’s *The Story of the Indian* (20 checkouts), John Musick’s *Braddock: a Story of the French and Indian War* (37 checkouts), and Agnes Laut’s *The Lords of the North* (34 checkouts). These works were overshadowed by the circulation of historical fiction and frontier nostalgia closer to Indiana by the likes of Edward Sylvester Ellis. Together, his pioneer titles—*Ned in the Block-House*, *Ned in the Woods*, *the Cabin in the Clearing: A Tale of the Frontier*, *Campfire and Wigwam*, etc.—account for a whopping 784 checkouts. These circulations compared to Helen Hunt Jackson’s chronicle of broken treaties *A Century of Dishonor* accessioned in 1897, which was checked out by Muncie residents just 15 times. As a community which imagined itself as part of the frontier, Muncie residents had a long and enduring appetite for Indians matched only by their selective historical memory. “What Middletown Read,” Center for Middletown Studies, Ball State University Libraries and Muncie Public Library, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://lib.bsu.edu/wmr/index.php>.

prestigious display,” they wrote of Dewey’s accounts of “savage” life.<sup>80</sup> Dewey’s contemporary writings offered the Lynds a functionalist explanation that could make Americans’ pecuniary impulses legible to itself.

But more importantly, in many ways, the Lynds had preempted Dewey’s argument about the importance of local community to national democratic culture that came in two of his significant works from the end of the decade, *The Public and Its Problem* (1927) and *Individualism Old and New* (1930). Intended as a rejoinder to Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*, Dewey conceded to Lippmann that a national public was in “retreat” or was “eclipsed” by the forces of alienation in labor, industrial imperatives, and mass culture—just as the Lynds had revealed in Muncie. As Muncie’s “great community” had appeared to fray under the unrelenting pressures of “business mind,” it seemed to Dewey to be a cautionary tale about how the problem of the frontier was essentially a problem of “eclipsed” publics. Yet Dewey held out hope for democratic renewal in towns like Muncie. After all, Dewey argued that national democracy was only as strong as its local communities; in this sense, he could not surrender Muncie to the closure of the frontier. So what was preventing Muncie—and the United States—from recovering its lost sense of community?

The lesson of Middletown for Dewey can be read in his subsequent book, *Individualism Old and New*, published in 1930. *Individualism Old and New* was Dewey’s critique of the concept of rugged individualism birthed from the settlement of the frontier. In fact, it can be said that Muncie, Indiana, was the point of embarkation for Dewey’s most penetrating analysis of America’s culture of individualism. Entire chapters of *Individualism Old and New* came out of Dewey’s writing about *Middletown* in a series of essays from the *New Republic*. He wrote an

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<sup>80</sup> Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 161, FN 11.

article titled “The House Divided Against Itself” which appeared in the magazine in the fall of 1929, which became the first chapter of *Individualism Old and New*.<sup>81</sup>

After a second article followed called “America—By Formula,” the editors of *New Republic* realized that *Middletown* had captured Dewey’s imagination.<sup>82</sup> “We have been enormously interested in the group of ideas you discussed in ‘America—By Formula’ and in your previous article on Middletown,” they wrote to Dewey. “We are wondering whether you wouldn’t consider expanding your discussion of this subject into a series of articles, perhaps four or five in number, which would enable you to go into detail regarding matters you have merely mentioned in these articles?”<sup>83</sup> Daniel Mebane, alumnus of the University of Indiana and treasurer of *The New Republic*, believed that Dewey had so thoroughly learned the lessons of Muncie that his writing on the topic was “the best the paper has published during the period.”<sup>84</sup> Now, the editors were interested in Dewey as a sage of civilization, someone who might divine the lesson of Turner’s history for the future: “Is there a real danger that we may be swamped by the crush of the material civilization which is now crowding upon us?” Dewey took up the invitation, writing a series of article that were revised into *Individualism Old and New*.

“Anthropologically speaking, we are living in a money culture,” Dewey insisted in his new book. “Its cult and rites dominate.”<sup>85</sup> This was commensurate with the Lynds’ findings from *Middletown* which had exposed the pecuniary imperative of which Dewey was now so critical. Dewey cited the Lynds’ findings about the consumption of Middletown’s industries: “We live as if economic forces determined the growth and decay of institutions and settled the fate of

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<sup>81</sup> John Dewey, “The House Divided against Itself,” *The New Republic* 58, April 24, 1929.

<sup>82</sup> John Dewey, “‘America’—By Formula,” *The New Republic* 6, September 18, 1929.

<sup>83</sup> 1929.10.09 (06132): George Soule to John Dewey, October 9, 1929, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

<sup>84</sup> 1929.10.17 (06215): Daniel Mebane to John Dewey, October 17, 1929, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

<sup>85</sup> John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (1930), *Later Works*, 5:46.

individuals. Liberty becomes a well-nigh obsolete term; we start, go, and stop at the signal of a vast industrial machine.”<sup>86</sup> In fact, the problem facing American democracy was akin to a relapse into the wrong side of the frontier, that of savage mind. In his account of the continuity of experience, Dewey wrote as late as 1938 that “the difference between civilization and savagery... is found in the degree in which previous experiences have changed the objective conditions under which subsequent experiences take place. The existence of roads, of means of rapid movement and transportation, tools, implements, furniture, electric light and power, are illustrations. Destroy the external conditions of present civilized experience, and for a time our experience would relapse into that of barbaric peoples.”<sup>87</sup> Strip Muncie of its civilized infrastructure and its population might revert to its savage psychology.

The frontier, which had rolled over places like Michigan and Indiana in the nineteenth century, had now come full circle on the psychology of modern Euro-Americans. The lessons of the nation’s frontier—rugged individualism, extractive profligacy, industriousness next to godliness—had outlived their usefulness. They were strategies that fit older social problems. Now, these shibboleths took on the quality of a magic chant more befitting an Indian-as-savage than a modern American. “It is becoming a commonplace to say that ... we are living in some bygone century, anywhere from the thirteenth to the eighteenth, although physically and externally we belong to the twentieth century,” Dewey lamented. Americans were working harder than ever, under worsening labor conditions, and had little to show for the fruits of their labor in the face of an unprecedented economic depression—while clinging to the rugged individualism of the pioneer. Dewey concluded that “in such a contradictory condition, it is not

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>87</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938), *Later Works*, 13: 39.

surprising that a report of American life, such as is contained, for example, in *Middletown*, should frequently refer to a ‘bewildered’ or ‘confused’ state of mind as characteristic of us.”<sup>88</sup>

From his reading of *Middletown*, Dewey concluded that the frontier history of the United States offered contemporary Americans a “dual problem,” or what he called a “double heritage.” Lest his readers believe that Dewey disowned or renounced the democratic potential of the frontier, Dewey insisted that while the closure of the frontier had created a new social problem, it also contained within it a solution. While the physical frontier might be closed, what was needed was the reopening of a new frontier to galvanize a new American experimentalism. “Our tradition, our heritage, is itself double,” Dewey wrote. “It contains in itself the ideal of equality of opportunity and of freedom for all, without regard to birth and status, as a condition for the effective realization of that equality. But its promise of a new moral and religious outlook has not been attained.”<sup>89</sup> While this revival of the frontier democracy had yet to come to pass, Dewey wrote in part to galvanize his audience to search for the next frontier. Modern alternatives to the frontier’s function in American history as a national problematic situation would be the key to solving the next generation of democracy’s ills. Both in their historical temptation for material wealth and future path to redemption through community renewal, *Middletown*’s residents thus exposed the “double heritage” of the frontier. Dewey saw an opportunity for that renewal at a summer camp in Rifton, New York.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 46.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>90</sup> Waldo Frank was not the only one who noted Dewey’s esteem for pioneers. Lewis Mumford also critiqued William James for offering philosophical comfort to the “animus of the pioneer.” Like Frank, Mumford ultimately critiqued a version of Dewey which Dewey himself would have disavowed—but even broken clocks are correct twice a day. For example, Mumford scathingly described pragmatism as a philosophy from “the maw of the Middle West.” While residents of Indiana might not appreciate such a description, Mumford was right that Dewey had Muncie on the mind. Cited in Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 381-82.

## The Pioneer Youth of America

In the autumn of 1960, Leon Clark wrote a letter to Dewey's widow, Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey. Clark was writing in regards to his senior thesis at Salem College, which was a study of communist organizations in the United States. In the course of his research, he had found a passing remark about Dewey's support for a communist summer camp. "Do you remember ever hearing Professor Dewey mention a communist Pioneer group in this country?" he wrote. "I understand that Pioneer Youth was an experimental educational organization, neither communist nor socialist, which had support from leading educators, including Professor Dewey."<sup>91</sup> Grant, ever the thoughtful steward of her late husband's legacy, wrote Clark back. "I do not recall my husband ever mentioning a Communist Pioneer Group in this country."<sup>92</sup> What Grant did not recall, the Federal Bureau of Investigation certainly did. In its file on Dewey, the FBI noted that he "was advisor of the Pioneer Youth of America."<sup>93</sup>

As it turns out, both Clark and the FBI were confused for good reason. In the 1920s, Dewey had supported an organization called the Pioneer Youth of America, not to be confused with the communist Young Pioneers of America.<sup>94</sup> The Pioneer Youth found an advocate in Joshua Lieberman, who wrote *Creative Camping: A Coeducational Experiment in Personality Development and Social Living, being the record of six summers of the National Experimental Camp of Pioneer Youth of America*, with an introduction by William H. Kilpatrick.<sup>95</sup> In a June

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<sup>91</sup> Leon J. Clark to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, ca. September 1, 1960, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 4.

<sup>92</sup> Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey to Leon J. Clark, September 13, 1960; see also Leon J. Clark to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, September 29, 1960, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 4.

<sup>93</sup> "To whom it may concern," Federal Bureau of Investigation, April 29, 1943, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

<sup>94</sup> See Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers: Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 24, 84.

<sup>95</sup> Joshua Lieberman, *Creative Camping: A Coeducational Experiment in Personality Development and Social Living, Being the Record of Six Summers of the National Experimental Camp of Pioneer Youth of America* (New



1924 letter to the editor in *Nation*, Norman Thomas wrote that the Pioneer Youth of America had the support of several unions, including the Ladies Garment Workers.<sup>96</sup> What began as a socialist progressive education summer camp later did, in fact, come to be run by communists in the 1930s. However, for our purposes, the political ideology that animated the Pioneer Youth of America is less important than its pedagogy. The group became a pedagogical enterprise that caught Dewey's interest expressly because of *Middletown*.

Dewey endorsed the educative mission of the group. He wrote a series of form letters on behalf of the Pioneer Youth of America. One of these letters survives in Dewey's papers. Dewey began his pitch for the Pioneer Youth by excerpting *Middletown*:

"I would like to play with the children more than I do but I'm too tired even when I have the time.... And my man is so tired when he comes home from work that he just lies down and rests and never plays with the children." A working-class mother interviewed by the authors of *Middletown* thus explains why fatigue on the job or at housework never done prevents the giving of much time to the day-by-day lives of the children.

In his view, the pecuniary demands of this working-class mother had eroded her ability to give her children the best possible education.

This is why Dewey had written: "I am writing you to commend Pioneer Youth of America, an organization directly concerned about the children from such homes. It is helping the boys and girls of American workers to livelier interests in their world of work and play and to more creative uses of leisure."<sup>97</sup>

While there were many summer camps and open-air schools as part of the "Fresh Air" movement in the twentieth century, the Pioneer Youth summer camp was particular appealing to

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York: Association Press, 1931). Dewey had a copy of Lieberman's 1938 *New Trends in Group Work* in his personal library.

<sup>96</sup> Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey to Leon J. Clark, September 13, 1960.

<sup>97</sup> 1929.12.03 (04849): John Dewey to David Pinski, December 3, 1929, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

Dewey because he believed such a learning environment would blend recreation with experiential learning. The Pioneer Youth, Dewey believed, was “developing social intelligence among children” through summer camp programming led by progressive educators. Moreover, with the camp’s ample opportunities for outdoor play, Dewey was confident that students could achieve the recreation that was so desperately needed in an era of increasing alienation from mass industry, mass culture, and mass media. But the Pioneer Youth in particular had ultimately earned his endorsement because of *Middletown* and its clear-eyed analysis of the dual problem of the frontier. This camp programming, convened in the summer, would provide a chance for working-class children to ameliorate the problem of the frontier legacy and recover the frontier as a problematic situation through nature study.<sup>98</sup>

Paul Mishler calls the Pioneer Youth of America “an independent children’s organization oriented to the socialist Left.”<sup>99</sup> Founded in 1924, the Pioneer Youth aimed to practice democratic socialism through a racially integrated summer camp. The Pioneer Youth built their flagship summer camp in Rifton, New York, in 1927.<sup>100</sup> Notable African American academic August Meier had close connections with the camp. He attended as a camper in the 1930s and returned as a camp counselor in the 1940s, partially influenced by the fact his mother had become camp director. Meier described the Rifton camp as the product of “a heterogeneous group of reformers—anarchists, Communists, socialists, pacifists, union leaders in the garment trades, liberals and, very important, Progressive educators.” In his estimation, the camp’s political commitment to socialism was far outweighed by its adherence to a strikingly Deweyan pedagogy. “The progressive education orientation led the camp to emphasize individual freedom,

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<sup>98</sup> Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 25-26.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>100</sup> W. L. Rhyne, “Work Camps as Education,” *The High School Journal* 30, no. 4 (October 1947): 212-16.

and to adopt a practice of having the campers themselves decide democratically on what their activities would be. Thus, as much as possible, decisions about what was done were in the hands of the children rather than their counselors.”<sup>101</sup> This child-centered pedagogy has led historian of summer camps Leslie Paris to conclude that the Pioneer Youth’s pedagogy was “at the vanguard of trends in camping and in children’s education more broadly.”<sup>102</sup>

Based on Lieberman’s *Creative Camping*, the Rifton camp was a gem in the summer camp circuit. Much of the Pioneer Youth pedagogy rested on Indian woodcraft, which was fit into a larger scheme re-enacting the origins of frontier towns like Muncie, Indiana. The boys went camping in “half a dozen” tepees while the girls hiked nature trails, equipped with the materials to properly identify the Indians in the landscape—in this case, “Indian tobacco” and “Indian lettuce.”<sup>103</sup> None of these elements were accidental or done out of simple convenience; woodcraft, synonymous with premodernity, was the spine of the entire enterprise. Lieberman wrote about how the summer camp activities seamlessly flowed one into the next. If students needed a place to swim, they built a dam. If they wanted to go out further into the water, they learned how to build a canoe. To launch the canoe, they had to construct a dock. “To play Indian required a tepee,” Lieberman wrote. “This in turn contributed to a study of local history, and the resulting interest in the locality produced a play.”<sup>104</sup>

The Pioneer Youth wanted a taste of the Midwest in upstate New York. The local history of Rifton itself proved to be an important feature of the students’ education. The students were led by instructors to find marble and scraps of iron that they insisted were remains of a Dutch

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<sup>101</sup> August Meier to Lloyd Saletan, April 10, 1943, “Background on August Meier,” August Meier Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, accessed June 1, 2021, <http://findingaids.library.umass.edu/ead/mums844>.

<sup>102</sup> Leslie Paris, *Children’s Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 227.

<sup>103</sup> Lieberman, *Creative Camping*, 32, 243.

<sup>104</sup> Lieberman, *Creative Camping*, 19.

colony. Even more exciting was a cave nearby, where it was rumored Indians had once lived—and died. “The Indian skeletons, it was stated by the neighbors, were found in a sitting position and one of the graves contained a bottle, evidently considered by the Indian as of value and probably received in part payment for land.”<sup>105</sup> Thus duly compensated, the campers were free to occupy the land without a burden on their conscience. Emancipated from history, campers were free to bring Indians back to life themselves.

Campers occupied a great majority of time with dramas where they Played Indian. “Their efforts were an outgrowth of an interest in Indians,” Lieberman wrote. “They had Indian camp fires, dramatized Indian life very frequently, worked on costumes, made a tepee, sang Indian songs, and presented an original and spontaneous, though simple, play of Indian life.”<sup>106</sup> Lieberman praised the students’ dramatizations, not only because of their commendable aesthetic quality but because they required students to organize themselves and develop leadership skills. These Indian dramas apparently captured the collective imagination of the campers: “The entire camp worked for weeks with one end in view.”<sup>107</sup> Music was played to supplement the children’s “Indian dramatizations, for games and folk dancing, and for camp pageants.” Harmonics and drums were commonly featured. “Campfire signing was an opportunity to bring to the boys and girls American folk songs, Negro spirituals, and the folk songs of various nations, together with a few good camping songs.”<sup>108</sup> The variety of such songs even reflected fragments of racial recapitulation theory: “The folk dancing groups offered a cycle of Indian, Egyptian, Asiatic,

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>107</sup> Lieberman, *Creative Camping*, 19. On one occasion, one such Indian drama proved to be a productive failure. “A group of intermediate boys attempted an Indian play but made a total failure out of it, and were kidded about it by the other campers.” (One can only imagine the criteria by which such a performance was deemed a failure.) Stung by the reproach, some of “the intermediate boys who had not participated in the Indian play, presented a humorous and most effective burlesque on their own group’s efforts.” Playing Indian, it seemed, dovetailed with playing with gender. After the abortive Indian play, “burlesques became the rage.” Ibid., 60.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 52.

medieval and modern dances.”<sup>109</sup> These cultural pluralist rites expressed through Playing Indian (not unlike Collier’s Pageant of Nations), typically held about a campfire in the evening, were the marquee events for the Pioneers.

Long before the Pioneer Youth were busy dressing like “pirates, Indians, clowns, and snake dancers,” Dewey had already endorsed nature and woodcraft.<sup>110</sup> Woodcraft (which often utilized a curriculum of Playing Indian) was regarded as an innovation in experiential learning. For example, in *Schools of To-Morrow*, Dewey celebrated the Little School in the Woods in Greenwich, Connecticut. An experimental school, the Greenwich School implemented its woodcraft curriculum through Playing Indian.<sup>111</sup> “The basis of this work, the director of the school calls Woodcraft,” Dewey wrote. “He believes that experience in the things the woodman does—riding, hunting, camping, scouting, mountaineering, Indian-craft, boating, etc.—will make strong, healthy, and independent young people with well-developed characters and a true sense of the beauty of nature.”<sup>112</sup> Impressed how the woodcraft curriculum was integrated with formal classroom study, Dewey endorsed it as a welcome development of experiential education.

Dewey’s endorsement of the Pioneer Youth of America began a lasting relationship between the pragmatist and summer camp educators who extolled the pedagogical utility of Playing Indian. In his 1950 book, *The Theory of Camping: An introduction to Camping in Education*, Frank Lewis Irwin cited Dewey and his 1938 *Experience in Education* in support of woodcraft embodied in his camp curriculum. “The organized camp ... has an unusual opportunity to provide the child with many worth-while experiences,” he wrote. “But as Dewey

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>111</sup> On the Greenwich school’s and other experimental schools’ nature study, see “Marietta L. Johnson and the Fairhope School of Organic Education,” in J. F. Staring, *Midwives of Progressive Education: The Bureau of Educational Experiments, 1916-1919* (Nijmegen: Drukkerij Efficient, 2013).

<sup>112</sup> Dewey, *The Schools of To-Morrow*, 267.

has said, not all ‘worth-while’ experiences are educative to all children.”<sup>113</sup> In a Deweyan vocabulary of habitual and reflective thinking, Irwin concluded that woodcraft camp “stimulates him to use faculties needed in being aware of his environment.” The monotony of regimented curriculum, where students would fall into habitual lines of thinking, could be constructively disrupted by camp life. “For the child who leads a hum-drum or monotonous existence at home or in school, the camp is indeed refreshing,” Irwin mused.

Playing Indian was never far away from these concerns; Irwin believed camp tasks would invite students to reflective experience, including “dividing the supper dessert, or in laying out the ball diamond, or in figuring the length of canvas for an Indian tepee.”<sup>114</sup> Irwin’s model camp included programs like “Indian Friendship Night,” where the campers would exchange hand-crafted gifts, dance “Indian dances,” and tell invented legends around the campfire. In these activities at camp, Irwin believed that something resembling a Deweyan pedagogy had been realized through Indian play.<sup>115</sup> In the meantime, Dewey regarded the Rifton camp as a means to address the problems exposed by the Lynds. If the closure of the frontier had evacuated communities like Muncie from the ongoing demand for experimental intelligence in daily life, then Playing Indian in camp education was a way to reopen the frontier on the scale of the individual. But it did not last. In 1938, the communists among the Pioneer Youth came to control the Rifton camp. Under their leadership, the frontier progressives were sidelined; this was a changing of the guard, which Meier concluded had diminished “something of the liveliness of the camp.”<sup>116</sup> While the camp continued on into the 1950s and beyond, Dewey’s attention had

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<sup>113</sup> Frank Lewis Irwin, *The Theory of Camping: An introduction to Camping in Education* (New York: S.A. Barnes, 1950), 34.

<sup>114</sup> Irwin, *The Theory of Camping*, 24-25.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>116</sup> August Meier to Lloyd Saletan, April 10, 1943.

turned elsewhere. But for a fleeting moment in the 1930s, the camp and its curriculum Playing Indian represented a means to address the problems exposed by *Middletown*.<sup>117</sup>

The Pioneer Youth summer camp enterprise sought to provide children with a didactic tonic to mass society's ill by Playing Indian. Lieberman's organization had concluded that educators could use camping as a pedagogical exercise to combat alienation of urban living, increase social cohesion, and reconnect students with a vanishing authenticity—all through Playing Indian. Dewey came to endorse the Pioneers because of his reading of *Middletown*. The Lynds' study had shown how children were stuck indoors, neglected by their overworked parents, losing out on a chance to cultivate experimental intelligence through experiential education. Dewey regarded the Pioneers as a solution not only to Muncie's problems, but America's problems. For Dewey and the Pioneers, the pedagogical keystone between education and democracy was a form of Playing Indian in service of the renewing the generative learning conditions that had once existed on the frontier.

Standing in stark contrast to the Pioneer Youth of America's camp was Charles Eastman's Oahe camp. Fourteen years after Dewey and Tufts had first cited the Dakota philosopher's biography, *Indian Boyhood*, Charles Eastman and his wife Elaine Goodale founded their own camp at Granite Lake, New Hampshire, in 1916. A "private sleepaway camp," the curriculum included athletics, nature study, and woodcraft not unlike the Rifton camp. Eastman had impeccable credentials for such an educative enterprise; he had worked for the YMCA in 1895 and published his own version of the Boy Scouts' guide appropriately called *Indian Scout Talks*. While the Oahe camp was intended for girls, a second camp for boys dubbed

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<sup>117</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt visited the Pioneer Youth camp at Rifton in 1959, where she wrote, "It is simpler and less expensive than some Girl and Boy Scout camps, and it does meet a real need for children from New York City." Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day, July 25, 1959," *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Digital Edition* (2017), accessed June 1, 2021, [https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?\\_y=1959&\\_f=md004493](https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1959&_f=md004493).

Ohiyesa was set to follow. Of course, 1916 had been the year that Dewey published his *Democracy and Education* and Eastman published his second autobiography, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. In that book, Eastman addressed how Dakota people of the past exhibited “democracy and community life [which] was much nearer the ideal than ours to-day.”<sup>118</sup>

As Kiara Virgil notes, Eastman connected his political writings to the curriculum of his summer camp. Eastman designed Oahe’s games, activities, and ceremonies derived from his own childhood. Canoeing, beadwork, sign language, basketry, and dancing were all a part of the camp’s curriculum. While the camp was a means for his daughters to explore their Dakota identity amidst their cosmopolitan and Christian upbringing, Virgil argues that “for Eastman, Oahe was a new venue where he could reach white audiences, both the campers and their parents, so that his performances of Indianness might produce new attitudes about the future place of Natives in America.”<sup>119</sup> The camp was an extension of his politics.

Unlike at the Rifton camp, Eastman curated the pageants, dramas, and Indian play at Oahe in ways that allowed him to lend dignity to Indigenous lifeways. Despite the fact that Oahe’s Playing Indian was ripe for misconstruction by White campers, its curriculum was distinct from Rifton “since Indian people remained in control of how to deploy these strategic performances of Indianness.”<sup>120</sup> “Their camp was distinct from other wilderness outfits at this time because they did not view Native practices as ‘savage’ and part of an early stage in child development that young people had to experience and overcome to become successful adults,”

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<sup>118</sup> Charles Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1977), 188, cited in Kiara Virgil, “Charles Eastman’s ‘School of the Woods’: Re-creation Related to Childhood, Race, Gender, and Nation at Camp Oahe,” *American Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2018): 25-50.

<sup>119</sup> Virgil, “Charles Eastman’s ‘School of the Woods,’” 26. According to Virgil, Eastman’s Oahe camp was an attempt to use a pedagogical environment to advance his cultural politics within a settler colonial framework. “His actions at Oahe are outside the Dakota nation because he is trying to work within a settler logic and social practice (the summer camp), but his performance is not wholly separated from Dakota cultural practice.” Virgil, “Charles Eastman’s ‘School of the Woods,’” 43.

<sup>120</sup> Virgil, “Charles Eastman’s ‘School of the Woods,’” 27.



writes Vigil. “Rather, the Eastman family sought to engage white girlhood to teach the future mothers of the nation about the value of Dakota teachings, to recast Indian culture.”<sup>121</sup> Oahe was Eastman’s way to advance his cultural politics of performance. It would condition non-Native children to accept that America’s future could—and would—include distinctly Indigenous people. Eastman ran the camp until 1920, when he and his wife Elaine separated. Though short-lived, the Oahe camp represents an important experiment in summer camp education. A pedagogical enterprise where Eastman’s cultural politics might be realized, Camp Oahe was a place where Native and non-Native people could come to learn from Indigenous people to appreciate Indigenous lifeways, rather than merely mimic them.

By 1932, Dewey had a prime opportunity to fold Eastman’s distinctive camp operations just a little over two hundred miles from New York into his philosophy when he revised *Ethics*. When he wrote to his coauthor James Tufts about updates and revisions to their 1908 edition, however, Dewey chose not to cite Eastman, but instead the Lynds’ *Middletown*. Dewey wrote to Tufts that “perhaps a little more could be made of what [James Truslow] Adams called the ‘business mind.’ Somehow Im [*sic*] getting more and more appalled [*sic*] at the extent to which pecuniary success and money standards seem to have invaded all current American valuations in all departments.”<sup>122</sup> Dewey recommended to Tufts that in their new chapter on economics, “maybe an explicit [*sic*] reference to *Middletown* could be worked in hereabouts.”<sup>123</sup> Dewey understood *Middletown* as a frontier history that documented how savage mind had given way to civilized mind, which had in turn become mired in “business mind.” Rather than revisit

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>122</sup> James Truslow Adams advanced a similar critique to Dewey in his “To ‘Be’ or to ‘Do’: A Note on American Education” essay in the June 1929 issue of *Forum, Our Business Civilization* (New York: A. & C. Boni, 1929), and his 1931 book, *The Epic of America*.

<sup>123</sup> John Dewey to James H. Tufts, June 18, 1931, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

Eastman's writings or any of his efforts at places like Oahe, it was *Middletown* and woodcraft groups like the Pioneer Youth that had the most appeal to Dewey. They held the key to the crisis of the democracy rendered by the frontier discourse. New pioneers would solve the problem that older pioneers had created. The frontier would be reconstructed.

## **Conclusion**

Over the course of his career, Dewey used the frontier thesis in two significant ways: as history and method. When we evaluate the impact of Dewey's early immersion in the frontier discourse on the contours of his cultural turn, two things are abundantly clear. First, the fact that the elements of frontier discourse remained a recurring element in Dewey's scholarship—from his arrival in Michigan in 1884 to his semi-official retirement from Columbia in 1930—evidences the longevity of that discourse in national life, and Dewey's willingness to draw upon it long after he left Michigan. While he may have jettisoned racial recapitulation, Dewey's turn toward pluralism remained constrained by the logic of Native erasure. As a foil to the pioneer experimentalism, Indians were simply too useful to Dewey as instruments of his wider philosophical critique to abandon in exchange for a careful consideration of Indigenous people as a constituency with a unique stake in the questions of democratic education. For all the accolades his racial cultural pluralism had earned in the intellectual history of the United States, the frontier discourse continued to shape Dewey's thinking long after his turn towards pluralism. From Frederick Jackson Turner, to the Lynds' *Middletown*, to the pioneer youth camp at Rifton, New York, the frontier thesis organized Dewey's thinking about the 1920s and 1930s and the crisis of democracy. The frontier discourse was a through-line from the beginning of his career in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to the height of his career in New York City.

Second, Dewey consistently invoked the history of the settlement of that frontier from an exclusively Euro-American perspective. Few works capture Dewey's enduring debt to the frontier thesis more clearly than his 1937 essay, "The Forward View: A Free Teacher in a Free Society," co-authored with Goodwin Watson. Dewey and his co-author attempted to make an intervention in the debate over the future of public education. By the time he co-wrote "The Forward View," Dewey was installed at Columbia University, having left Michigan behind forty years earlier. Nevertheless, he and Goodwin invoked America's frontier past in order to drive home their point. Dewey and Watson asserted that "the public school was brought into our national life in order to further the hope for increased opportunity, increased equality, and more enlightened citizens." Dewey and Watson imagined a time when "trains of covered wagons moved across western prairies toward the fulfillment of dreams for a fresh start on new lands. The rise of industry nourished other hopes: hope of great wealth—for the few—and hope of a rising standard of living for everyone. Hope might clash with hope, but the school was a part of all."<sup>124</sup> Dewey failed to register that federal Indian schools clashed with the hopes of many Indigenous parents for their children's education.

In "The Forward View," Dewey wrote that schools emerged "in our national life" for the purposes of economic growth, wise governance, and equality before the law—but for whom? The answer is implicit: those people "who moved across western prairies" towards "dreams for a fresh start on new lands." When Dewey and his co-author were confident that the nation's schools would raise the "standard of living for everyone" and prepare the children of native-born and immigrants alike for their lives as American citizens, they excluded from the civic bounty of schooling the original occupants of those "new lands"—the nation's Indigenous people. As

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<sup>124</sup> John Dewey and Goodwin Watson, "The Forward View: A Free Teacher in a Free Society" (1937), *Later Works*, 11:539.

such, Dewey's prescription for the frontier problem offered little in the way of treating the ongoing wound of settler colonialism. Instrumental Indians and the backgrounding and foiling they enabled were a structural part of Dewey's philosophy stretching from 1884 to 1938.

The Lynds' study of Muncie fit Dewey's evolving use of the frontier discourse like a glove. *Middletown* appealed to Dewey precisely because of Muncie's supposedly representative history as a frontier community. Muncie could be cast as a typical American community precisely because it had been founded by pioneers, the prime agents of a historically contingent origin story for democracy in America writ large. The Lynds began Muncie's history in the 1800s, and its modern malaise began with the closing of the frontier and the rise of the gas industry in the year 1890. Moreover, as it had left its frontier trappings of Indians and log cabins in the past, by the 1920s Muncie struck the Lynds as an ideal laboratory for studying change over time in American communities through an anthropological lens. As Sarah Igo writes, this method was an innovation, for it purported to illustrate a representative kind of America. The Lynds' history altogether excised Indigenous inhabitants of the land that would become Indiana, relegating them to the status of mere features of the wilderness that pioneers surpassed. As Muncie stood for the frontier, it also stood for America.

As Muncie's psychological makeup gave way to a modern industrial mentality, it represented the national crisis that the Lynds and Dewey believed was at the heart of American democracy. The Euro-American pioneers of Muncie had used their experimental intelligence to shape a new democratic civilization by way of their associated living in the wilderness. Their common encounter with wilderness amounted to a problematic situation that demanded resolution. This had led to the felling of trees, the clearing of land, and the building of a town. In turn, this development had led to the growth of a series of composite communities knit together

in the form of the local clubs, church groups, library reading circles, and most importantly, schools that came to make up Muncie as a “great community.”

But after 1890 and the coming of the gas industry, Muncie became a victim of its own success. A pecuniary culture swept aside Muncie’s older forms of associated life and replaced them with an industrial culture that unraveled face-to-face communities and replaced them with a crisis in individualism, a homogenizing mass culture, and an overwhelming desire to simply get ahead through material acquisition. Denied a frontier of their own to settle, their descendants in Muncie now faced a democratic crisis. So it was that Dewey and others were concerned that as the frontier closed, pioneers were dying off—but not in the same way as their Indian foils. Unlike the vanishing Indian, the disappearing pioneer was not racialized. Rather, Dewey saw the disappearing pioneer as closing the book on America’s quintessential social occupation. After all, the frontier thesis held that pioneers of America’s wilderness had been forced to create all the myriad social occupations that European civilization had previously encompassed. In so doing, they had created new possibilities for the expression of associated living, refining it into a distinctly American democratic culture. Now, in the twilight of the frontier, the passing of the pioneer into history meant that America was losing a font of experimental intelligence. If, as Felix Cohen would write some years later, Indians are a canary in the coalmine for democracy, then Dewey found his canaries in the children of the original pioneer generation of *Middletown*.<sup>125</sup>

Dewey’s conclusion about the “double heritage” of the frontier was arguably the culmination of his engagement with the frontier discourse. Dewey spent the better part of the 1920s and 1930s using the frontier thesis to cast the frontier as one, continental-scaled

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<sup>125</sup> Jill E. Martin, “The Miner’s Canary: Felix S. Cohen’s Philosophy of Indian Rights,” *American Indian Law Review* 23, no. 1 (1998/1999): 165-79.

“problematic situation” for pioneers like Frederick Riggs. In pacifying a hostile wilderness consisting of empty land, dangerous animals, and treacherous Indians, Dewey cast the settlement of the frontier as a problematic situation that settlers resolved. This psychological foiling with Indians could be read on the landscape. The result was that with every tree felled, field planted, fence raised—and for each Indian removed, assimilated, or killed—pioneers had cultivated experimental intelligence. If the wilderness conditions of the frontier had worked upon the minds of settlers like a problematic situation, then the frontier itself had functioned not unlike a national school.

As a result, Dewey was invested in the frontier as both a historical origin for democracy and a cautionary tale. The lesson that Dewey had derived from Riggs’ life was the “double heritage” of the frontier history of the United States. Dewey tried to signal that this was not a matter of nostalgia for pioneer life, but was rather suggestive of the future of experimentalism. “I am not, I hope, referring to this difference in order to adopt the too easy habit of old age and sing the praise of a bygone age, lamenting the good old days of yore,” he insisted. “But the tremendous change raises a question. How shall we today under our conditions develop the same independence and initiative of mind with respect to our problems that they were forced to evolve in the face of their problems?” Dewey felt that a new era of democratic schooling was the solution to this double heritage of the frontier thesis. “Education is one of the great opportunities for present day pioneering,” he concluded.<sup>126</sup> Dewey’s vision for democratic education would take inspiration not from Indigenous people like Andrew J. Blackbird or Charles Eastman, but from men and women like Frederick Riggs. Dewey spent the better part of his career experimentalizing Turner’s frontier thesis, and in so doing, he carried water for settler

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<sup>126</sup> Dewey, “Construction and Critics, 132.

colonialism from Michigan and the Great Lakes directly into the heart of his synthesis of education and democracy.

While Dewey's use of the frontier discourse remained consistent throughout his career, the same could not be said for the frontier progressives of which he was a part. While the full range of the political debate that took place in the pages of the journal and amongst its membership are beyond the scope of this project, suffice it to say that by 1935, the frontier progressives at *The Social Frontier* split apart over the trajectory of the New Deal.<sup>127</sup> For many, the political energies of the Roosevelt administration offered a source of optimism. For others, Roosevelt was barking up the wrong tree. Many of the more radically minded contributors felt that the designs of the New Deal to restore free market capitalism were misguided. For his part, Dewey remained skeptical of the New Deal. While he welcomed many New Deal programs, Dewey remained convinced that they did not go far enough to offer meaningful reforms to achieve economic parity that would enable the flourishing of democratic culture.<sup>128</sup> Dewey was invested in the reconstruction of capitalism which had led to the collapse, not simply searching for its rehabilitation. By this time, however, the enthusiasm that had driven the original launch of the enterprise had dwindled. Split over the politics of the New Deal, the board of the journal pushed to merge with the Progressive Education Association. This association adopted the journal in 1939 and renamed it *Frontiers of Democracy*. As Provenzo argues, "After its takeover

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<sup>127</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the politics of *The Social Frontier* and its membership, see Murrow, "Depicting Teachers' Roles in Social Reconstruction in *The Social Frontier*, 1934-1943," 311-33.

<sup>128</sup> In the winter of 1936, many of the more centrist members of the frontiers progressive established the John Dewey Society. These represented many of the middle- to upper-class people who proved less interested in class politics than enthusiast of progressive, "child-centered" education. In so doing, these acolytes mistook Dewey's own politics. It was during this period that Dewey also became active in the organization of a new third party that hoped to push Roosevelt's Democrats further to the left. For more on the John Dewey Society and its strife with the Progressive Education Association, see Provenzo Jr., *The Social Frontier*, 10-13.

and renaming ... the journal lost much of its radical and critical edge.”<sup>129</sup> World War II sapped what little readership was left, and the journal folded in 1943.

One arena where educators never lost their faith in Dewey and the original program of *The Social Frontier*, however, was in the Office of Indian Affairs. Under the leadership of Dewey’s former acolyte, John Collier, Dewey’s philosophical synthesis of education and democracy was about to find its most concerted articulation in federal Indian schools.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 14.



## CHAPTER 8:

### **Trust: The Deweyan Brain Trust at the Heart of the Indian New Deal, 1933-1945**

On January 7, 1934, the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier summoned a group of prominent leaders in the Indian reform movement to a meeting in order to determine a new direction for federal Indian policy. The group, which convened at the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC, was chaired by Lewis Meriam. Meriam was seen as a rising expert on Indian affairs after his 1928 Brookings Institute report titled *The Problem of Indian Administration* had chronicled the government's numerous failings. High-ranking government officials such as Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, were also in attendance. Prominent Indigenous activists, such as the lawyer and founding member of the Society of American Indians, Thomas Sloan (Omaha), were also present. Of particular note were several major figures in education, such as the wife of the Director of Indian Education Will Carson Ryan Jr., and Zitkala-Sa with her partner R. T. Bonnin representing their group, the National Council of American Indians. There was also Moisés Sáenz, the director of rural education in Mexico's Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and close ally to Collier.<sup>1</sup> They had assembled to imagine a better future for Indian Country in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahlstedt, "John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy," 212-214. Graham D. Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934-45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 19. While it is not clear who forwarded these amendments, the list is an interesting snapshot of the agenda of Indian reformers, such as a bill to criminalize wrongfully identifying as an Indian. The only amendment the group could not reach consensus upon were rules governing blood quantum.

The conference advanced a number of recommendations, including granting Indian communities the right to recall federal employees, the creation of tribal councils “with certain defined powers,” and, most important, an end to the policy regime of allotment.<sup>2</sup> While their numerous recommendations gathered varied support, the group unanimously adopted a recommendation to democratize Indian Country through Indian self-government. “The powers of government now exercised over the Indian population through the Office of Indian Affairs shall be gradually transferred to organized Indian communities, subject only to such necessary restriction as may be required to assure the continuance of health, educational and welfare services now furnished by the Federal Government,” their statement read.<sup>3</sup> This program for the devolution of federal powers to newly formed tribal governments functioned as a sort of mission statement for Collier’s signature legislation, the Indian Re-Organization Act (IRA). “The IRA was a part of what Collier understood as his effort to bring about ‘scores of ancient tribal systems [and] reorient themselves toward modern tasks,’” notes Graham Taylor.<sup>4</sup> For his own part, Collier insisted that the IRA exemplified “centralized mechanisms most systematically aimed toward decentralization” in the service of “the New Deal’s purpose of broadened horizons for autonomous local groups.”<sup>5</sup> Under the banner of Collier’s mantra of “self-governance,” the IRA would bring democracy to Indian Country.

As it was ultimately passed on June 18, 1934, the IRA aimed to establish (or, more accurately, re-establish) tribal governments which had been outlawed by treaties, undermined by allotment, or disintegrated by the federal government’s assimilation policies. Under the

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Hearings before the Committee on Indian Affairs*, S. 2103, Wheeler-Howard Act—exempt certain Indians, 76<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3d sess., June 18, 1934, 409-11.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, xi.

<sup>5</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 311.

provisions of the IRA, the federal government would essentially devolve certain powers of governance to these new tribal governments that might otherwise be handled by a municipality in any other part of the United States, but that it had retained due to the federal supremacy inherent in Indian policy.<sup>6</sup> One of the leading legal architects of the IRA, Felix Cohen, understood that the *raison d'être* for the bill was to provide for “the progressive transfer of municipal functions to the organized tribe.” Graham Taylor adds: “That is, to give the new tribal governments authority in such areas as law enforcement, public education, and similar services performed by county and municipal governments.”<sup>7</sup> In this fashion, Collier imagined that he could help Indian nations achieve democracy through “self-government.”

However, the IRA ultimately made two enormous exceptions to the powers it devolved to new tribal governments. Historians of the Indian New Deal have paid a great deal of attention to the fact that the power to organize tribal courts was not a part of the IRA. Not only did this prove to be a major millstone around the neck for tribal governments which seriously hollowed out Collier’s program for Indian “self-government,” but it was also a particularly notable departure from the framework of the U.S. Constitution and its separation of powers of government upon which the IRA constitutions were based. However, while one could argue that a system of courts was not typically a function of government reserved for municipal governance elsewhere in the United States, there was another exemption from the IRA that certainly was: schooling.

While the resolution of the Cosmos Club had identified “health, educational and welfare services” as important elements of self-governance, schooling was ultimately exempted from the IRA. The truncated nature of the self-determination in education is further evidenced by the fact

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, tribal governments would also have responsibilities that municipalities did not, including establishing citizenship qualifications, governing reservations, overseeing assets held by the tribal community, and dealing directly with the federal government.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, 30.

that while the IRA attempted to devolve federal powers to tribal governments organized akin to municipalities, it exempted the authority to organize schools. In other parts of the country, municipal governments were empowered to delegate a portion of their inherent powers to the formation of school districts. After all, the control of schools at the scale of the municipality had been an intentional part of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy as embodied in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. As a result, one might argue that there was no inherent federal power in education to devolve to tribal governments in the first place. Of course, the realities of an entire federal school system for Indians operating since 1879 begged to differ.

In effect, the power usually afforded to municipalities for the local control of schools was exempted from the new tribal governments organized by the IRA. This created a double-bind at the intersection of the synthesis of education and democracy that those at the Cosmos Club had imagined for Indian Country. The U.S. Constitution upon which the tribal governments were based offered no model for the organization of schools due to the synthesis of education and democracy previously already established by the Northwest Ordinance. Consequently, if Collier had been truly committed to invest tribal governments with the same powers of a municipality, it stood to reason that empowering tribal governments to organize their own tribal versions of school districts ought to have been one such element of the IRA. If the IRA would not empower the new tribal governments to operate their own schools, what did Collier have in mind to bring “self-governance” to Indian schooling in its place?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> To be sure, the IRA contained some provisions regarding this system of education. Section 11 of the IRA established an annual fund amounting to \$250,000 “for loans to Indians for the payment of tuition and other expenses in recognized vocational and trade schools.” However, these funds did little to address the question of the extent to which the IRA’s tribal governments could directly shape federal Indian schools. In conjunction with the IRA, Collier pushed for the passage of the Johnson-O’Malley Act. The Johnson-O’Malley Act allowed the Indian Office to subsidize the attendance of Native children in public school systems which could not levy property taxes on Indian assets held in trust by the federal government. With the passage of this act, many federal policymakers sought to push Native students upon public schools run by the states. The result was that between the IRA and the

Revisiting the attendees of the Cosmos Club is suggestive. By 1934, John Collier, W. Carson Ryan, and Moisés Sáenz had already emerged as the early leaders in education reform that occurred parallel to the IRA. When Ryan left the Office of Indian Affairs in 1936, Collier replaced him with Willard Beatty, who then recruited another progressive educator, Pedro T. Orata. Together, these five men—Collier, Sáenz, Ryan, Beatty, and Orata—make up what I call the “Deweyan brain trust” at the heart of the Indian New Deal. While Collier was the lynchpin, these pedagogues all shared a common familiarity, endorsement, and interest in John Dewey. Consequently, this group proved to be a select cadre of progressive educators in government who took actions to explicitly adapt Dewey’s ideas for Indian schooling. Led by Collier, the brain trust at the heart of the Indian New Deal attempted to bring democracy to Indian Country not through the devolution of schooling to Indigenous people, but by making Indian schools more Deweyan.<sup>9</sup> Their project to bring an explicitly Deweyan brand of progressive education to Indigenous people was an international effort, which spanned the United States, Mexico, the Philippines, and, of course, Indian Country.

### **Recruit Number 1: Moisés Sáenz**

To get a better handle on the extent to which Collier’s reforms in Indian education were influenced by Dewey, we must travel to what may seem at first like an unlikely place: Mexico. When Collier arrived in California in 1919, he had worked for the California Adult Education Program. During his short tenure there, Collier praised the Russian revolution for its commitment to communalism. This earned him few accolades among California’s urban

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Johnson-O’Malley Act, the federal government remained in control of reservation schools, and state public schools became the only offering for K-12 schooling for Indian people beyond the reservation. See Section 1, Indian Re-Organization Act of 1934, Public Law 383, 73d Congress, 2d sess. (June 18, 1934), 984.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations Between the United States and Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 96-99.

reformers, and he eventually resigned in frustration after being out of step with prevailing politics. Settlement houses and immigrant populations would no longer be his vehicle for reform to achieve the kind of community restoration he had in mind in the United States. It was then that Collier made plans to travel to Mexico, “hoping to discover, in the midst of Mexico’s revolution, a working plan for a new social order.”<sup>10</sup>

That Collier looked for inspiration in Mexico made perfect sense. In 1917, Mexico emerged from revolution with the adoption of a new constitution. Known as the Constitution of 1917, the document advanced important reforms, none more so than in education. To counter the dominant power of the Catholic Church over the nation’s schooling, Article 3 guaranteed Mexican citizens a secular education through public schools. The document declared that such education “shall be democratic, considering democracy not only as a legal structure and a political regimen, but as a system of life founded on a constant economic, social, and cultural betterment of the people.”<sup>11</sup> The result was the formation of the SEP, which in wake of the revolution became the vanguard of democracy.

Many of the Mexican SEP reformers became convinced that among the progressive education movement in the United States, John Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy offered a model to address the pressing problems facing the Mexican government. In his book *Backroad Pragmatists*, Ruben Flores reconstructs how the philosophy of Dewey became

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<sup>10</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 84-85. See also Deron Boyles, “John Dewey’s Influence in Mexico: Rural Schooling, ‘Community,’ and the Vitality of Context,” *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (December 2012): 98-113.

<sup>11</sup> “Constitution of 1917,” The Mexican Revolution and the United States in the Collections of the Library of Congress, accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/mexican-revolution-and-the-united-states/constitution-of-1917.html#:~:text=By%20the%20end%20of%201916,state%20except%20Chihuahua%20and%20Morelos.&text=The%20Constitution%20of%201917%2C%20still,human%20rights%20for%20all%20Mexicans>. On the Mexican constitution, see Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 93-97.

incredibly popular among Mexican education reformers during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>12</sup> Dewey's experimentalist method as an alternative to pedagogy based on parochial traditions; its emphasis on experiential learning through the "project method"; and his model of schools as social centers appealed to Mexican reformers. Flores argues that for American and Mexican reformers alike, "pragmatism offered them a way out of the transcendent morals of the social hierarchies, against which they had rebelled, including the Catholic Church in the case of Mexico and the American genteel tradition in the case of the United States."<sup>13</sup>

Among the foremost issues plaguing the government were disputes stemming from land, labor, and education of Mexico's *Indios* people. Today, Indigenous people of Mexico consist of eighty ethnolinguistic groups, each with their own enduring histories, cultures, and lifeways. However, like their counterparts in the United States, the Indigenous people of Mexico share a common pattern of political autonomy subverted by Euro-American colonialism. By 1920, this broad trajectory had produced a number of unresolved questions regarding Indigenous people's racial identity, legal standing, and political autonomy vis-a-vis the postrevolutionary federal state.<sup>14</sup> Mexican reformers intent on solving Mexico's "Indian problem" soon coalesced into a group of "Indigenistas" who, according to Wilbert T. Ahlstedt, "advocated *indigenismo*, a political, intellectual, and artistic movement that celebrated Indigenous peoples in the Americas,

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<sup>12</sup> Part of this surprise stems from the fact that Dewey's role in the Trotsky commission in 1937 has come to dominate the memory of his legacy. "Dewey would be remembered more for his defense of Leon Trotsky in Mexico City in 1937 than for the policy reforms that his students had initiated through the cultural missions and the rural normal schools," writes Ruben Flores. Ruben Flores, *Backroad Pragmatists: Mexico's Melting Pot and Civil Rights in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 295.

<sup>13</sup> Flores, *Backroad Pragmatists*, 288.

<sup>14</sup> Ahlstedt, "John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy," 98. See also Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico 1910-1940" in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, ed. Richard Graham, Thomas E. Skidmore, Aline Helg, and Alan Knight (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 71-114.

on the one hand, but also sought to develop, educate, and otherwise ‘change’ them, on the other.”<sup>15</sup>

Among the most consequential of the Mexican Indigenistas at the SEP was Moisés Sáenz. Sáenz was born in Nuevo León in 1888 to a Presbyterian family who operated a rural dairy farm outside Monterrey.<sup>16</sup> His parents saw to it that Sáenz was enrolled in a Presbyterian Seminary in Coyocán, Mexico, where he graduated in 1907. He went on to earn a degree in teaching from the *Normal De Jalpa* and an MA from the Presbyterian Jefferson College in Pennsylvania. While he returned to Mexico to work as an educator, Sáenz eventually made his way to Columbia University to earn his doctorate. While at Columbia, “Sáenz worked on experiments with new educational techniques he’d learned while participating in Deweyan educational trials conducted by Columbia’s Lincoln School,” notes Ahlstedt. Sáenz never finished his doctoral work, electing to return to Mexico in 1923, where he became an official at the SEP. By the 1930s, Moisés Sáenz became head of the SEP’s rural education program. This made him the leading official of Mexico’s programs for Indigenous schooling.

During his tenure, Sáenz became convinced that his predecessor Manuel Gamio’s *incorporación* program had failed to properly respect Indigenous cultures in its insistence on their incorporation into the national polity.<sup>17</sup> While he approved of Gamio’s commitment to social scientific method, he decried his policy as “unilateralist.” In its place, Sáenz recommended

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<sup>15</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 98-99. It was the Indigenistas who would conscript Dewey to shape their policy of Indigenous education in the SEP. Ahlstedt notes, “In Mexico Dewey’s progressive aims were used in the context of dealing with what Andrés Molina Enriquez referred to as *Los Grandes Problemas Nacionales* (The Great National Problems): land reform, the rightful place of Mexico’s indigenous people, and the creation of citizens that conformed to a universal ideal of citizenship.” *Ibid.*, 175. See also Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Ahlstedt notes that Sáenz’s religious upbringing made education an important part of social reform from an early age. Later in his career, Sáenz would strive to become such a system-builder for schools intended for Indigenous people, and his Protestant influences would point him north to the United States for intellectual interlocutors like Collier. Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 156-60.

<sup>17</sup> Flores, *Backroad Pragmatists*, 156-160.



a program “for *integración* where *centro social* (social action centers) operated according to the principles of Deweyan active learning and involved every agency of the government in an effort to involve Indigenous peoples in the consolidation of the nation.”<sup>18</sup> National elites would assist Indigenous people in the conservation of their cultural lives through their enrollment in schools designed to be social centers.<sup>19</sup>

More than anything else, it was Dewey’s account of democracy as a culture sustained by these kinds of schools that appealed to Sáenz. Ahlstedt argues that in Mexico, “Dewey’s pedagogy was a tool used with the intention of creating a universal category of a citizen, *el técnico* who was in subordination to the issues of social justice.”<sup>20</sup> In this view, Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy served Mexico’s federal reformers’ attempts to incorporate Mexico’s Indigenous people in the state under the banner of universal, cosmopolitan citizenship.<sup>21</sup> Universal citizenship, however, was a dubious prospect for many Indigenous people in Mexico, let alone a model for the United States. Flores suggests that the racialization of Mexico’s Indigenous people was not an inevitable consequence of Dewey’s brand of pragmatism as it was translated to Mexico. But enthusiasm for Dewey’s pragmatic method offered unclear lessons regarding the political distinction of Indigenous people on both sides of the border.

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<sup>18</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 118.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-121.

<sup>20</sup> According to Ahlstedt, Dewey offered Sáenz and other reformers a progressive, rather than liberal, concept of citizenship. “Rather than seeing citizenship in the classical liberal way where specific rights were guaranteed through the judicial process, this definition used the title of citizen in a more symbolic sense, indicating that the possessor of citizenship was a political subject with the right to represent themselves before the state and with the right to demand an education, land, and the fulfillment of the promises made in the 1917 Constitution.” Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 175.

<sup>21</sup> Victor José Rodríguez, *The Practical Man of Modernity: The Reception of John Dewey’s Pedagogy in Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Flores notes that “depending on the choices that one made, pragmatism could be used to destroy local culture just as easily as it could be used to fortify it.”<sup>22</sup>

Nowhere was this flaw clearer than in the question of local control of Indigenous schooling. Under the *Indigenistas*, the SEP created a system of rural schools intended to modernize Indigenous peasant communities and incorporate them into the modern nation-state.<sup>23</sup> A new system of rural schools was constructed, including a number of *tipos* (model schools) and secondary schools. This rural school system—composed of around 2,500 schools with 97,000 children and 48,000 adult students—was made in Dewey’s image.<sup>24</sup> “Sáenz sought to combine the principles of Dewey’s Laboratory school with Dewey disciple William Heard Kilpatrick’s Project Method,” Ahlstedt argues. “The teacher functioned as a facilitator, helping students to achieve knowledge through personal discovery, not as a dispenser of knowledge and information. A project method classroom focused on democracy and collaboration to solve ‘purposeful’ problems.”<sup>25</sup> Sáenz was convinced that Dewey offered an ideal model for rural schools, where the lessons of the classroom imparted in formal schooling would radiate out in the community in the form of children’s new problem-solving prowess in matters of everyday life.

Sáenz’s “Deweyfication” of Mexico’s rural schools for Indigenous people proved to be a tall order. While the rural school system marked an important investment in Indigenous education long neglected by the Mexican federal government, the system was still perpetually underfunded. Despite Sáenz’s intentions, rural teachers were mostly non-Indigenous people who had little familiarity with Indigenous lifeways, languages, or culture. Moreover, these teachers

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<sup>22</sup> Flores, *Backroad Pragmatists*, 289.

<sup>23</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 167-71.

<sup>24</sup> Boyles, “John Dewey’s Influence in Mexico,” 105.

<sup>25</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 177.

were often poorly trained as instructors, resulting in a poor reputation for the rural schools.

“Parents complained,” writes Ahlstedt, “and found it silly that their children were being asked to do the same thing their parents taught them on the farm.”<sup>26</sup> For all these shortcomings, however, the most problematic aspect of these rural schools was that Indigenous people themselves had little say in their design, administration, or operation.

However, with Sáenz at the levers of power at the SEP, Indigenous objections did little to divert Dewey’s philosophy from being channeled in fundamentally anti-democratic ways.<sup>27</sup>

Seeking to bolster the reputation of his program, Sáenz published “The School and Culture” in the journal *Progressive Education* in 1932. There he proclaimed that rural schooling was “one of the most efficient means of enhancing our nationality and creating an integrated Mexico.”

Though he intended to articulate that his schools were the vanguard of democracy for Mexico’s Indigenous people, Sáenz’s article inadvertently captured the ultimately passive role that Indigenous people played in the new administration of the schools: “Revolution was not made by the Indian, it was in a certain sense for the Indian.”<sup>28</sup>

Collier failed to heed this lesson. As he made his preparations for the trip to Mexico in 1920, Collier accepted Mabel Dodge Luhan’s invitation to come to Taos, where he unexpectedly “discovered” his Red Atlantis. His adventure in New Mexico changed the trajectory of Collier’s intellectual journey; his trip to Mexico would have to wait while Collier began a new career in Indian reform in the United States. Correspondence with Manuel Gamio and Moisés Sáenz would have to suffice. Eventually, Collier met Sáenz in Mexico in 1932. Afterwards, Collier

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<sup>26</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 115. However, there were efforts to properly train and prepare Indigenous people as educators in the rural schools. Under Luiz Chávez Orozco, the Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas (DIA) trained a cadre of Indigenous people in their own languages to become rural school educators. See Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 116 and Alexander Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 106-8.

<sup>28</sup> Moisés Sáenz, “The School and Culture,” *Progressive Education* 9, no. 2 (February 1932): 99.

wrote that Sáenz was “one of the most evolved, experienced and educated humans I have ever met.”<sup>29</sup> Soon, Collier came to believe that Mexico was far ahead of the United States in instituting a program of Indigenous cultural conservation through reforms in schooling.<sup>30</sup>

Together, they planned a number of cooperative ventures, which included hiring Sáenz as a consultant to Collier’s reforms and their joint formation of an Inter-American Institute for the Indian.<sup>31</sup> Collier published a companion piece to Sáenz’s article in the pages of *Progressive Education*. Titled “Mexico: A Challenge,” Collier’s essay argued that the *Indigenesitas* had successfully configured schools to lead to “a profounder understanding of the Indian cultural pattern,” from which “there may emerge the structural elements of a new Western Civilization.”<sup>32</sup> Due in large part to Sáenz’s realizations of Dewey’s philosophy, Collier proclaimed that “Mexico has lessons to teach the United States in the matter of schools and Indian administration.”<sup>33</sup>

### **John Dewey on Mexican Schools**

In the intervening years, Dewey himself also had become interested in education reforms in Mexico.<sup>34</sup> This culminated in Dewey’s trip to Mexico in 1926 as part of the Committee on

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 153.

<sup>30</sup> Nearly a decade after his trip to Taos, Collier finally made it to Mexico. On Collier’s trip, see Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 148-53.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>32</sup> John Collier, “Mexico: A Challenge,” *Progressive Education* 9, no. 2 (February 1932): 95-98.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 3. Collier was particularly envious of Mexico’s plan to commodify Indigenous arts and crafts. Such commoditization, Collier figured, would not only conserve traditional cultural forms, but offer an income stream to impoverished Indigenous communities. On the international aspects of the valorization of Indigenous art, see Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 121-28; on U.S. efforts, led in large part by Collier, see Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 131-33. On Dewey’s experimentalism and its appeal in Mexico broadly, see also Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, “Stereophonic Scientific Modernism: Social Science Between Mexico and the United States, 1880-1930,” *Journal of American History*, 86 (December 1999), 1156-87.

Cultural Relations with Latin America, which delighted Sáenz.<sup>35</sup> That year, Sáenz spoke at the University of Chicago. “When John Dewey gets to Mexico he will find his ideas at work in our schools,” Sáenz announced with confidence. “Motivation, respect for personality, self-expression, vitalization of school work, project method, learning by doing, democracy in education—all of Dewey is there.”<sup>36</sup> In Mexico City, Dewey gave several lectures, did some sightseeing and shopping, and spoke with leading officials, including Sáenz.<sup>37</sup> Dewey was eager to convene with him: “I hope to have an interview with him and maybe learn something about Mexican edn [*sic*] before I leave; he is said to be the intellectual factor in the dept.”<sup>38</sup> After a luncheon with Sáenz, Dewey remarked to his wife that “he lives out at Chapultepec Heights and has the most marvellous [*sic*] flowers I’ve seen yet.”<sup>39</sup> While there is no record of their conversation, Dewey made a point to visit one of Sáenz’s rural schools for Indigenous people.<sup>40</sup>

When he returned to the United States, Dewey wrote positively about these rural schools. In his writing about Mexico, Dewey made it clear that he was familiar with Sáenz’s designs for the SEP’s education of Indigenous people. Dewey wrote that the establishment of state education in rural areas “marks a deliberate and systematic attempt to incorporate in the social body the

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<sup>35</sup> The group was founded by the Rockefellers, Ahlstedt notes, “who were seeking greater cultural understanding while hoping to better protect their extensive oil holdings in Mexico.” Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 125.

<sup>36</sup> Harry Edwin Rosser, “Beyond Revolution: The Social Concern of Moisés Sáenz, Mexican Educator, 1888-1941” (PhD diss., American University, 1971), 75, as cited in Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 166.

<sup>37</sup> John Dewey to Alice Dewey, August 17, 1926, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> When he arrived in Guadalajara several days later, one of Sáenz’s subordinates appeared to take Dewey to one such school. On August 22, Dewey wrote that “the federal Supt of [education] for the State turned up, & said he had had a telegram from Sáenz in Mexico to be attentive to us. So we told him we wanted to go to one of the Indian villages where they made pottery.” The official took Dewey “8 or 10 miles out to the best pottery village—several thousand people, & making pottery in almost every house; the clay a mile or so away; no wheels at all; all the shaping done with the hands & some molds.” Dewey was impressed, so much so that he was all the more eager for Sáenz’s underling to return: “Today at 10 he is coming to take us to a fiesta of Indian rural school teachers.” No other details of the visit appear to be extant in Dewey’s papers. John Dewey to Alice Dewey, August 22, 1926, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

Indians who form 80 percent of the total population.” Dewey celebrated that this use of schooling would undo prejudice against Indigenous people by other Mexicans. To his credit, Dewey noted the history of oppression and discrimination aimed at Indigenous people: “Previous to the revolution, this numerically preponderant element was not only neglected, but despised,” he wrote. “Nothing in Mexico can be understood without bearing in mind that until a few years ago the Indians were economically enslaved, intellectually disinherited and politically eliminated,” he observed. Dewey rightly understood that schooling for Mexican Indigenous people was not a peripheral concern for the vitality of Mexican democracy, but central to it.<sup>41</sup> Sending Indigenous people to federal schools would therefore help integrate them into a democratic Mexican nation-state. Ending the material poverty that kept Indigenous people separate from participating in the polity on the basis of equality with other Mexicans was the social problem that schooling could overcome.

However, Dewey went on to accept a dangerous premise: that federal schooling was a form of righting these past wrongs. Dewey felt that a modern, secular, and public school system that was independent of Catholic mission schools offered a path towards liberal democracy for Indigenous people within the Mexican polity. Dewey called the creation of these schools nothing short of an “educational revolution” which “not only represents an effort to incorporate the indigenous population into the social life and intellectual culture of Mexico as a whole, but it is also an indispensable means of political integration for the country.” By equipping Mexico’s Indigenous people with language, trade, and social skills that would decrease their perception as cultural Others within the Mexican political and cultural life, Dewey suggested schools could help realize democracy for these people. Meanwhile, non-Indigenous Mexicans’ encounters with

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<sup>41</sup> Dewey, “Mexico’s Educational Renaissance” (1926), *Later Works*, 2:201. See also Dewey, “From a Mexican Notebook” (1926), *Later Works*, 2: 209-10.

Indigenous people in such schools would work to sand down individual racial prejudice and create frictionless integration. In other words, Dewey understood that schooling was being used in Mexico to absorb Indigenous people into a multicultural democratic culture much like a settlement house organization such as the Hull House or the People's Institute. He endorsed Sáenz's program.<sup>42</sup>

"I believe that the brightest spot in the Mexico of today is its educational activity," Dewey concluded. "We in the United States who have pursued such a different policy with our Indian population are under an obligation to understand and to sympathize." Of course, this claim that the United States had "pursued such a different policy" was untrue—the United States had invented the use of a school system directly administered by the federal government as a vehicle for the assimilation and incorporation of Indigenous people since at least 1879, and had done so in Michigan with the Mount Pleasant Industrial Indian School in 1893. But since Dewey never spoke or wrote about the U.S. project of Indian schooling, we can only speculate about what he found distinct (let alone superior) in Mexico's policy.

Part of the problem was that even in Mexico, Dewey could not divest himself of the Great Lakes' frontier discourse. In fact, when he considered the challenges of Mexican nation-building through schools, he drew the wrong lesson from U.S. frontier history. "The difficulties in creating a moral and political entity out of Mexico are so enormous that they often seem insuperable; one most readily pictures the general state of the country by thinking of early colonial days in the United States, with a comparatively small number of settlements of a high civilization surrounded by Indian peoples with whom they have but superficial contact. The fact that the Mexican Indians have a settled agricultural life, a much higher culture and greater

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<sup>42</sup> Dewey, "Mexico's Educational Renaissance," 201.

resistance than our own Indians but increases the difficulty of the situation,” Dewey pontificated. In his praise for Mexican reformers, Dewey depicted the American frontier as a place where settler outposts had been few, contact between settlers and Indians was limited, and Indigenous resistance to assimilation was enfeebled by their alleged nomadic lifeways. This account was more myth of the frontier discourse than actual history. It had been challenged by the existence and history of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomie, Andrew Blackbird’s writings, and even Frederick Riggs’ own supposed personal interaction with the Ojibwe in the state of Michigan.<sup>43</sup>

But as a consequence of his reliance on Instrumental Indians and the corollary lack of actual Indigenous people in his philosophy, Dewey uncritically accepted that Sáenz’s project to educate Indigenous people was done in the name of democracy. Dewey argued that “the policy of incorporating the Indians into modern life is of such extraordinary difficulty, its execution demands so much time, peace and tranquility, that any action on our part which puts added obstacles in its way is simply criminal.” Dewey concluded that to deny Indian people an education in Mexico was to deny them a path to democracy. Dewey went so far as to suggest that keeping Indigenous people out of such schools would be not simply unethical, but criminal.<sup>44</sup>

This statement about Indian education in Mexico made by invoking the frontier thesis would be the closest Dewey would ever come to addressing Indian education in the United States. Flores argues that as American and Mexican political and educational reformers alike drew on pragmatism to reshape Mexico’s schools for Indigenous people, they reproduced many of the same practical problems that adapting Dewey’s philosophy posed when progressives attempted to realize it in the United States. In channeling Dewey, Mexico’s *Indigenistas* unwittingly imbibed the frontier discourse and its settler colonial pluralism into their synthesis of

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<sup>43</sup> Dewey, “Mexico’s Educational Renaissance,” 206.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



education and democracy.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, Flores ruminates with no small measure of melancholy that Mexican reformers had turned to Dewey at all: “In a world of available philosophies and politics, they looked to a small cluster of ideas born in the U.S. northeast at the end of the nineteenth century for inspiration about politics in the twentieth.”<sup>46</sup> The bottom line is that Dewey found Mexico’s rural schools revolutionary “because they are part of a larger nation-building project that will ‘incorporate’ and ‘integrate’ the indigenous,” writes Kimberly Richards. “The fact that Dewey ignores that this ‘revolution’ was both developed and perpetuated by the ruling Spanish minority shows both his theoretical limitations.”<sup>47</sup> As long as Indigenous people were objects of educational reform, education would remain “for” and not “by” Indigenous people themselves. Schooling would remain imposed, the antithesis of democracy.

### **Ho-Chunk Counterpoint: Henry Roe Cloud**

While Collier was enamored with Mexican *Indigenistas*, an Indigenous critique of federal Indian education was building in the United States. In 1926, Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work commissioned the Government Research Institute to conduct a sociological study of federal Indian policy and conditions on reservations. The survey team, led by former Census Bureau official Lewis Meriam, began a year-long tour of Indian Country. Three members of the

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<sup>45</sup> Perhaps not entirely unwittingly. José Vasconcelos, the SEP’s first secretary, was skeptical of Dewey. Vasconcelos did not mince his words: “The importation of the Deweyan system among our countrymen is an aberrant case, with graver consequences than the opium and alcohol trades which other colonized people had been subjected to.” Yet Vasconcelos’ own formulation of the *La Raza Cósmica* (‘The Cosmic Race’) was also problematic from the perspective of Indigenous people, who sought to steward their political and cultural identity as distinct and apart from ethnic minorities and the federal state alike. Flores, *Backroad Pragmatists*, 287; Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 15, FN 12, 105-6; Boyles, “John Dewey’s Influence in Mexico,” 102-4.

<sup>46</sup> Flores, *Backroad Pragmatists*, 288.

<sup>47</sup> Richards, “Ancillary Citizenship and Stratified Assimilation,” 86.

team were responsible for reviewing the federal government's Indian schools: Fayette Avery McKenzie, W. Carson Ryan, and Henry Roe Cloud.<sup>48</sup>

Henry Roe Cloud was a Ho-Chunk activist, educator, and reformer. His experience with schooling began at the Genoa Indian Industrial School in Nebraska; he transferred to the Winnebago Industrial School around 1898 and then the Santee Normal Training School, where he converted to Christianity. In the church, Cloud found a new educational network, and he soon enrolled at the Mount Hermon mission school in Massachusetts in 1902. He later attended Yale University, where he studied psychology and philosophy, earning his master's in anthropology in 1914. He also earned a divinity degree from Auburn Theological Seminary in New York and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1913. Cloud became an early leader of the Society of American Indians. It was there, after meeting his future wife Elizabeth Bender (White Earth Ojibwe), that Henry Cloud made education the focus of his reform activities. As children, both Henry and Elizabeth Cloud had attended government schools at a time when the schools primarily prepared Native people to work as low-wage laborers through Reel's half-and-half curriculum. Cloud later recalled that at Genoa Indian Industrial School he "worked two years in turning a washing machine ... to reduce the running expenses of the institution. I nursed a growing hatred for it. Such work is not educative." By the end of the 1920s, Cloud had become nationally renowned as a leading figure in Indian education reform.<sup>49</sup>

Collier was familiar with Cloud. Both men had been on the Committee of 100 in 1923, and Collier begrudgingly shared the limelight when the Meriam survey team published its report in 1928 titled *The Problem of Indian Administration*. The report called for sweeping changes to the

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Watras, "Progressive Education and Native American Schools, 1929-1950," *Educational Foundations* 18, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 2004): 83.

<sup>49</sup> Lisa Tetzloff, "Elizabeth Bender Cloud: 'Working for and with Our Indian People,'" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 30, no. 3 (September 2009): 89; Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 221.

government's Indian schools. It identified acute neglect of Indigenous students' health, condemned denigrating assimilatory curriculum, and chronicled the reverberating trauma of family separation. Most of these critiques focused on the notorious off-reservation industrial boarding schools such as the one in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. The report concluded that a fundamental change was required in federal Indian schooling. "The work with and for the Indians must give consideration of the desire of the individual Indians," Cloud and the authors of *The Problem of Indian Administration* wrote. "He who wishes to merge into the social and economic life of the prevailing civilization of this country should be given all practicable aid and advice in making the necessary adjustments. He who wants to remain an Indian and live according to his old culture should be aided in doing so."<sup>50</sup> As Lomawaima and McCarty suggest, this was a notable departure from the older logic of Indian education. "Remain an Indian? Preserve Native cultures? These were unprecedented federal goals in Indian country."<sup>51</sup> It appeared like a first step on a path that might lead to self-determination in education.<sup>52</sup>

While Collier and Cloud were both critics of the federal government's schools, they had different visions of what reform might look like. Whereas Cloud wanted to end federal Indian policy of assimilation and incorporation in order to empower individual Indian people in matters such as education, Collier supported an end to assimilation in the service of his own anti-modern primitivism. Publicly, the two were largely cordial and mutually supportive of each other's efforts. Cloud was involved in early rounds of drafting the IRA. He participated in half of the ten Indian congresses that Collier later organized to promote the bill.<sup>53</sup> However, Collier kept his

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<sup>50</sup> Cited in Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 65.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>52</sup> Watras, "Progressive Education and Native American Schools," 83-84.

<sup>53</sup> Joel Pfister, *The Yale Indian: The Education of Henry Roe Cloud* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 233, FN 110.

aims in education distinct from Cloud's—especially as the names of both men increasingly were mentioned as candidates for Commissioner of Indian Affairs. "Cloud's eminence could blow the whistle on Collier's pluralist paternalism," Joel Pfister wrote. No surprise: Cloud's educational credentials rivaled—if not surpassed—Collier's. Cloud's "presence complicated Collier's romantic construct of Indianness."<sup>54</sup> This was perhaps best evidenced in the fact that while Cloud supported the IRA, he was disappointed in Collier's disinterest in adapting his designs for democracy to actual Indigenous communities. "Herein lay a golden opportunity for the government to draw up constitutional forms of government consonant with natural concepts of [tribal] government reading back into the centuries," Cloud later wrote of the IRA. "I drew up a form of government according to my tribal clan system and proudly showed it to visiting travel officials from the Washington Office. I was promptly told to throw this into the wastebasket as they had just what was needed for our Winnebago Constitution."<sup>55</sup>

Renya K. Ramirez (Ho-Chunk scholar and descendant of Cloud) has documented that Collier and others expressed some wariness about Cloud's participation at the highest level of the Office of Indian Affairs.<sup>56</sup> When Franklin D. Roosevelt won election in 1932, he named Harold L. Ickes as Secretary of the Interior. Ickes favored Collier for the job, not least of all because Ickes and his wife had been members of Collier's American Indian Defense Association.<sup>57</sup> After Collier eventually became commissioner on April 20, 1933, many expected he would name Cloud to a high-level position in Indian education policy. Instead, Collier appointed him superintendent of Haskell Indian School, the largest of the federal government's off-reservation

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<sup>54</sup> Pfister, *The Yale Indian*, 162.

<sup>55</sup> Renya K. Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe Cloud and Elizabeth Bender Cloud* (Lincoln: University Press and American Philosophical Society, 2018), 146.

<sup>56</sup> Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 126-31.

<sup>57</sup> Watras, "Progressive Education and Native American Schools," 87.

boarding schools. While this was a breakthrough appointment as the first Native superintendent, it also represented Cloud's banishment from Washington, DC. Ramirez notes that Cloud, who long channeled his professional credentials in service of his role as a warrior for Ho-Chunk and Indigenous people generally, took the job, determined to make the most of it. For several years, Cloud served as the only Indigenous supervisor of a federal Indian boarding school.<sup>58</sup> Collier's sidelining of Cloud foreshadowed his broader turning away from Native voices that were not in harmony with his designs in education reform.

While Indigenous critiques and recommendations for education during the New Deal were diverse, the most salient was a growing bloc among Native people (including Cloud) calling for the accreditation of off-reservation boarding schools. Between the government's day schools (functionally elementary schools), boarding schools (akin to middle schools), and off-reservation industrial boarding schools, there was a gap in the federal government's Indian school system for high school education. Most off-reservation schools, such as the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School (MPIIS), offered schooling up until the eighth grade. After that, Native parents had to stomach the unappealing prospect of sending their children to public high schools. In public schools, Native students were outnumbered by non-Natives and were often isolated, bullied, or ignored by peers and teachers alike. At least in federal Indian schools, they were recognized as distinct from their non-Native peers. While off-reservation industrial boarding schools were often brutal, deadly, and denigrating places, to many Native people they were the embodiment of the federal government's responsibility to them on the basis of their political distinction as Indigenous people. As Lomawaima and McCarty note, it was in part due to this reason that the early decades of the twentieth century saw an upsurge in Native demand

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<sup>58</sup> Pfister, *The Yale Indian*, 143-44; Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 134-39; Pfister, *Individuality Incorporated*, 203-4.

that the federal government's schools be brought into line with other school systems in the United States. Native parents wanted the federal school system to offer their children a path to secondary education.<sup>59</sup>

But Collier, motivated principally by the spirit of his anti-modern primitivism, had little interest in the costly conversion of industrial schools into high schools. As Collier wrote, "The boarding school system, under which children were taken from their families and confined in distant schools through their adolescent years, paralleled the other government measures. All were designed to break the relations between the generations, to kill the Indian languages and cultures, and to make the Indian over into an imitation white man."<sup>60</sup> While Collier rightly diagnosed the harm of this system when it was imposed on Indigenous people, he did not have the democratic imagination to see these schools as institutions potentially ripe for federal devolution to tribal governments. Instead, Collier allowed his anti-modern primitivism to guide his opposition to these schools. After all, what was the purpose of the federal government's school system originally built to disappear Natives in a world where Indian culture was suddenly valuable and useful to non-Natives? With leaders like Henry Roe Cloud relegated to Kansas, Collier could focus on shaping Indian education policy in the service of his own idiosyncratic goals. To help him to realize them, Collier approached a different author of *The Problem of Indian Administration*, Will Carson Ryan.

### **Recruit Number 2: W. Carson Ryan, Jr.**

W. Carson Ryan Jr. was born in New York City in 1885. For a time, Ryan imagined a career in journalism, but he was increasingly drawn to education, an interest first piqued as he

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<sup>59</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 68-73.

<sup>60</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 131.

found that he enjoyed tutoring students to put himself through college. Ryan graduated from Harvard in 1907 and earned his PhD from George Washington University in 1918. He went on to positions at the U.S. Bureau of Education, where he developed a specialty in rural and vocational education. Later, Ryan would become head of the education department at Swarthmore and president of the Progressive Education Association. In 1926, Ryan was recruited to be a part of the Meriam survey. Along with Fayette Avery McKenzie and Henry Roe Cloud, Ryan helped study conditions in federal Indian schools and author a series of recommendations.<sup>61</sup> In the wake of the *Problem of Indian Administration*, then Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles James Rhoads decided to appoint Ryan as Director of Indian Education in 1929.

One of the recommendations from the *Problem of Indian Administration* was the accreditation of several off-reservation industrial schools as high schools.<sup>62</sup> Fashioning off-reservation industrial schools into high schools meant adding teachers and curriculum for up to three new grade levels; securing appropriations for the clothing, food, and housing of hundreds of new students; and covering all other expenditures for costs associated with expanding, rather than reducing, these schools. While there was increasing Native demand for such a policy, convincing a skeptical Congress to foot the bill was a tall order. Ryan set to work. He identified six boarding schools for closure, declared an end to their military regimentation, and made plans to convert just a select few remainders into high schools with a vocational education curriculum.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Jennifer L. Bertolet, "After the Meriam Report: W. Carson Ryan, Jr. and the Transformation of American Indian Education, 1928-1936" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2006), 1-2, 9-31.

<sup>62</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> Watras, "Progressive Education and Native American Schools," 86.

When Collier arrived in Washington as the new commissioner in 1933, he had to decide whether to keep Ryan on to carry forward his agenda or loop him into his own ambitions.<sup>64</sup> Whatever disagreements the two pedagogues might have had, they shared a predilection for Dewey.<sup>65</sup> As Jennifer L. Bertolet argues, Ryan's tenure began reshaping the federal government's Indian education system into "a modern program of John Dewey-inspired progressive cross-cultural education."<sup>66</sup> She persuasively shows that when critics of Dewey (from among more radical educators) grew louder, Ryan "remained committed to Dewey's child-centered ideals."<sup>67</sup> Ryan himself wrote that he was committed to Dewey's vision "to carry forward the pioneering experimentation and research that have been characteristic of education at its best."<sup>68</sup> Collier decided to keep Ryan on the job.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> In his 1932 article on Mexican schools, Collier wrote, "The present director of Indian education in the United States, Dr. Carson W. Ryan, Jr. is working heroically within a system which is the antithesis of his own philosophy and his own personal instincts. He means for the system to be changed. The coming three years will tell." Collier, "Mexico: A Challenge," *Progressive Education* 9 (1932): 96.

<sup>65</sup> Many of Collier's ideas about Indian education can be found in his periodical, *Indians at Work*. This was Collier's in-house journal, where he opined about all matters of the Indian New Deal, and education in particular. It should be no great surprise that Dewey appeared in its pages. For example, in an article from September 15, 1934, Collier declared that "we must conceive of work in wood and metal, of weaving, sewing, and cooking, as methods of living and learning which society keeps itself going, as agencies for bringing home to the child some of the primal necessities of community life (Dewey, 1900, 14)." Far beyond this reference to Dewey's *School and Society*, Laukaitis notes in his broad analysis of *Indians at Work* that "following the same progressive ideals as John Dewey viewing the great community as the means to a great society, the Collier administration advanced the idea that America's 'Indian Problem' could only be solved by restoring community and healing the wounds caused by past practices. Toward this result, *Indians at Work* presented the school as a panacea for the problems that affected Indian communities." John J. Laukaitis, "Indians at Work and John Collier's Campaign for Progressive Educational Reform," *American Educational History Journal* 33, no. 2 (2006): 101-3.

<sup>66</sup> Bertolet, "After the Meriam Report," 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. On the debate over race and ethnicity among progressive educators in this period, see Ronald K. Goodenow, "The Progressive Educator, Race and Ethnicity in the Depression Years: An Overview," *History of Education Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 365-94.

<sup>68</sup> W. Carson Ryan, "What Do We Mean by Progressive Education?" *Progressive Education* 60 (October 1939): 69.

<sup>69</sup> Looking back, Collier remembered that Ryan had a difficult job. "The directorship of Indian Education was surely one of the most demanding jobs in the world. There are no other school administrative units of its geographical size and of its variety of problems in America. Indian education had to encompass many studies not ordinarily found in school curricula—the introduction of Indian children to modern techniques [sic] of health and hygiene ... to our world's machines and power sources, and to basic concepts about money and commerce." Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 196.



Collier and Ryan held up the day school as the institutional configuration that best represented Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy.<sup>70</sup> "Ryan exuded Dewey-inspired enthusiasm over the possibilities of day school education," Jennifer Bertolet writes.<sup>71</sup> According to Frederick Stefon, "Ryan hypothesized that among the Indian communal organizations, especially among the Pueblo, he had found a utopian setting 'for a new type of school of the progressive sort with which the whole community would be involved.... If there really is a new way in education, certain Indian groups offer the best possible place to apply it.'"<sup>72</sup> Under Collier and Ryan, day schools "became community centers emphasizing native arts and crafts, home economics, vocational studies, and adult education. Virtually all activities, from washing clothes to exchanging library books, revolved around the school," writes historian Roger Bromert. As Pedro T. Orata, another member of Collier's Deweyan brain trust, later wrote, "The trend since 1930 has been to do away with boarding schools and replace them with community day schools or to place the Indian children in public schools. These community day schools are expected to bring education closer to the people, to give them opportunities to learn to meet the demands of present-day living in their immediate communities."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Together, Collier and Ryan outlined a combined three-point plan for education reform that they derived from their familiarity with Dewey and the broader movement for progressive education. First, they would continue to work as quickly as possible to close some of the most expensive of the federal government's off-reservation industrial boarding schools. Meanwhile, they sought to increase funding for the remaining schools in order to pay for better clothes, food, and health for Native students. They made plans to increase the number of bilingual readers, Indian clubs, and arts and crafts at these schools. They also worked to subsidize Indian students' attendance in state public schools if they so chose. Most importantly, however, in the wake of the closure of boarding schools, Collier and Ryan would open scores of new federal day schools.

<sup>71</sup> Bertolet, "After the Meriam Report," 206.

<sup>72</sup> W. Carson Ryan Jr. and Rose K. Brandt, "Indian Education Today," *Progressive Education* 9, no. 2 (February 1932): 83, cited in Frederick J. Stefon, "Willard Beatty and Progressive Education," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 33, no. 4 (2009): 106.

<sup>73</sup> Pedro T. Orata, *Fundamental Education in an Amerindian Community* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1953), 205.

In one of his first acts as commissioner, Collier sent Sáenz to complete a three-month tour of Indian reservations in the United States.<sup>74</sup> At the end of his inspection tour, Sáenz recommended that Collier's administration invest in day schools on reservations that could be configured like rural schools he had overseen at the SEP.<sup>75</sup> In Bromert's estimation, "the philosophy of involving the entire family in the day school reflected Collier's deep concern for the concept of community."<sup>76</sup> Collier arranged in 1935 for Ryan to travel to Mexico to see Sáenz's Deweyan reforms in rural schools firsthand.<sup>77</sup> Together, Collier and Ryan put forward a plan between 1932 and 1934 to definitively address off-reservation industrial schools.<sup>78</sup> Collier and Ryan identified a number of schools—such as Haskell in Kansas and Chilocco in Oklahoma—for accreditation as "vocational high schools," which emphasized job readiness for reservation-based political economies. They then made plans to shutter a number of others deemed too expensive to convert to high schools or continue their operations—such as Chemawa in Oregon and Phoenix in Arizona. Then, the federal government would increase funding to states to pay for Native students to attend public high schools in the place of these discontinued schools.

By converting some schools to vocational high schools and opening a legion of new day schools, Collier and Ryan were confident that they were enacting the recommendations of *The Problem of Indian Administration*, which Cloud and Ryan had written to call for "locally

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<sup>74</sup> Ahlstedt, "John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy," 211-12.

<sup>75</sup> John Collier, "Indians at Work: An Emergency Conservation Sheet for Our Selves," Washington, DC: Office of Indian Affairs, January 15, 1934.

<sup>76</sup> Roger Bromert, "The Sioux and the Indian New Deal, 1933-1944" (PhD diss., University of Toledo, 1980), 160.

<sup>77</sup> The Deweyan brain trust and their frequent international trips (mostly to Mexico) eventually led Congress to attach a rider to their appropriations to the Office of Indian Affairs prohibiting Collier from paying for trips "with the intent of investigating education systems for Indians." Ahlstedt, "John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy," 239-41.

<sup>78</sup> Their plan coincided with Roosevelt's 1934 executive order 6750-c calling for more vocational apprenticeships in U.S. schools, which Lomawaima and McCarty characterize as a call for increased vocational education in Indian schools. Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 70.

relevant” curriculum. In their view, in order to provide locally relevant curriculum, schools had to be brought closer—figuratively and literally—to reservation communities. Collier and Ryan regarded the federal system of off-reservation boarding schools as diametrically opposed to this idea. Ryan himself wrote, “We make no secret of the fact that we hope to eliminate gradually practically all the Government boarding schools.”<sup>79</sup> They became convinced that the closure of these schools in favor of day schools would more readily accomplish their Deweyan goals of making federal schools into social centers.<sup>80</sup>

The problem with their Deweyan-inspired plan for democracy and education in Indian Country was that they did not heed the very real communities that had grown up around these off-reservation schools. When they learned of Collier’s and Ryan’s plans, many of the Native people associated with these schools balked. As Lomawaima and McCarty have written, Collier and Ryan’s vocational high school plan at places like Haskell and Chilocco was an unappealing solution to Native people’s demand for accreditation that might offer a ladder to postsecondary education. Collier and Ryan “defined locally relevant education to fit entrenched notions of Indians’ lesser abilities and circumscribed opportunities, stressing vocational training at the expense of Native communities’ request for accredited academic high schools.”<sup>81</sup> At the same time, Collier’s and Ryan’s outright closure of schools such as Phoenix and Chemawa at the height of the Great Depression felt to many Native parents, alumni, and current students less like an act of cultural pluralism than it was outright theft. One of the best vantage points from which

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>80</sup> As Margaret Connell Szasz observes, “This issue was the subject of more publicity than almost any other aspect of Indian education. Collier knew the value of favorable publicity, and when he began closing boarding schools, he made sure that everyone knew about it. Twelve schools were closed between 1928 and 1933.” Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 60.

<sup>81</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 71.

to understand this issue is where Dewey's divergence from Indigenous people first began: Michigan.

As part of their efforts to reform the Indian School Service, Collier and Ryan targeted the Mount Pleasant boarding school for closure in 1934. Ever since Dewey had left Michigan in 1894, the MPIIS had been in operation schooling several generations of Michigan Indian children and their families. It had become a place where Andrew J. Blackbird sought employment; where a number of Indigenous instructors had taught; and where a score of students had played sports, marched in the school band, and spent their youths surrounded by other Indigenous people. By the 1930s, many of them had other ideas about the school's future. Over the course of forty years, Indigenous people from across Michigan who had been gathered at MPIIS through a mix of coercion and voluntarism had negotiated the assimilatory and incorporatist logic of the school. The school had become an important node in the lives of the Anishinaabe, Odawa, and Bodewadomi students, alumni, and employees who studied, worked, and gathered there. In so doing, they had begun to slowly bend the institution away from its assimilatory function and into a kind of hub for community life. MPIIS was an institution that had been built as a means to erase Indigenous identity and which had, over forty years, become a lynchpin of Indigenous community in Michigan, transformed in large part by its intergenerational cohort of Indigenous students, employees, teachers, and alumni. As much as it had originally embodied the imposition of anti-democratic schooling among Michigan Indigenous people that brought family separation, cultural destruction, and even death, MPIIS had become an important place in the lives of many Indigenous youth when Collier and Ryan decided unilaterally that it was to be shut down.

Part of the reason Collier chose MPIIS for closure was that it appeared like an easy and symbolic victory for his reforms in education. Closing many of the expensive off-reservation industrial Indian schools that had become symbols of assimilation would demonstrate his commitment to overturning the policies of previous years. What's more, Collier found a willing partner in Governor William Comstock of Michigan, who was eager to take the property off his hands. Comstock wanted to turn the campus into a state school for neurologically atypical and developmentally impaired children. This led Comstock to make a deal with Collier: in exchange for the closure of the boarding school, the state would guarantee its Indigenous students had access to state schools, subsidized by the federal government. In lieu of state property taxes, Collier accepted the proposal, known as the Comstock Agreement, and the boarding school was closed.<sup>82</sup>

While attendance at MPIIS had been a traumatic, brutal, and even deadly experience for many Indigenous children in Michigan, there is no denying that its absence by 1935 left a hole in their lives. When the MPIIS was gone, what was left to stand in its place as the federal apparatus devoted to servicing Indian distinction? Instead of the staff and faculty of MPIIS, the federal government hired a series of exclusively non-Indian social workers to oversee the integration of Indigenous students into Michigan public schools and into orphanages, poor houses, and non-

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<sup>82</sup> Michigan would be a case study for the efficacy of Collier's IRA and JOM policies. Of the final class of fifty at MPIIS in 1934, fourteen students were sent home for the summer and left to their own devices, five were declared mentally deficient and transferred to the Michigan Home and Training School, and twenty-three were placed into foster homes by the Michigan Children's Aid Society. In the end, the state of Michigan got the campus that it coveted from the MPIIS in exchange for the promise to foot the bill for Indian schooling in public schools; Collier and the federal government could point the closure of the MPIIS as making good on the promise to end the era of imposed schooling. What seemed like a win-win deal for the federal government and the state of Michigan turned out to be a loser for Michigan's Indigenous people. The state almost immediately reneged on its obligations in the Comstock Agreement. For nearly thirty years, the state did next to nothing to commit financial resources in place of the federal government to the education of Indian citizens. The Comstock Agreement proved to be a rickety and creaky apparatus for Indian education in Michigan. Indigenous sovereignty, which could ground their claim to organize their own schools, was largely ignored. Littlefield, "BIA Schools: Theories of Resistance and Social Reproduction," 439.

Indian homes.<sup>83</sup> The school offered Indigenous children a chance for a childhood surrounded by fellow Indigenous peers and a number of Indigenous teachers. Under Collier's direction, they were replaced by the unfamiliar faces of federal social workers and state public school teachers. As Alice Littlefield notes, "Among Michigan Indians, the closing of the Mt. Pleasant Indian School continues to be regarded by an older generation as evidence of government betrayal of its obligations to native people."<sup>84</sup> Having lost the one institution that was available exclusively to them as Indigenous people on the basis of their political distinction, albeit in problematic ways, it felt to many Michigan Indian people that something that was rightly theirs had wrongly been taken.<sup>85</sup>

Looking back to the Indian New Deal in Michigan, it is hard not to see Collier's debts to Deweyan ideas coming full circle: the settlement house synthesis of education and democracy and its attendant cultural pluralism configured for immigrant populations coming to roost at the MPIIS. This synthesis flattened Indians' political status in favor of their schooling as a racialized group. For example, George Jackson, an Anishinaabe and Odawa man, insisted to state officials that he deserved federal aid for his three school-aged children in the wake of the MPIIS closure because of his status as an Indigenous person. The school's superintendent clarified that "in such cases it will be necessary for the local authorities to assume responsibility using welfare funds provided by State and Federal Government to the benefit of which Michigan Indian children, like other citizens of the state, are entitled."<sup>86</sup> As perverse as the intentions of its founders had been,

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<sup>83</sup> The closure of MPIIS amounts to what Andrew Woolford has described as a "move from social control through disciplinary education to a new liberal welfarist modest of intervention in the lives of those viewed to exist at the outskirts of society." Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment*, 81.

<sup>84</sup> Littlefield, "BIA Schools," 439.

<sup>85</sup> Report from Frank Christy to John Collier, June 19, 1934, Folder 39, Box 19, Records Related to the Closure of the MPIS and Agency 1933-1934, Record Group 75, National Archives Building, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>86</sup> Frank Christy to Carl Peterson, June 16, 1933, Folder 39, Box 19, Records Related to the Closure of the MPIS and Agency 1933-1934, Record Group 75, National Archives Building, Chicago, Illinois.

the MPIIS represented the federal government's direct investment in Indian education. Once the MPIIS was gone, the state of Michigan came to regard Indigenous families like any other racial or ethnic minority in the state.

In the closure of the MPIIS, we see another irony: through their agency, creativity, and determination, several generations of Indigenous people from Andrew Blackbird to Leroy Wesaw Sr. had themselves begun to make a school intended to disintegrate their families, communities, and nations into a kind of social center that might have resembled what Dewey had had in mind for schools all along. What if instead of closing MPIIS, Collier turned the school over to Native people to govern? What if tribal governments such as the Saginaw Chippewa had been empowered to take over control of schools like the MPIIS and had been subsidized by the federal government? Would not such an approach be congruent with Dewey's reconstruction of local control in the form of community schools as social centers? Why did Collier exempt the principle of local control from tribal governments under the IRA's new constitutional order in the first place? The answer lies in part with the next two members of Collier's Deweyan brain trust.

### **Recruit Number 3: Willard Beatty**

Collier and Ryan continued to close off-reservation boarding schools until Ryan left his job at Director of Indian Education in 1936. Ryan left the Office of Indian Affairs to take up a position in the Carnegie Foundation. To find a suitable candidate to continue his Deweyan brain trust, Collier resolved to find a prominent progressive educator. He located one in Willard Beatty.

Willard Beatty was born in 1891. His inculcation in progressive education began early, when he attended the California School of Mechanical Arts, known as the James Lick School in

San Francisco. At a school explicitly designed around a curriculum of industrial education, Beatty spent his earliest school days in an apprenticeship program that combined work study with academic instruction. Education historian Frederick Stefon chronicles the influence that this kind of experiential learning had on Beatty: it “so impressed him that he entered the University of California in 1909 and graduated in 1913 with a bachelor of science in architecture.”<sup>87</sup> Intent on becoming an educator himself, Beatty then attended San Francisco State Teachers College. There Beatty was “exposed to the progressive educational philosophies of Francis Parker, Burk, William H. Kilpatrick, Charles H. Judd, and John Dewey.”<sup>88</sup> In particular, Beatty became convinced that industrial education, which combined physical work and study in the course of a school day, was a crucial part of preparing the public for democratic life. Like Dewey, Beatty did not believe that experiential learning should be a departure from learning to labor; rather, it was an “enrichment” of labor towards more meaningful ends.<sup>89</sup>

Beatty was hired to teach at the San Francisco State Teachers College, and he and Collier were briefly on the faculty together until 1920. While Collier left soon after his trip to Taos Pueblo to become an advocate for Indians, Beatty remained focused on schooling and soon became an innovator in progressive education. He earned an MA in education from the University of California in 1921 and studied in a doctoral program at the University of Chicago. He went on to become superintendent of schools in Bronxville, where he acquired a national reputation.<sup>90</sup> While he did not complete his PhD, he studied from 1924 to 1929 at the Teachers College at Columbia University. Not long after, Beatty became president of the Progressive Education Association, an office he held when he was approached by Collier to become the next

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<sup>87</sup> Stefon, “Willard Beatty and Progressive Indian Education,” 92.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-96.





Figure 8.1. Photo of Willard W. Beatty in “86,000 Indian Pupils,” *Lewis County Advocate*, February 20, 1936. Photograph Washington State University Libraries Digital Collections, Pullman, Washington.

Director of Indian Education in 1936.<sup>91</sup> In fact, Ryan and Beatty essentially switched jobs—when Beatty replaced Ryan as Director of Indian Education, Ryan replaced Beatty as president of the Progressive Education Association.<sup>92</sup> In making Beatty the successor to Ryan, Collier explicitly strengthened the connection between his educational reforms in the Office of Indian Affairs and the wider movement for progressive education in the United States.

Beatty’s appointment to Director of Education in the Office of Indian Affairs seemed to further indicate that Dewey’s ideas specifically would be applied to Indian schools. *Time* magazine heralded Beatty’s appointment, remarking that he was “prepared to dispense the blessings of his faith to

81,000 young Amerindians.” Beatty’s progressive pedigree seemed well suited for Indian education.<sup>93</sup> “Since the prime tenet of Progressive Education is to let pupils study what they want to study, Willard Beatty seemed well fitted for his job,” *Time* reasoned. “In reservation schools

<sup>91</sup> Watras, “Progressive Education and Native American Schools,” 91.

<sup>92</sup> Stefon, “Willard Beatty and Progressive Indian Education,” 105.

<sup>93</sup> Beatty’s appointment was hardly the first time in his life that he had considered the welfare of Native people. Claudia Keenan suggests that during Beatty’s childhood in San Francisco he was particularly close with his uncle, Earle Walcott. Walcott was active in reform movements in the city, becoming secretary of the Commonwealth Club, a civic organization dedicated to matters of progressive reform in California. In his capacity as secretary, Walcott organized a program in 1909, “Indian Rights and Wrongs,” extending an invitation to prominent reformers in Indian affairs in California including Cornelia Taber of the Northern California Indian Association and Alfred L. Kroeber at the University of California at Berkeley. Claudia J. Keenan, “The Education of Willard W. Beatty,” *Through the Hourglass*, accessed February 23, 2021, [www.throughthehourglass.com/2016/08/the-education-of-willard-w-beatty.html](http://www.throughthehourglass.com/2016/08/the-education-of-willard-w-beatty.html).

Director Beatty will encourage the study of Indian arts, customs and languages, in addition to ‘pale face learning.’”<sup>94</sup> The *Progressive Education Magazine* concluded that “white children’s loss will be Indian children’s gain.”<sup>95</sup> In light of his training, Frederick Stefon has called Beatty “The Indian’s John Dewey.” “Beatty, a true progressive, believed the schools were ‘centers of life’ in which children ‘learn to do by actually doing,’” Stefon argues. “Like John Dewey, Beatty qualified his emphasis on experience.”<sup>96</sup> This is not mere hyperbole; after eight years as Director of Indian Education, Beatty gifted Dewey a copy of his 1944 *Education for Action: Selected Articles from Indian Education*, with an inscription “in tribute to a lifetime of educational leadership.”<sup>97</sup>

When he took on the job in 1936, Beatty set about reshaping the Indian School Service into an exemplar of progressive education. That year, the federal government counted 26,000 Indian students in 249 government schools.<sup>98</sup> Beatty brought three major initiatives to this system: he organized a series of summer teaching institutes and curriculum planning conferences; increased the number of bilingual materials in curriculum; and welcomed Indigenous stories, holidays, arts and crafts, and dance into schools.<sup>99</sup>

First, Beatty resolved to spread the gospel of pragmatism by way of summer teacher training institutes.<sup>100</sup> Under Beatty’s direction, federal educators began meeting annually during the summer months when school was generally out. These meetings were a way for teachers in

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<sup>94</sup> “Education: Beatty to Indians,” *Time Magazine*, February 10, 1936, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,755804,00.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Keenan, “The Education of Willard W. Beatty.”

<sup>96</sup> Stefon, “Willard Beatty and Progressive Indian Education,” 101.

<sup>97</sup> Child Study Association of America to John Dewey, March 16, 1927, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Watras, “Progressive Education and Native American Schools,” 92.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>100</sup> “Beatty embarked on various in-service training and staff programs to teach our teachers,” Collier recalled. “We had to develop theories of education out of our experience, and test them in practice as we went along.” Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 197.

the Indian School Service to exchange best practices, learn new skills, and discuss a variety of topics related to pedagogy and policy. Beatty made it a priority to institutionalize the summer institutes, making them one of the defining features of his tenure.<sup>101</sup> The institutes became an important conduit by which Collier's brain trust could disseminate their Deweyan-inspired ideas. "Ryan and Beatty attempted to inculcate their respective Indian Service teaching staffs with progressive methodology not through dictate, but through in-service training and summer schools," observes Stefon.<sup>102</sup> Beatty carried out the first of his new summer teaching institutes at Pine Ridge. In July of 1936, two hundred teachers from the Indian School Service gathered to hear Beatty and others opine on the unique task of teaching Indians.<sup>103</sup> These summer institutes were popular among many federal government Indian teachers, including the smaller cadre of Native educators who worked as teachers. However, their professionalization rarely included training that might prepare these Indigenous professionals for a career as a school principal or superintendent, positions through which they might direct the administration of Indian schools.

Second, Beatty and Collier pushed for the publication and adoption of Native language instructional materials in federal schools. "We intended that school life become bilingual," Collier recalled of his discussions with Beatty, "and that the schools should serve adult and child alike. We encouraged the literalization of Indian languages and the publication of Indian-English literature."<sup>104</sup> Under Collier and Beatty, the Indian Office produced a number of grammars, dictionaries, and textbooks, including books for younger children that featured Indigenous languages, stories, and characters. Most notably, Beatty oversaw the creation of a series of *Indian Life Readers*, which featured stories attributed to Native cultures and translated into

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<sup>101</sup> Bromert, "The Sioux and the Indian New Deal," 158-59.

<sup>102</sup> Stefon, "Willard Beatty and Progressive Indian Education," 99.

<sup>103</sup> Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 46-47.

<sup>104</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 196.

Pueblo, Navajo, and Lakota languages.<sup>105</sup> While Collier and Beatty found some success in this initiative, their efforts were uneven. While Diné language materials were successfully commissioned by the Office of Indian Affairs for use in schools on the Navajo nation, there was more difficulty in Dakota/Lakota schools.<sup>106</sup> In either case, these materials were less a product of an Indigenous anti-colonial cultural survivance and more the product of anti-modern primitivists eager to conserve select Native cultural subjects.<sup>107</sup> When materials such as these were developed by non-Native educators independent of more meaningful devolution of control over school administration to Indigenous teachers, they failed to reach the threshold of meaningful democracy in Indian education.

Third, Collier's anti-modern primitivist esteem of tribalism cultures led to his desire to make federal schools less outwardly hostile to the "expression of Native identity, language, and heritage."<sup>108</sup> Collier and Beatty worked to up-end the curricular monopoly of English-language instruction, the insistence on students' exclusive observation of Euro-American holidays, and the military order of the early twentieth century. These boarding school curricula had long targeted Native clothing, hairstyles, and even names. Under Collier, the remaining federal industrial schools lessened their grip on complete cultural erasure. Chilocco created a class on "Indian History and Lore" which was flooded with eager Native students.<sup>109</sup> Haskell created "home rooms" which featured lessons on Native stories and offered newly formed "Indian Clubs," where students would often make their own regalia and perform dances for local non-Native audiences.

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<sup>105</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 91-113.

<sup>106</sup> Bromert, "The Sioux and the Indian New Deal," 159.

<sup>107</sup> While Bertolet suggests that these materials represented a Deweyan kind of "cross-cultural education," Lomawaima and McCarty characterize these books as meaningful if rudimentary attempts at "cultural pluralism." Bertolet, "After the Meriam Report," 319; Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 91-92.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>109</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 73.

While these were important departures from the earlier logic of assimilation that may appear like pluralist concessions, the anti-colonial character of these reforms was constrained by what Lomawaima and McCarty call a racial “safety zone.” This ideological safety zone could be measured by just how far non-Native administrators at Indian schools deigned to allow Native students to traffic in their Native identities. The safety zone was the ultimate anti-democratic feature of schooling “for” Indians rather than “by” Indians: it meant that non-Natives had the authority to decide when and how Native language, stories, and material culture could appear, and in what fashion.<sup>110</sup> The result was a program for education defined “within a framework of American, not [Native], cultural meaning,” conclude Lomawaima and McCarty.<sup>111</sup>

Over the course of nearly ten years enacting these reforms together, Collier came to regard Beatty as his natural successor as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. “Beatty, our Director of Indian Education, was my first choice,” Collier wrote later.<sup>112</sup> But while Beatty’s changes to federal Indian schools were important challenges to the prevailing attitude of schooling for assimilation, Collier and Beatty’s Deweyan-inspired reforms fell well short of achieving self-determination in Indian schooling. This became most apparent in Beatty’s recruitment of another member of Collier’s Deweyan brain trust, Pedro T. Orata.

#### **Recruit Number 4: Pedro T. Orata**

Perhaps the member of Collier’s Deweyan brain trust most committed to putting theory into practice was Pedro T. Orata. Orata was a Filipino man born in a rural farming village in Urdaneta in 1899. Acutely aware of the diminished prospect for social mobility of those born into such conditions, Orata placed his faith in education as a path towards a better life. He

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<sup>110</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 1-8.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>112</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 369.

attended a high school in Pangasinan in 1920 and graduated as valedictorian, before setting sights on the United States. He earned a BA and MA from the University of Illinois.<sup>113</sup> After graduation, he earned his PhD at Ohio State University and taught there until 1936, when he was contacted by Willard Beatty.<sup>114</sup> Beatty explained how he had asked Boyd H. Bode of Ohio State to recommend an expert who might be interested in actually putting Deweyan ideas into practice in Indian education.<sup>115</sup> Bode recommended his junior colleague in no small part because of Orata's own familiarity with Dewey's philosophy. For example, in 1926 while he was a graduate student, Orata published an essay in the *University of Illinois Bulletin* where he cited Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. "John Dewey clearly expressed in all his educational writings his belief in the school as a social institution," he wrote. Orata pointed especially to Dewey's essay "My Pedagogic Creed" as a clarion call for education from a "social point of view."<sup>116</sup>

Bode had recommended Orata in part because he believed that the primary problem facing federal Indian schools was that their curriculum was too removed from the everyday

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<sup>113</sup> Leonila Ocampo Bacani, "A study on the Life and Selected Works of Dr. Pedro T. Orata: Their Implications to Contemporary Education" (MA thesis, Guagua National Colleges, 1973); Mila D. Aguilar, "The Community School and Its Relevance to the Present Times," *The Journal of History* 48, no. 1&2 (January-December 2002): 1-8; Gregorio C. Borlaza, *The Life and Work of Pedro T. Orata: An Advocate of Education for All, for Life and Throughout Life* (Manila: Philippine Christian University, 1984); Teofidez E. Calvero, "Pedro T. Orata: His Legacies to Philippine Education and Society" (EdD diss., University of Pangasinan, 1994); Erwin S. Fernandez, "The Community School and the Mother Tongue: Dr. Pedro T. Orata on Multilingual Education," StudyLib, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://studylib.net/doc/8556633/the-community-school-and-the-mother-tongue—dr.-pedro-t.-....> See also Pedro T. Orata, "The Theory of Identical Elements" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1928).

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Watras, "Was Fundamental Education Another Form of Colonialism?" *Review of Education* 53, no. 1 (January 2007): 58-59.

<sup>115</sup> Bode was a frequent correspondent with Dewey. In fact, Dewey once praised Bode for the great degree of fidelity in reconstructing and advancing his own arguments. "Speaking egotistically I am particularly moved to express my appreciation of the careful study you have given my writings and my gratitude for your adequate and sympathetic understanding and exposition of them," Dewey told Bode in a May 1911 letter. "One gets used to disagreement but one has a certain longing for comprehension and your articles have been a great consolation to me." John Dewey to Boyd H. Bode, May 11, 1911, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>116</sup> Pedro T. Orata, "Adaptation of Subject-Matter and Instruction to Individual Differences in the Elementary School," *University of Illinois Bulletin* 13, no. 20 (January 1926): 7.

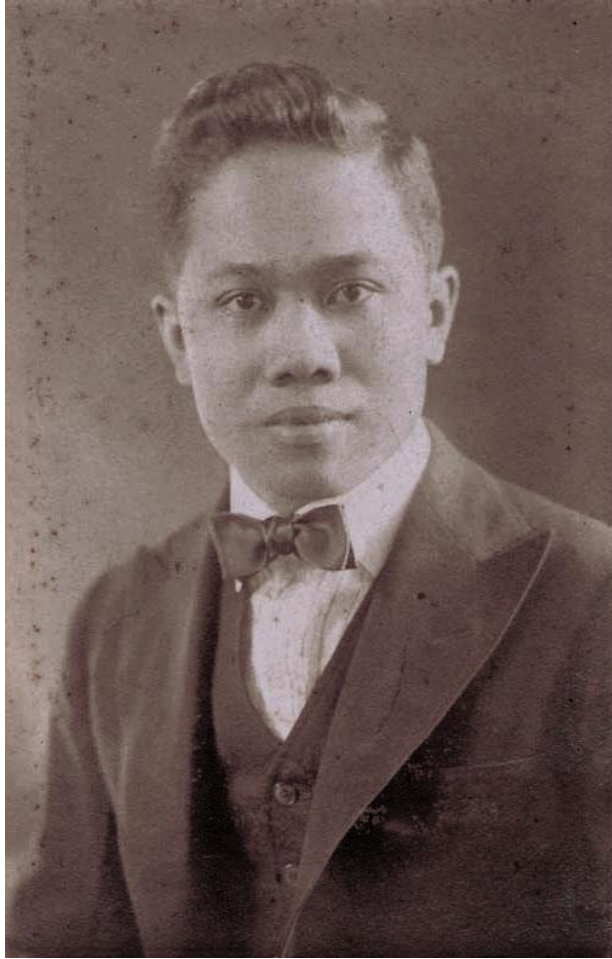


Figure 8.2. *Pedro T. Orata*, Illinois Class of 1924, “History of Urdaneta City University,” Urdaneta City University, Urdaneta, Philippines.

experience of the students they taught on the reservation.<sup>117</sup> The problem of Indian education that Orata had set out to solve was the problem of all progressive education: “One of the most frequent and insistent charges brought against our American system of education is that it is unrelated to life,” Bode wrote. Improvement in federal schooling was to be accomplished by the “pioneer work ... being done in revitalizing education by dealing with the concerns of young people in a social context and bringing the school closer to serve the high purpose of making democracy a way of life.”<sup>118</sup> Bode concluded that “Dr. Orata’s work ... is significant, not only as an indication

of the general direction in which we should move if the Indians in our midst are to have a decent chance, but also for the larger perspective which it opens up for education in a democratic social

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<sup>117</sup> Many years later in 1948, Dewey authored a tribute of Bode, where it became clear that he had long considered Bode as a kindred intellectual spirit. “The fact that Boyd Bode has always seen both philosophy and education as expressions of human life, in terms of their joint opportunity and responsibility for contribution to the advancement of that life is what makes his educational work so upstanding,” Dewey announced. “He sees democracy as the moral human order which gives the fullest possible opportunity for development of all its members and sees the schools of democracy as agencies for maintaining and strengthening that order.” To anyone who might have made a mental note that this sounded a lot like Dewey’s own philosophy, Dewey was quick to add that “Bode has often been over-generous in what he said about the influence of some of my philosophic writings in aiding him to unite philosophy and education,” he assured his audience. “How, it makes me proud and happy to feel that I have had even an indirect part in the work he had done.” John Dewey, “Boyd H. Bode: An Appreciation” (1948), *Later Works*, 15: 327-28.

<sup>118</sup> Boyd H. Bode, “Foreword,” in Orata, *Fundamental Education*, xi.

order.”<sup>119</sup> Orata concurred, writing that schooling was a crucial part of “their salvation.”

“Education,” Orata wrote, “must help them to achieve self-support and self-government.”<sup>120</sup> But how could this best be accomplished?

Collier, Beatty, and Orata agreed that “a good demonstration is worth a thousand theories.” Working together, the three decided to implement a study of what Dewey’s philosophy would look like if it were adapted for use in a federal Indian day school. To implement the study, Orata would become the principal of the Little Wound Day School on Pine Ridge reservation.

“We chose the Little Wound School, an elementary and junior high day school with an enrollment of about 165 pupils for the study,” Beatty explained. “Dr. Orata spent the school year 1936-37 living daily with the problem.” The “problem,” Beatty elaborated, was the “democratic approach to the organization of [Orata’s] teaching staff, the development of student morale, and the enlistment of community support.”<sup>121</sup> Beatty and Orata gave their experiment a leg up by selecting a federal Indian day school in Kyle, South Dakota. In 1936, Kyle featured little more than a handful of houses and a single “building for the cafe and gas station.”<sup>122</sup> The school plans called for classrooms, a gym, “a community bath house,” and permanent housing for staff.<sup>123</sup> In a rural place like Kyle, it was difficult for any school *not* to function as a de facto social center.

Under Orata, the school would be explicitly reimagined as a Deweyan enterprise, not unlike a settlement house. In fact, the original title of the report on Orata’s year at the Little Wound Day School was a play on the title of Dewey’s 1916 book; he called it *Democracy and Indian Education*.<sup>124</sup> Orata made it clear that the Little Wound Day School experiment was

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>120</sup> Orata, “Preface,” in *Fundamental Education*, xii.

<sup>121</sup> Willard Beatty, “Introduction,” in *Fundamental Education*, x.

<sup>122</sup> Watras, “Progressive Education and Native American Schools,” 92.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>124</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, xii, FN 1.



commensurate with Collier's plan for Indian "self-government": "We aim to demonstrate that a people, afflicted with disease, destitute, relatively illiterate and hopelessly dependent upon the government, can be motivated and guided to shift for themselves in order to live the ways of freedom and democracy."<sup>125</sup>

Together, Orata and his instructors at Little Wound implemented a six-part plan for the Little Wound Day School. Their first initiative would be to develop a sense that the teachers at the school were members of a team. According to education historian Joseph Watras, "[Orata] wanted this team to follow Dewey's five steps of thinking by studying the situation, formulating problems, planning their solution, enacting their plans, and evaluating the results."<sup>126</sup> That educational team would then study the student body, communicate with parents in the community, and try to implement the priorities of the federal government. Second, to demonstrate how they had ingratiated themselves with the Oglala Lakota, Orata wrote that his team of educators—made up of mostly non-Native teachers—"partook of their food, their dances and songs, and listened to their stories of long ago—and they listened to ours."<sup>127</sup> Having satisfactorily won over the community's skepticism about his team's intentions, Orata then cast his net wide, arguing that all members of the Oglala Lakota community "from the three-year old child in the nursery-kindergarten class to his ninety-year-old grandmother" fell under the purview of the school's activities. The goal was to guide "them to analyze and plan the solution of these problems," something that was accomplished when "we let them go ahead with their plans even though at times they made mistakes; we deliberately made ourselves increasingly

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>126</sup> Watras, "Was Fundamental Education Another Form of Colonialism?" 61.

<sup>127</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, xiii.

superfluous as we felt they were willing and able to assume responsibilities that rightly belonged to them, and in the end, withdrew altogether.”<sup>128</sup>

The fourth consideration that Orata made was that his educational team would have to divvy up their responsibilities at the school and in the community based on their own strengths and interests. In many cases, Orata wrote that this meant deferring to Oglala elders. “We, the teachers, were not always the leaders,” he explained. “Many of the adults knew better than we about many matters that concerned them, in which cases we were the learners and they were our teachers.”<sup>129</sup> While this may seem like a measure of humility in the face of Oglala Lakota community leaders and traditional educators that surrounded the Little Wound Day School, it was matched by a fifth consideration that suggests whose experience carried the most weight at the school. Orata enumerated that such people consulted by his team of educators had been “our community farmer,” the “owner of the community store,” and the “local priest,” all stations likely filled by non-Native people.<sup>130</sup> Finally, Orata’s sixth initiative was to teach literacy not as an end unto itself, but as a means to offer Indian residents of the reservation more command over their local conditions. “We taught literacy incidentally, in order to lead them to see and appreciate its value to themselves,” Orata explained. His hope was that literacy taught in this “indirect” mode would then be a means to transform the community in order to “raise better crops, to prevent disease, to protect themselves and their families from blizzard and sub-zero weather, to conserve their soil, to secure maximum enjoyment from their yearly carnival, and to solve problems with which they are confronted.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, xiii.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

Many Oglala Lakota people who frequented the Little Wound Day school's programs believed that Orata's experiment had been an improvement in the quality of the federal government's schooling. Their testimony, selectively excerpted in Orata's *Fundamental Education*, provides a clue to the nature of the support from the Oglala Lakota that Orata was eager to amplify. In one example that Orata highlighted, sixty parents and twenty children had gathered to discuss the question of discipline at the school. Discussion was lively. A number of motions were put to the community by Orata; when they voted, some motions were approved and others were opposed. On the question of discipline, however, a great consensus rippled through the assembled Oglala Lakota. A man named Bull Bear had begun the meeting by vouching for Orata and his staff: "I think the way they are handling the school right now is all right," he explained. "In the past fifty or sixty years the government has been watching over us, but things are changing, and we ought to change, too." On its face, this may have been a compelling argument, but it was Bull Bear's own experience in a federal Indian school that truly drove the point home:

I went to an Indian school and they were very strict with us. They had the place fenced in, and no one was supposed to go outside the fence. They had dark closets where they put us if we had to be punished, and sometimes they fed us on bread and water.... It was worse than a penitentiary. I don't believe we want to do anything like that here. I believe the children ought to be given freedom, and the rules and regulations that have to be made should be made by both the teacher and the pupils, together.<sup>132</sup>

This experience would not have been uncommon to many of the older Oglala Lakota people in the room. "You all heard what Mr. Bull Bear just said," a Mr. T. C. chimed in, adding that "we don't want our children to be like prisoners. I don't want you to be too strict with the children; I think they should have some freedom. Let the children decide things with the teacher.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 115.

They'll understand.”<sup>133</sup> One Oglala Lakota mother, recorded as “Mrs. F,” noted that “last year the principal [of the Little Wound Day School] was a stern man, and my boy, Carl, was always getting punished for doing something; the more he was punished the worse he became, and it was hard to do anything with him. Now, under the new plan, he is a better boy. He likes to come to school and doesn't get into so much trouble; he is turning out to be one of the best boys in school.” Mrs. F was grateful that Orata and his staff were more kind than their predecessors. “I think that the plan Dr. Orata is building up is a fine thing—teaching the children to be responsible for their own conduct.” The measure to keep tribal police officers away from the Little Wound Day School and entrust the children with freedom was passed unanimously.<sup>134</sup> Orata was proud of results like these.

Due to the outbreak of World War II, the publication of Orata's report of the Little Wound Day School was delayed until 1952. While it recorded the findings of the 1936-1937 school year, *Fundamental Education* is shot through with many assumptions about schooling's role in development, modernization, and anti-poverty more characteristic of the termination era of the 1950s. “Fundamental education” was Orata's term for an increasingly popular paradigm for schooling during the middle of the twentieth century. Fundamental educators emphasized teaching literacy as the cornerstone of a schooling program, which could raise people out of poverty in order to become economically self-sufficient. According to Joseph Watras, fundamental educators attempt to “show people that they could learn academic skills when they sought answers to everyday problems. According to advocates, fundamental education

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<sup>133</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 115.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

encouraged members of Indigenous groups to improve their lives and strengthen their culture.”<sup>135</sup>

Orata described the true democratic quality of the Little Wound School: “The basic requirement of such a program is that the community be made the nucleus of the educative process, and the school the center of community activities.”<sup>136</sup> And yet, unlike Dewey, Orata was much more comfortable with a curriculum of experiential education cloaked in the language of progressive education, but which served to provide more “fundamental” skills. “For such a program [as the Little Wound Day School] the traditional academic curriculum is a luxury which can be bought only at the high price of aggravating the existing critical condition of dependence, shiftlessness, and poverty of the Indian people,” Orata wrote of his time at the school. As Watras has argued, in the hands of Orata and Collier’s brain trust, fundamental education served less to realize Deweyan ideals and more as yet another expression of proletarianization.<sup>137</sup> When Beatty insisted that Indian schools “must teach the boys and girls to make a living—in a majority of cases from the assets in their immediate environment,” many Indigenous people heard the echoes of the proletarianization that Estelle Reel had also found in Dewey’s Laboratory School.<sup>138</sup>

This outcome was not for lack of trying. When Orata had first arrived in Kyle, he had performed what he believed was a kind of educative triage. Orata concluded that there were several major problems among the Oglala Lakota that a school configured as a social center

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<sup>135</sup> Watras, “Was Fundamental Education Another Form of Colonialism?” 57.

<sup>136</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 205.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>138</sup> Stefon, “Willard Beatty and Progressive Education,” 93. For example, when Pima parents in Arizona called for accreditation of industrial schools, Beatty wrote to an agent there that “I am glad that you and I agree that this hullabaloo about college preparation is largely a waste of time.” Nevertheless, Beatty had been unable to outright ignore the Native demand for greater high school accreditation. He reported that in the year he began his job as Director of Indian Education, there had been zero accredited high schools for Indian students; by 1951, there were 33. Cited in Lomawaima and McCarty, 72-73. It is perhaps fitting that after he left the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Beatty ended up (alongside his scion Pedro Orata) as a member of UNESCO’s Fundamental Education program in 1952, where according to Stefon, “he actively continued to experiment with the tenet of progressive educational theory.” Stefon, “Willard Beatty and Progressive Education,” 107.

might be able to ameliorate—malnourishment; poor sanitation, housing, and accommodations; soil erosion; antiquated agricultural equipment and practices; and something Orata dubbed “ignorance and superstition.”<sup>139</sup> In surveying Pine Ridge in search of problems that schooling might solve, Orata was confident that the continued federal control of schools like the Little Wound Day School was not among them. Instead, it was the material poverty of the Oglala Lakota that was the obstacle to self-governance that education might solve. In his appraisal, Orata concluded that “while at the beginning [the Lakota community] tended to depend upon us for supervision and expected us to tell them what to do and how to do it when confronted with a problem, at the end of the year they were resentful of any opportunity denied them to think for themselves, to make decisions, and to manage their own affairs. Many of them improved their houses, cultivated larger garden plots and raised more hogs and chickens than previously.”<sup>140</sup> How exactly more chickens and hogs translated to greater self-determination in education remains unclear, but such a plan paralleled Sáenz’s rural schools in Mexico. Nevertheless, Collier and Beatty praised Orata’s experiment as exactly the kind of Deweyan vision that they had hoped to achieve for Indians.

Portions of Orata’s reports were reprinted by Haskell Indian School students in a number of circulars to promote Collier’s brain trust.<sup>141</sup> In his circulars, Beatty thanked Orata for his efforts. In his memoirs, Collier recalled that Orata’s experiment “was of particular value because its subject was a community characterized by extreme poverty of all resources except human resources.” He praised Orata’s attempts to make the Little Wound Day School a center for

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<sup>139</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, xiii.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Reyhner, “Placed-Based Education,” 16.

“community hopes” and suggested that Orata was one of “numerous men and women [who] revolutionized the Indian school system” during his administration.<sup>142</sup>

### **Lakota Counterpoint: Benjamin Reifel**

Collier’s enthusiasm for Orata’s school was cooled by Benjamin Reifel. Reifel was a Lakota man born on the Rosebud reservation. Reifel was educated at a boarding school before he studied at South Dakota State College. After graduation, he was hired by the Office of Indian Affairs as a farm agent at Pine Ridge. He eventually rose to the position of field agent, where he was responsible for overseeing the implementation of many of Collier’s programs during the Indian New Deal. Later, Reifel attended Harvard University in 1949 and later became the superintendent at Pine Ridge.<sup>143</sup> Reifel eventually entered politics, becoming the first Lakota person elected to the U.S. Congress in 1960; he later served briefly as Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

In an oral history, Reifel reflected on his time at Pine Ridge helping to enact the Indian New Deal.<sup>144</sup> He was far less sanguine than Collier’s Deweyan brain trust about Orata’s experiment. “Other than the general revival of bringing additional money for facilities, I think the methods that were implemented—as a result of this wave of progressive education sweeping the country—I don’t believe it did the Indian education system much help, as far as the Indian children are concerned,” Reifel told his interviewer. He elaborated:

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<sup>142</sup> Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 198. Willard Beatty, “Indian Arts and Crafts,” in *Education for Action: Selected Articles from Indian Education, 1936-43* (New Kirk, OK: Chilocco Indian Agricultural School Printing Department, 1994), 316-17.

<sup>143</sup> Henry Roe Cloud favored Reifel as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the 1950s. See Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 221.

<sup>144</sup> On Reifel’s part in the IRA approval on Pine Ridge, see Bromert, “The Sioux and the Indian New Deal,” 78-80, 181-82.

I myself think a little bit of education and training and think there's nothing wrong with the John Dewey approach if you have enough well-trained teachers and the facilities and equipment to follow the John Dewey method. But [at Pine Ridge] we had an educator come out—Dr. Willard Beatty—and he said, “Throw out the curriculum, throw out the stated courses. Study and you won't find books in the classroom.” And these poor teachers were just going around because they've never been taught how to handle the situation. A few conferences were held and wonderful speeches were made about the value of the Dewey approach and progressive education. And so he had kids roaming around trying to find something to do.<sup>145</sup>

At first glance, it might be tempting to dismiss Reifel's account as a misunderstanding of Dewey's philosophy or animated by his partisan antipathy to Collier's politics. However, if we take Reifel's account seriously, it is clear that Reifel was familiar with the contours of Dewey's philosophy and had his opinion about it. As a Rosebud Lakota person working on the Pine Ridge reservation in 1936, Reifel was far better situated than Pedro Orata or Willard Beatty to understand the true impact of Collier's Deweyan brain trust on the Oglala Lakota community.

In particular, Reifel was concerned that Dewey's enthusiasm for experiential, hands-on learning in line with everyday experience was vulnerable to a problem that Dewey had not encountered at places like the Laboratory School. As far as Reifel was concerned, the danger of Collier and his brain trust's zeal for Dewey among the Oglala Lakota was that it ultimately did little to deliver on empowerment of Indian people to control the terms of their own schooling. “There was feeling—the Indian went away to boarding schools and they came back to the reservations anyway, so why train them to leave? Why not train them to stay where they are?” Reifel recalled of the Deweyan brain trust. “So you had goats brought in, little projects where the little kids would work with chickens or rabbits and gardens, and they tended to be losing sight of learning to read and write and to figure.”<sup>146</sup> In Reifel's estimation, gardens and chickens were

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<sup>145</sup> Ben Reifel in *To Be an Indian: An Oral History*, ed. Joseph H. Cash and Herbert T. Hoover (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 126.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*



unobjectionable fodder for progressive education in, say, the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. But at Kyle, South Dakota, at the heart of the Pine Ridge reservation, on lands divided by allotment, just miles away from the site of the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee? That was a different story.

Reifel was ultimately dubious that Collier's brain trust and their experiments at Pine Ridge adequately aligned with Indigenous people's aspirations for the social mobility enabled by education. Reifel was concerned that at Pine Ridge, such experimental curriculum at federal schools risked veering back into a form of racialized schooling that had culminated in little more than proletarianization and auxiliary citizenship in the nineteenth century. If impoverished reservations with subsistence gardens and chicken coops were the sum total of the community life for which schooling was to prepare students, then Deweyan education offered very little in the way of the self-determination yearned for by many Indigenous people. As Reifel conceded, this pitfall might have been avoided in a school system that was adequately financed by the Office of Indian Affairs, responsive to Indigenous needs of the local community at places like Pine Ridge, and carried out by teachers—preferably Native instructors—who might have read Dewey's writings closely. But as it was at Pine Ridge in 1936, Reifel believed that despite ambitious aspirations to apply Dewey's ideas to Indian Country, Collier's administration had led to yet another iteration of anti-democratic schooling for Indian students in the hands of non-Native educators.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> In his report, Orata dismissed such concerns by citing another pragmatist: "Perhaps in fifteen or fifty years of similar opportunities the Indian people will come to demand their just right to life in terms, not of so many bushels of potatoes, but of freedom to think for themselves and to determine their own destiny. At any rate, we feel that we have discovered, as far as application to an Indian situation is concerned, 'a live hypothesis,' as William James calls it ... and if that hypothesis is alive, as far as Indians are concerned, we can safely assume that it can be made to work as a basis for reorganizing the schools all over the world." Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 214.

Reifel's concerns were borne out by the truncated conception of democratic self-governance offered in Orata's *Fundamental Education*. "If the Indians regard it as their right to be fed, clothed, and protected by the government, then having them raise goats and potatoes becomes an infringement upon their right to life and property," he argued. "Obviously, we should first disabuse them of that attitude by building up in them the feeling that the right to life and property carries with it the corresponding responsibility of earning and maintaining a living." If the Deweyan experiment at Little Wound Day School was successful, then Orata concluded that "the Indians will eventually regard all forms of charity as an insult to their pride and integrity."<sup>148</sup>

In this fashion, a school like Orata's Little Wound Day School could be counted as democratic if it might help the Oglala Lakota raise chickens more efficiently, read and write with parity to Euro-American school children, and manage their own affairs without government supervision. This finding suggests the way Dewey's synthesis of democracy and education was understood by non-Native educators as a means to use schools to raise a standard of living, raise material and social conditions on the reservation, and improve literacy, health, and welfare of Indian students. Even while they were intimately familiar with Dewey's philosophy and eager to enact it, Collier's brain trust gave little pause to the fact that their program of self-governance for Indians never really translated to tribal self-determination in schools. Actual community control over the schools themselves was never the end in view for these educators of Indians. To the contrary, Collier's Deweyan brain trust had conflated economic independence and self-sufficiency with local control as the true democratic criterion of education and democracy.

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<sup>148</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 63.

Of course, this was not mutually exclusive of Orata's effort to increase Oglala participation at the school. Orata's teachers convened a number of events—a dance, a carnival, a series of regular town hall-style meetings—as an effort to bring the school closer to the life of the community. In his study of the Little Wound School, Joseph Watras concedes that while “Orata may not have reinforced the Indigenous culture, he had demonstrated cultural sensitivity by employing activities the community valued as part of the curriculum and by enlisting community members to help carry out the lessons.”<sup>149</sup> At the same time, such events offered vehicles for the education of students and adults alike. An Oglala Lakota woman whose words were captured in *Fundamental Education* only as “Mrs. D.” offers one such voice. While Mrs. D recorded that she had been originally quite skeptical of Orata's tenure at the Little Wound Day School, she eventually was won over. “By helping with a few of the activities around the school I soon realized the pupils were being cared for by the principal and teachers through an entirely different method than what I was referring to.”<sup>150</sup>

But Native participation in federal schools was not equivalent to the power of tribal communities to exert self-determination over education. This distinction became all the more clear in 1937, when Orata's Little Wound Day School found itself at the center of the debate over the structure of democracy at Pine Ridge and all across Indian Country.

### **The Charter of Incorporation and the Little Wound Day School, 1936-1937**

Pine Ridge also affords a vantage point from the nexus between Collier's political and educational reforms. Collier's democracy unfolded at Pine Ridge in a sequence marked by three milestones set by the IRA. First, the Oglala Lakota on Pine Ridge voted to adopt the IRA on

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<sup>149</sup> Watras, “Progressive Education and Native American Schools,” 94.

<sup>150</sup> Cited in Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 190.

October 27, 1934.<sup>151</sup> Second, a constitution was drafted under the provisions of the IRA. It is important to note that prior to the IRA, Pine Ridge already possessed experience with constitutional politics. In fact, Pine Ridge already had a constitution of its own, adopted by the Oglala Lakota in 1921 without approval of the Department of the Interior.<sup>152</sup> “Not only were early constitution writers concerned with the need to expand tribal participation in the reservation political process,” notes historian Richmond L. Clow, “but they also maintained as much as possible of their cultural heritage in the written documents by continuing the office of chief and group participation in the political process.”<sup>153</sup> Despite the friction, the Pine Ridge IRA constitution was approved by the Department of Interior on January 15, 1936.

After approving a new constitution, the third and final step in the process of adopting the IRA provided for the newly established tribal government to “apply for a charter of incorporation from the Secretary of the Interior.”<sup>154</sup> This charter was the legal means by which Collier’s IRA would vest the tribal government with the powers of a municipality. Once a tribal government had been granted a charter of incorporation by the federal government, it could begin to discharge its responsibilities under its new constitution and apply for revolving funds set up by Collier’s Office of Indian Affairs. A charter was the key that would turn the ignition of the IRA as the new motor for democracy in Indian Country.<sup>155</sup> Preventing that key from turning at Pine Ridge became the last opportunity for opponents of the IRA to stop it.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Bromert, “The Sioux and the Indian New Deal,” 68.

<sup>152</sup> From that year on, constitutional politics divided the reservation community. These divisions were often between the members of prominent families which were seen as traditional leaders in the community and those who were newcomers to the newly minted Oglala Tribal Council. Nevertheless, these politics were a natural outgrowth of Pine Ridge’s political initiative, rather than the imposition of the Office of Indian Affairs.

<sup>153</sup> Richmond L. Clow, “The Indian Reorganization Act and the Loss of Tribal Sovereignty: Constitutions on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1987): 127.

<sup>154</sup> Bromert, “The Sioux and the Indian New Deal,” 82.

<sup>155</sup> Under the provisions of the IRA, adopting a charter had to be approved by a plebiscite. Late-breaking opposition to the IRA on Pine Ridge is partially attributable to the reconciliation of the Oglala Lakota’s 1921 constitution, and

The Little Wound Day School became a hub for politicking regarding the charter. In fact, Orata was inspired by his Deweyan-inflected philosophy to incorporate the election into the curriculum of the school. He wrote that the students “naturally wanted to know what it was about, and they were led to read the provisions of the Reorganization Act and especially that part of the Charter.”<sup>157</sup> Orata invited agency officials to come by the school and explain the terms of the election to the children, many of whom had parents leading the push against its approval. Orata even organized a mock vote among the students, using the occasion to teach about “the topic of elections, the secret ballot, and the like.”<sup>158</sup> In a masterstroke of Deweyan emphasis on the school as a center for community life, Little Wound Day School became host to a ballot box, a seamless way for Orata and his teachers to make the election a subject of the curriculum. As a member of Collier’s brain trust, Orata clearly favored the passage of the charter. Orata went to great lengths to articulate that schools like the Little Wound Day School were the true means by which the IRA could be judged. “Indian education, in general, will become an instrument with which to implement the Indian Reorganization Act, and the school, in particular, will then render

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the new IRA constitution with which it was merged to form the final 1936 constitution. That resulting 1936 constitution formalized new boundaries for the purposes of organizing elections. In particular, the new constitution established these electoral districts based not on the *tiyospaye* kinship boundaries which defined the Oglala Lakota, but rather on farm districts. The logic for this decision was that these farm districts had shaped the pattern of community life after the establishment of the reservation and would therefore reflect where the Oglala Lakota were actually living by the 1930s. This led to the delegitimization of the tribal government which these districts supported, as many Oglala Lakota recognized the *tiyospaye* as a more accurate reflection of community organization. Bromert, “The Sioux and the Indian New Deal,” 77.

<sup>156</sup> More immediately was an objection of some established leader to the manner in which the constitution stipulated that candidates for tribal office would have to campaign within those new electoral districts. A contingent of Oglala Lakota did not relish forsaking older political patterns to rise to leadership in their community for U.S.-style electoral campaigns. This group retained their membership in the older Oglala Treaty council and “refused to acknowledge the new group’s existence.” As a result, the reservation government was divided between two groups claiming authority. By the time the Oglala Lakota moved to adopt a charter near the end of 1936, the mood at Pine Ridge had turned sour. The election to approve the charter of incorporation under the IRA therefore became a hotly contested proxy issue to the larger tensions between Oglala Lakota leadership and Collier’s vision for Indian democracy. Bromert, “The Sioux and the Indian New Deal,” 77-82.

<sup>157</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 36.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

service to the community in terms of character building for the Indian generation that is to be or should be in the process of becoming,” he concluded.<sup>159</sup>

Despite all of Orata’s educative efforts, the Oglala Lakota rejected the charter of incorporation in March of 1937 by a vote of 1524 to 1092.<sup>160</sup> While the issues that shaped the outcome of the election are beyond the scope of this inquiry, it is clear that in the wake of the defeat, Orata did all he could to lay the groundwork for future approval of the charter. For example, Orata wrote that the day after the charter was rejected, the students at Little Wound Day School “took up the problem: Why did the people of Kyle and of Pine Ridge vote against the Charter?” Debriefing this question became a Deweyan activity for the students: “They speculated on this problem, and finally they were asked to write on this question: Did you vote for or against the Charter? Why? Later they considered this problem: In the light of our discussion, what do you think should be done next time to insure the passage of the Charter?” In light of a long history of federal meddling in their community, it was not difficult for the Oglala children to surmise a solution: “They suggested that the people might be asked to help formulate its provisions,” Orata’s report concluded.<sup>161</sup> While the exact outcome of the Little Wound Day School’s mock election went unrecorded, Orata documented that “surprisingly enough, the result of the voting in the class was about the same as that of the adults in Kyle.” Disappointed in that outcome, Orata mused that “perhaps the pupils and the parents had talked the matter over.”<sup>162</sup>

Perhaps, indeed! When Orata and his educators spoke of making the school a center for community life, the Lakota rejection of the IRA was clearly not what they had in mind.

Subsequently, Orata’s education team conducted a series of interviews with parents to try to

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>160</sup> Bromert, “The Sioux and the Indian New Deal,” 83.

<sup>161</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 29.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 64.

determine why the charter had failed. Their findings included the following: the Oglala Lakota simply disagreed with it; they did comprehend what it entailed; they had been bamboozled into the belief that the New Deal was bad for Pine Ridge; they had been duped by opponents; or they opposed it because they “did not have a part in making it.”<sup>163</sup> Deeming these reasons to be somewhat spurious, Orata ultimately chastised the Oglala Lakota. In rejecting the charter, they had rejected Collier and his brain trust’s attempt to bring them their version of democracy. “Those who voted against the Charter did so because of fear that they might lose the benefits that they now enjoy, chiefly, ownership of land without taxes,” Orata mused. “We can deduce from this the final conclusion that the Indians were thinking, not of self-government, but of what they could get from the government.” Nevertheless, Orata and his educators never gave up on their efforts to use the Little Wound Day School as the vanguard of Collier’s vision for democracy at Pine Ridge: “The need, educationally speaking, is not more voting, but more motivation and enlightenment,” they concluded. Orata redoubled his efforts to put his thumb on the scale in favor of Collier’s policies.<sup>164</sup>

That year, the charter never passed. While the 1936 IRA constitution approved by Oglala Lakota voters did go into effect, the Pine Ridge tribal government that it established simply operated without a charter.<sup>165</sup> In 1939, there was a movement among some of the Oglala Lakota to repeal the IRA altogether. The anti-IRA campaign called for a referendum facilitated by the federal government to overturn the IRA, but such a vote never occurred—Collier certainly had little interest in watching Pine Ridge voters undo his signature policy. Despite the fact that Orata and his teachers had been unable to help pass the charter, Orata’s experiment at the Little Wound

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 63-64.

<sup>165</sup> Bromert, “The Sioux and the Indian New Deal,” 182-83.

Day School was feted as a major success for Collier's reforms in education. "If, as a result of their being consulted on minor matters they realize it is their privilege as citizens to make decisions for themselves and begrudge the lack of opportunity to help make the Charter, their voting against it may really be an indication that they are catching the spirit and the letter of the Reorganization Act," he surmised.<sup>166</sup> Even though the school had failed to engender much community support for the IRA charter, Orata took pride in the fact that perhaps his school had helped spread a culture of democracy anyway.

Mr. Bull Bear of Kyle, South Dakota, certainly saw it that way. Bull Bear was an interpreter who accompanied Orata and his teachers during their community outreach efforts. His notes from community meetings, preserved in *Fundamental Education*, are detailed, insightful, and sympathetic to the problems of many members of his community. "We have never had anything like this before," Bull Bear said of the Little Wound Day School, "where the pupils and the adults worked together and managed the affairs of the school." While he likely never read *Democracy and Education*, Bull Bear made a case for the school in a way that would have made Dewey proud: "Our school is run by the pupils and adults; we do our planning and judging without too much help from the teachers. We were not taught books, but we learned to think for ourselves." For these reasons, Bull Bear exhorted Orata to stay at Pine Ridge. "I think Mr. Orata had done us a great deal of good this year," he testified. "I think it will be a good idea if he could be back with us again next year, although he seems anxious to leave."<sup>167</sup>

Orata ultimately did depart at the end of the year, leaving the Oglala Lakota and the Little Wound Day School behind. Observers believed that the school divested itself of its experimental quality after Orata had left. "Enthusiasm dies with the departure of the leader," reported Hazel F.

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<sup>166</sup> Cited in Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 65.

<sup>167</sup> Orata, *Fundamental Education*, 65.



Wilson, one of Orata's teachers at the school. "The only comment made about the experiment is that it was interesting—while it lasted."<sup>168</sup> Reading Bull Bear's account, it is impossible to wonder what might have happened if more Oglala Lakota people like him—or "Mrs. D," or perhaps even Reifel—had been the principal or teachers at a version of the Little Wound Day School administered by the Pine Ridge government. Despite their political differences, had they been empowered to operate such schools themselves, it might have been a real first step on the path towards realizing a sustainable and enduring self-determination in schooling among the Oglala Lakota.

This underscores the ultimate irony: Even if Pine Ridge had secured the passage of a charter of incorporation, vesting their new tribal government with the power of a municipality, Oglala Lakota people like Bull Bear would have remained unable to direct the administration of the Little Wound Day School. The school belonged to the federal government and remained outside the jurisdiction of tribal governments organized under the IRA. While Orata may have included more community feedback at Little Wound Day School in the image of Dewey's schools as social centers, he failed to devolve formal control of the school to the Oglala Lakota. The result was that Collier's brain trust brought self-governance to a school on Pine Ridge without self-determination.<sup>169</sup> As Lomawaima and McCarty darkly observe, "A new idea—schools should serve the needs and interests of Native students—was wedded to an old idea—federal policymakers were best qualified to define those needs and interests." Put another way, in

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<sup>168</sup> Cited in Stefon, "Willard Beatty and Progressive Indian Education," 104.

<sup>169</sup> After his tenure at the Little Wound Day School, Orata became a consultant in the U.S. Office of Education, a job he retained until 1941. He returned to the Philippines and worked in the office of the President there until Japanese occupation. After the war, Orata returned to Manila as the leader of the Curriculum and Research Division of the Philippine's Department of Education and became an active member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). He worked at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, before returning to the Philippines in 1965 to develop a system of community barrio high schools and community colleges based in large part on his experience from the Little Wounded Day School. Orata, *Fundamental Education*, "About the Author," ix; Watras, "Was Fundamental Education Another Form of Colonialism?" 64-69.

Collier's hands, Dewey's philosophy when applied to Indian Country was the meeting place between local control and indirect rule. The outcome was what these historians have called "local control but not community control."<sup>170</sup> This was as close to a Deweyan vision for schools as a social center as Collier's brain trust could muster.

## **Conclusion**

As World War II drew to a close, Collier's reforms had lost momentum, and his list of allies in Washington had worn thin. Congress starved many of his programs of funding, including his favorite vehicle for employing Indian workers, the Civilian Conservation Corps. Meanwhile, Collier had alienated many Native people across Indian Country, including large contingents among the Diné and the Dakota and Lakota. There was a strong movement to repeal the IRA. Moreover, the energy of the Deweyan brain trust Collier had assembled was largely spent. Ryan had left to continue his career in education. Meanwhile, though Beatty was still hard at work promoting progressive education in curriculum in the role of Director of Indian Education, most of the dramatic changes to the administration of Indian schools—such as the closure of MPIIS and Orata's experiment at the Little Wound Day School—were complete.

Perhaps most dramatically, Collier and Sáenz became hostile towards one another. After his part in Collier's Indian New Deal, Sáenz returned to Mexico and became that country's ambassador to Peru. He remained dedicated to the cause of Indigenous education, playing a role in the founding of the International Indian Institute.<sup>171</sup> Once close allies, Collier and Sáenz ultimately split over the direction of the institute. The two men were divided over the role of

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<sup>170</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 69.

<sup>171</sup> Ahlstedt, "John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy," 305.

Indigenous people joining their reform efforts.<sup>172</sup> While in Lima, Sáenz died from pneumonia in 1941, and their partnership was ended.<sup>173</sup>

Not long after, Collier saw the writing on the wall for his own prospects as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. After a twelve-year stint largely spent trying to bring democracy to Indian Country through schooling, he resigned in 1945. Some months before Collier resigned, Beatty wrote to Collier in November to assure him that he had made good progress: “You must not forget that when you entered the Indian Service as Commissioner you brought with you a tremendous number of vital new concepts with regard to our dealing with the Indians.”<sup>174</sup> As I have argued, one of those concepts had been the philosophy of John Dewey.

In the days before they became members of Collier’s brain trust, W. Carson Ryan, Willard Beatty, and Pedro Orata had relied on Dewey as they cut their teeth criticizing both transactional pedagogy and vulgar vocational education in public schools. But when they came to control the levers of federal Indian schools, their debt to Dewey manifested as something altogether different. They did not stop to adequately consider the Native communities that had come to exist anchored at reservation day schools and around off-reservation schools alike. Because the IRA excluded any consideration of devolving federal powers to tribal governments to administer schooling, when Collier’s brain trust invoked Dewey and his ideas, they advanced a decidedly anti-democratic plan for Indian education. Such reforms may have been a welcome relief from the transactional pedagogy of the past, but they fell well short of the kind of self-determination many Native people yearned for in the education of their children.

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<sup>172</sup> “Sáenz wanted an immediate establishment of Indigenous people as active participating citizens in their nation but Collier was more cautious, wanting a gradual incorporation of Indians into the ranks of citizenship,” Ahlstedt concludes. Ahlstedt, “John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy,” 321.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Willard Beatty to John Collier, November 4, 1944, in John Collier Letters 1922-1968, Microfilm Reel 11, New York Public Library.

In the end, the Deweyan brain trust at the center of the Indian New Deal reveals that Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy—built *on* Instrumental Indians—was ill suited as a tool *for* promoting Indigenous people's self-governance of schools. At the same time, Cloud's and Reifel's objections to Collier's programs represented the inherent risk that Native self-determination posed to the Deweyan brain trust.<sup>175</sup> When Collier had gone to Taos in the spirit of Waldo Frank and the Young Americans, he indulged in anti-modern primitivism; when Collier was leading the Indian New Deal, he channeled Dewey's frontier progressivism. In the hands of Collier's brain trust, John Dewey proved to be little more than a new label on old wine poured into Indian Country.<sup>176</sup>

The mainland, however, was not the only place where such a vintage was pushed upon Indigenous people. Across the Pacific Ocean, *Kānaka Maoli* were about to get a taste of Dewey's philosophy as served by *haoles* who fancied themselves progressive educators at the bleeding edge of the American frontier: Hawai'i.

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<sup>175</sup> “Tracing the route from harsh criticism of manual labor to a ‘new’ vocational education that sabotaged high school accreditation illuminates exactly how dangerous Native self-determination has appeared,” notes Lomawaima and McCarty. “The threat that a high school degree might enable access to higher education and economic development, possibly economic competition, trumped the promises of Native participation in defining ‘locally relevant education.’” Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 72.

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Biolsi, “‘Indian Self-Government’ as a Technique of Domination,” *American Indian Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 23-28.

## CHAPTER 9:

### *Aloha: John Dewey and the Frontier in Hawai'i, 1893-1951*

On a warm winter night in 1951, Robert W. Clopton, a professor of education at the University of Hawai'i, paid a visit to the Halekulani Hotel. He and his daughter "Bets" had come to see guests John and Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey. Roberta had been friendly with John for many years, and the two had been married in New York in 1946; now, they had come to Hawai'i with their two adopted children, Adrienne and John. As Clopton recalled, he had encountered the Deweys that night on their way to a late dinner. "Looking for a change in menu, they asked us to recommend a restaurant." Despite the fact that the Cloptons had already had dinner that evening, Robert jumped at the opportunity to share a meal with the renowned philosopher. Bets, then a student at Honolulu High School, was a little more dubious about the prospect of a second meal with the ninety-two-year-old mainlander.

Nevertheless, the Cloptons hosted the Deweys and their conversation was "vigorous—as it always was with Dewey," Robert attested. It seemed as if no time at all had passed before the server was "giving me the signal that she wished we'd get out so that they could close." Around midnight, Robert drove the Deweys back to the Halekulani Hotel and the Cloptons said their goodbyes. On their way home, Bets said, "Gee, Pap, I used to think that *you* were sort of smart." Robert laughed. "Just what was it that disillusioned you?" he replied. Bets explained her revised

opinion thusly: “I don’t really think you’re dumb; it’s just that I never heard *anybody* talk who could make things—important things—sound so clear as Mr. Dewey made them sound.”<sup>1</sup>

The Cloptons were hardly the only ones in Hawai’i who were enamored with John Dewey. In October 1929, Ross B. Wiley, the director of the Division of Research in the Department of Public Instruction in Hawai’i’s territorial government, wrote to Dewey and enclosed a copy of the *Hawai’i Educational Review*. “I am not sure whether you are aware of it or not, but it is a fact that the present educational thinking and tendency in public education in Hawai’i has been and is tremendously influenced by you and your work.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps no other Hawaiian pedagogue spoke as eloquently and at length about Dewey’s influence in the islands than Benjamin O. Wist. Wist was a historian of public schooling in Hawai’i, where he had served as dean and regent at the University of Hawai’i. These bona fides led him to give a talk in 1949 on the occasion of Dewey’s ninetieth birthday titled “The Influence of John Dewey upon Education in Hawai’i.” While Wist acknowledged that the gathering was ostensibly a celebration of Dewey’s birthday, he also told the audience that as far as Hawaiian educators were concerned, “we can likewise celebrate a half-century of educational progress under the aegis of the American flag—progress John Dewey was to share in introducing.”<sup>3</sup> These accolades form a pattern. Non-Native Hawaiian educators spent the better part of fifty years from 1900 to 1950 singing Dewey’s praises. Why did Dewey’s philosophy find such purchase among *haole* educators in Hawai’i?

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Clopton, “John Dewey, An Appreciation,” enclosed in Robert Clopton to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, May 24, 1962, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ross B. Wiley to John Dewey, October 7, 1929, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin O. Wist, “The Influence of John Dewey Upon Education in Hawai’i,” *ca.* October 20, 1949, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

Over the course of his lifetime, Dewey made just three visits to Hawai'i. The first came in 1899, when both John and Alice Chipman Dewey traveled to Honolulu as part of a short-lived university extension program. They returned to Hawai'i for a second time on a layover during their trip to Japan in 1919. The third and final trip came in 1951, when John and his second wife, Roberta Lowitz Grant, came to the islands as a reprieve for the aging philosopher's health. Of these three visits, Dewey's trip in 1899 was perhaps the most consequential. During his five-week visit, Dewey lent his growing reputation to offer the imprimatur of what was becoming progressive education to Hawai'i's schools. However, attributing Dewey's popularity in Hawai'i to the talks he delivered in the islands during this visit fails to explain the longevity of his ideas in the islands.

Within the existing scholarship on Dewey's philosophy, his relationship to Hawai'i remains a relatively weak point. Robert Westbrook excludes Dewey's time in Hawai'i in its entirety. Others, such as Jay Martin, mention Dewey's time in Hawai'i, yet leave U.S. imperial history in the islands seriously underscrutinized.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Martin's genealogy of schooling in Hawai'i notes that as a result of American missionary settlement in the islands as early as the 1840s, "Hawai'i's system was actually ahead of that of several states on the mainland." Martin does not question how Dewey and his philosophy itself played a role in this process. Nor does Thomas Fallace's *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race* treat Native Hawaiians in its analysis of Dewey's attitudes about Indigenous people. In what is the most comprehensive account, the University of Hawai'i published in 2015 a special issue of *Educational Perspectives* devoted to

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Martin narrates that when Dewey arrived in 1899, the islands had become a republic and had "voted to cede itself to the United States as a territory." This is a mischaracterization that gives little attention to the details of the 1893 coup d'état against Queen Lili'uokalani and enduring Native Hawaiian contestation to the annexation, resistance that remained active when Dewey arrived there in 1899. Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 201.

Dewey's influence in the islands.<sup>5</sup> There, education historian Hunter McEwan outlined the circumstances of Dewey's activities in the islands during all three of his visits, but did little to connect them to the larger history of schooling in Hawai'i. Furthermore, all of these accounts fail to interrogate the function of schooling in the history of U.S. settler colonialism in the islands and its impact on Native Hawaiian people.<sup>6</sup>

Taken in isolation, Dewey's visits to Hawai'i might appear like a progressive pedagogue on a tour of schools akin to his visits to Japan, China, and Turkey. When placed in the context of Indigenous history, however, Dewey's visits to Hawai'i look quite different. What may appear on first blush as geographical novelty is made far more revealing through the lens of Indigenous studies. In his trips to the island, Dewey and his philosophy became entangled with the processes of settler colonialism as they unfolded through the schooling of Native Hawaiians. In the end, whether he knew it or not, Dewey brought the frontier discourse and its occlusion of Native people to Hawai'i through his synthesis of education and democracy. In doing so, we may see Dewey in a new light, and cast him into relief as a major player in the settler colonialism of Indigenous people on the mainland and beyond. Such an approach would dramatically rewrite the way Dewey's legacy in Hawai'i is remembered.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Journal of the College of Education, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, "John Dewey in Hawai'i," *Educational Perspectives*, 47, no. 1 and 2 (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Perlstein has attempted a corrective, noting that many of the settler colonial themes Dewey would later explore in his lectures in China were already at play in his commentary in Hawai'i.

<sup>7</sup> My analysis follows in the footsteps of Aulii Silva and her article in the special issue of *Educational Perspectives* devoted to John Dewey in Hawai'i. In her essay, Silva relates how she "labored through a class reading Dewey's *Democracy and Education* and *Art As Experience*—often without disguising my irritation and impatience with his writings during class discussions. Whether my professor or classmates wanted to hear it, I imparted a healthy amount of critique about the value of John Dewey's contributions to the chronicles of American education." Silva struggled to square Dewey's philosophy of education with his seeming lack of engagement with students in the classroom, a discrepancy that she felt widened by "authentic cultural contexts for teaching and learning, researching origins of Hawaiian knowledge production and dissemination" embodied in the Native Hawaiian principle of *kuleana*. See Aulii Silva, "Dewey in Hawai'i, 1899," *Educational Perspectives*, 28-29.



This chapter attempts to place Dewey into the history of schooling and its role in the settler colonialization of Hawai'i. On the one hand, Indigenous historians have long documented imposed schooling in Hawai'i, but they have rarely considered Dewey a part of this historical development.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, historians of education, philosophers, and Dewey scholars have noted Dewey's popularity in Hawai'i, but have not considered the longer and ongoing processes of settler colonialism unfolding there which conditioned this appeal.<sup>9</sup> By following Dewey to Hawai'i through the lens of critical Indigenous studies, we can bring the two areas of scholarship together.

Specifically, this chapter is structured around three parties who translated Dewey's philosophy to Hawai'i. The first Euro-Americans in Hawai'i to find inspiration in Dewey were members of the Castle family. The Castle family, led by Samuel Northrup Castle, arrived in Hawai'i in the 1830s. Castle began his career in the islands by handling the finances of a missionary school at the Chief's Children School overseen by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).<sup>10</sup> However, Castle soon became a leading member of the Euro-American planter oligarchy, founding Castle & Cooke, one of the Big Five corporations that came to dominate the political and economic life on the islands during the late

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<sup>8</sup> Maenette Kape'ahiokalani Padeken Ah Nee Benham, Ronald H. Heck, *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawai'i: The Silencing of Native Voices* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1998); Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004); Kalani Beyer, "Secondary Education as American Hegemony in Hawai'i," *American Educational History Journal*, 39, no. 2 (2012): 515-35; Pasfield, "The Head, the Heart, and the Hands"; Judy Rohrer, *Staking Claim: Settler Colonialism and Racialization in Hawai'i* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016); Carl Beyer, "The White Architects of Hawaiian Education," *American Educational History Journal* 44, no. 2 (2017): 1-18; Derek Taira, "Embracing Education and Contesting Americanization: A Reexamination of Native Hawaiian Student Engagement in Territorial Hawai'i's Public Schools, 1920-1940," *History of Education Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (August 2018): 362-91.

<sup>9</sup> Hunter McEwan, "John Dewey's Visits to Hawai'i," *Educational Perspectives* 47, no. 1 and 2 (2015), 11-22, and Alfred L. Castle, "John Dewey and the Beginnings of Progressive Early Education in Hawai'i," *Educational Perspectives* 47, no. 1 and 2 (2015): 23-27.

<sup>10</sup> On the Chief's School as the centerpiece of missionary settler colonial coercion upon the Native Hawaiian nobility, see Julie Kaomea, "Education for Elimination in Nineteenth-Century Hawai'i: Settler Colonialism and the Native Hawaiian Chiefs' Children's Boarding School," *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2014): 123-44.

nineteenth century. His second wife, Mary Tenney Castle, and three of her children, Helen, Henry, and Harriet, all became close adherents to Dewey's brand of the "new education." Beginning in the 1890s, the Castles became close family friends with the Deweys, and when they asked him for his assistance in launching the Henry and Dorothy Castle Memorial Kindergarten, their invitation was largely responsible for John Dewey's first visit to Hawai'i in 1899.

The Castles' philanthropic interests in Dewey cannot be easily disentangled from the material interests of the Euro-American planter class in the Hawaiian Islands of which they were a part. The Castles supported missionary school in equal parts ingratiation and infiltration of the Kingdom of Hawai'i's government.<sup>11</sup> The Castle family commanded a wide portfolio of assets, including the *Hawaiian Gazette*, Oahu Railway and Land Company, and the Ewa plantation, among other financial holdings by Castle & Cooke. As a result, from 1887 to 1898, the resistance of Native Hawaiians in defense of their sovereignty presented a threat to the security of these assets and Castle & Cooke operations. The refusal of Queen Lili'uokalani to acquiesce to Euro-American handlers; Robert Wilcox and his repeated rebellions of restoration; the large numbers of Native Hawaiians in their new political leagues who petitioned the United States—these were all political upheavals that risked the viability of the Castle-backed coup in 1893, the republic that formed in its wake in 1894, and the territory that followed in 1898.

In their correspondence with the Castles, both John and Alice Dewey were not only aware of these events in Hawai'i, but came to see the political situation in Hawai'i largely through the Castles' eyes. When they came to Hawai'i in 1899, the Deweys lodged with the

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed accounting of the financial assets of the Castle family and their philanthropic enterprises, see Alfred L. Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy: A History of the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Historical Society, 1992), 66-89. On the role of the Big Five oligarchs and the Castle family in particular in the destabilization of the Hawaiian monarchy, see Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

Castle family and helped consult with them on the launch of the Henry and Dorothy Castle Kindergarten. As a result, the outcome of the Castle family's realization of Dewey's philosophy was not so much a departure from earlier missionary trends in education, but was instead the culmination of their family's legacy in missionary schooling for the assimilation of non-White people in Hawai'i.<sup>12</sup>

No less eager than the Castles to bring Dewey to Hawai'i was Henry S. Townsend. Townsend served as the inspector general of schools in Hawai'i from 1896 to 1899. In this role, Townsend read Dewey's exploits in Chicago and republished them in a journal he edited in Hawai'i called *The Progressive Educator*. Among Euro-American educators in Hawai'i, Townsend later described Dewey as "our Great High Priest and what he said had a tendency to be accepted without further consideration."<sup>13</sup> At the National Education Association (NEA) meeting in Los Angeles held just days before Dewey sailed for Hawai'i, Townsend unveiled his vision for a Deweyan synthesis of education and democracy for the islands. In Dewey's philosophy, Townsend saw a model for a modern progressive system of schooling that could turn the island's potential racial disharmony into a democratic unity. Townsend invoked Dewey in support of a centralized public school system where a non-White majority of students would be enrolled in the classrooms controlled by the territory's minority *haole* instructors, administrators, and bureaucrats.

While he cloaked this system in the language of equal opportunity for people of all races, Townsend clearly understood public schooling as a tool for racial management. The schooling of

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<sup>12</sup> On the Castle and Tenney families' missionary zeal as a product of the Second Great Awakening, see Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 14-20. For more on missionary expeditions from New England to Hawai'i, see Benham and Heck, *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawai'i*, 31-80; Jennifer Fish Kashay, "Agents of Imperialism: Missionaries and Merchants in Early-Nineteenth Century Hawai'i," *The New England Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (June 2007): 280-98.

<sup>13</sup> Henry S. Townsend, *Education as I Saw It in the Hawai'i of the Nineties*, ed. Benjamin O. Wist (Hilo: Typewritten Manuscript, 1936), 81.

Native Hawaiians, Polynesian, Japanese, and Chinese people by Euro-American instructors in English would prop up the continuation of the cultural and political dominance of the Euro-American planter class in Hawai'i. Native Hawaiian incorporation into the settler colonial polity through school functioned to make them into little more than one racial group among others within their own homeland. Townsend invoked Dewey to celebrate this flattening of Native Hawaiians' political distinction as striking a blow for pluralism.

Fifty years later, Benjamin Wist updated Townsend's program of schooling for racial harmonization in service of Hawaiian statehood. Wist was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and came to Hawai'i by way of training at Yale. Wist found that Townsend's turn-of-the-century enthusiasm for Dewey in Hawai'i had never been more apt than at the dawn of the 1950s. By 1951, the achievement of racial harmony through schooling in the name of Hawaiian democracy was no longer a matter of racial management; instead, it had matured into evidence for the island's political and cultural compatibility with U.S. democracy. In celebrating Dewey's ninetieth birthday in 1949, Wist cast Dewey and his philosophy at the center of that history. Advocates of statehood, Wist suggested, owed much of their platform to Dewey: "Few are the advocates of statehood, at home or abroad, who recognize how much the educational philosophy of John Dewey has influenced trends to this end."<sup>14</sup> In such attributions, Wist made Dewey into an instrumental figure in the campaign for Hawaiian statehood. As scholars of Hawaiian history have argued, both the imposition of schools on Native Hawaiian children and their relationship to Hawai'i's suitability for statehood were critical interventions in the erasure of Native Hawaiian sovereignty. As Sarah Miller-Davenport reminds us, "While statehood represented the expansion of American society and law to include a wider swathe of peoples and cultural norms,

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<sup>14</sup> Wist, "The Influence of John Dewey Upon Education in Hawai'i," in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

this expansion was accompanied by a process of national consolidation that limited the political options for those who might not want to participate in the U.S. project.”<sup>15</sup> Whether or not Hawaiian schools actually operated along Deweyan lines was quite beside the point; what was more important for Wist was enrolling Dewey in the political effort for Hawaiian statehood.

While each of these non-Native Hawaiian programs for Native Hawaiian education varied, they shared one thing in common: an intense enthusiasm for John Dewey and a settlement house synthesis of schooling and democracy and the logic of the elimination of Native Hawaiian sovereignty that came bundled with it. Whether it was the Castles, Townsend, or Wist, each believed that Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy was uniquely suited for Hawai’i and its “problem” of racial heterogeneity. When properly contextualized by a longitudinal analysis of Dewey’s life and thought and its impact on Indigenous peoples, it is not difficult to understand Dewey’s enduring appeal to these *haole* pedagogues. Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy offered these Euro-American Hawaiian educators a cutting-edge program for public schooling that evacuated Native Hawaiians’ political status (a status that might otherwise be a basis for self-determination in schooling) and replaced it with a brand of pluralism befitting immigrants and urban settlement houses, all under the guise of democratic education.

Dewey’s philosophy helped to bring the frontier discourse to Hawai’i. Euro-Americans in Hawai’i were especially intent on portraying Native Hawaiians simply as one of many racial groups in Hawai’i in large part due to the egregious nature of the coup against Queen Lili’uokalani. Suppressing Native Hawaiian claims to political and cultural autonomy was therefore an urgent need for Euro-American *haoles*. I conclude that Dewey’s philosophy offered

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah Miller-Davenport, *The Gateway State: Hawai’i and the Cultural Transformation of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 8.

Euro-American progressive educators in Hawai'i a means to include Native Hawaiians in the republican, territorial, and state public school system under the banner of democratic education, while simultaneously denying them the democratic principle of self-determination in schooling. Instead of celebrating Dewey's importance among non-Native educators in the islands, I offer caution. Dewey figuratively carried the water of the frontier synthesis of education and democracy across the actual waters of the Pacific to the lands of the *Kānaka Maoli*.

### **The Castle Family and the History of Imposed Schooling in Hawai'i, 1836-1893**

This shared history between the Great Lakes and Hawai'i begins with missionary families like the Castles and arguably culminates in their close friendship and patronage of John Dewey. The Castle family was deeply imbricated in the American settler colonial history of Hawai'i. Patriarch Samuel Northrup Castle was born in New York in 1808. Like Jeremiah and Frederick Riggs, Samuel originally left New York heading west into the Great Lakes, where he aimed to make a career for himself as a banker in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1836, he married Angeline Tenney, also of New York. The Tenney family, ardent abolitionists forged in the heat of the Second Great Awakening, understood schooling as a potent part of their religious ideology of social benevolence and racial uplift.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, across the Pacific, the first American Protestant missionaries arrived in Hawai'i in the 1820s.<sup>17</sup> Sensing greater opportunity in the far-flung outpost of American Christendom, Samuel and Angeline set sail from Boston to Honolulu in

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<sup>16</sup> Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 14-20.

<sup>17</sup> The Castles, like many New England Protestants, may have come to regard Hawai'i as a place ripe for missionary activity in part due to Ōpūkaha'ia. Ōpūkaha'ia was a Native Hawaiian who came to New England in the early nineteenth century following the network of international trade that stretched from Hawai'i to the East Coast of the United States. Once in New England, Ōpūkaha'ia converted to Christianity, a decision David Chang characterizes as that of a man who was an Indigenous religious expert who was in pursuit of greater religious authority. Ōpūkaha'ia's conversion, a highly specific and idiosyncratic decision of a single Native Hawaiian person, inspired many American missionaries to go to Hawai'i and replicate his conversion upon Native Hawaiians as a class of people altogether similar. For more on Ōpūkaha'ia, see David A. Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

1836. They were not alone. Aboard their ship *Mary Frazier* was Amos Starr Cooke, Juliette Montague, and a group of missionaries from the ABCFM.<sup>18</sup> The ABCFM was no stranger to imposing schooling in Native communities; the organization had been opening mission schools among American Indian nations for decades. Hawai'i was simply the next frontier in their effort. Grasping that the Hawaiian kingdom was governed by strong centralized power, American missionaries worked to ingratiate themselves with the Hawaiian monarchs. Schooling was an ideal vehicle for this purpose.<sup>19</sup> When they landed in Honolulu, Samuel joined the mission and handled their finances, while Angeline joined Amos Cooke as he convinced King Kamehameha III to open a school.<sup>20</sup> The result was the Chiefs' Children School, opened in 1839, which would come to educate many members of the Hawaiian nobility.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ansel Judd Northrup, *The Northrup-Northrop genealogy: A Record of the Known Descendants of Joseph Northrup, Who Came from England in 1637, and Was One of the Original Settlers of Milford, Conn. in 1639; with Lists of Northrups and Northrops in the Revolution* (New York: Gafton Press, 1908), 30–31.

<sup>19</sup> Kalani Beyer, "A Century of Using Secondary Education to Extend an American Hegemony Over Hawai'i," *American Educational History Journal* 39, no. 2 (2012): 515-35.

<sup>20</sup> On Hawaiian missions as complex sites of the negotiation and formation of race, gender, and identity for Euro-Americans and Native Hawaiians alike, see Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989); Jennifer Thigpen, *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawai'i's Pacific World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Joy Schulz, *Hawaiian by Birth: Missionary Children, Bicultural Identity, and U.S. Colonialism in the Pacific* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> The Chief's Children School, eventually renamed the Royal School, is a microcosm of missionary schooling in Hawai'i. Created at the impetus of Euro-Americans, it was an institution where the Native Hawaiian students who passed through its doors left a lasting impact. As Osorio notes, "Every Native ruler after Kamehameha and many of the nobles were educated here." The school is Oahu's oldest continuously operating school. In 1846, the kingdom took control of the school from the mission to revitalize it. The Minister of Public Instruction for the kingdom oversaw the transition, which resulted in rechristening the institution as the Royal School. The children of the mission were then allowed to enroll, and the school moved in 1850 to its current location on Queen Emma Street. It was then reorganized as a day school and had an enrollment of over a hundred students by the 1850s. The administration of the school was seized by the republic after the coup against one of its own alumni, Queen Lili'uokalani. It became a public elementary school, which it remains to this day. The Royal School was under the auspices of educators like Henry S. Townsend in his role as the territorial inspector of schools by the time Dewey arrived in Hawai'i in 1899. Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui*, 19-21. See also Amos Starr Cooke and Juliette Montague Cooke, *The Hawaiian Chiefs' Children's School: A Record Compiled from the Diary and Letters of Amos Starr Cooke and Juliette Montague Cooke by Their Granddaughter*, ed. Mary Atherton Richards (Rutland: C. E. Tuttle Co., 1970).



Figure 9.1. Mary Tenney Castle, 1898, Wikimedia Commons.

Before long, the ambitions of Samuel Castle and Amos Starr Cook’s partnership outgrew missionary schooling. In the 1850s, American commercial interest in the islands intensified. According to Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo’ole Osorio, this was exemplified in “the incorporation of missionaries Amos Starr Cooke and Samuel Castle in 1850 into what would someday be one of the largest and wealthiest of the sugar companies.”<sup>22</sup> Castle & Cooke began as a

mercantile company, but soon grew into a major corporation, owning shares in various

plantations, railroads, construction companies, and newspapers. It would eventually merge with the Hawaiian Pineapple Company to form Dole Fruits, one of the largest fruit growers in the twentieth century. Like many others in the Big Five planter class, Castle & Cooke sought to protect their interests and maintain a powerful hold over Hawai’i’s expanding planting industry by holding sway over Native Hawaiian monarchs. According to the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, in 1925, Samuel N. Castle had racked up an impressive resume in the kingdom’s government, acting as “privy councilor in 1863, president of the Hawaiian legislature, 1864-5, and was appointed to the house of nobles by King Kalakaua.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> George F. Nellist, ed. *The Story of Hawai’i and Its Builders* (Honolulu: Honolulu Star Bulletin, 1925).



When his wife Angeline died in 1841, Samuel Castle married her sister Mary Tenney in 1842. Even before she arrived in Hawai'i in 1843, Mary (1810-1907) was keenly interested in education. She insisted on using her family's wealth to give her children the finest education in Hawai'i and the mainland alike. When Samuel Castle died in 1894, Mary created the Samuel Northrup Castle Memorial Fund, which would serve as the "primary vehicle for her gifts to the community."<sup>24</sup> Drawing on her family's abolitionist commitments and her sister Angeline's experience supporting Chief's School, Mary soon became a major philanthropic supporter of Euro-American schools across Hawai'i. Motivated by her religious brand of benevolent uplift, kindergarten education became a particular interest. Mary soon bankrolled the formation of the Free Kindergarten and Children's Aid Association (FKCAA) of the Hawaiian Islands. This organization was a nonsectarian successor to the older Woman's Board of Missions in Hawai'i, which historian and descendant Alfred L. Castle suggests represents a departure in early childhood schooling from its missionary origins in Hawai'i.<sup>25</sup> Mary's daughter Harriet Castle served as the financial secretary and de facto leader of the FKCAA. In this role, she would come to know John and Alice Dewey quite well for their leadership of the Laboratory School. But it was largely through her son Henry that Mary and the foundation first became familiar with Dewey's philosophy.

Henry Northrup Castle was born in 1862 in Honolulu. He was the youngest of Samuel and Mary's nine children. Henry's sister Helen recalled that in Henry's youth, the family spent

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<sup>24</sup> The Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation was incorporated in 1925 with assets estimated at over one million dollars. The foundation's website mentions the source of this wealth only by noting that Castle & Cooke's assets offered "the financial basis for a permanent charitable endowment in Hawai'i." "History of the Foundation," Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.fdnweb.org/castle/history/>. See also Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> George Herbert Mead and Helen Castle Mead, ed. *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012). See Alfred Castle's sketch of the history of kindergartens on the mainland United States and in Hawai'i, Alfred L. Castle, "Introduction," in *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, x-xiii.

time near a Catholic mission on Molokai. “There was a little schoolhouse on a hill ... which was presided over by the sweet spirit of Miss Mary Paris,” Helen recalled, adding that Henry enjoyed pantomiming the missionary Henry Paris. According to Helen, a young Henry would preach his own backyard sermons, “a Hawaiian jargon his tongue, his audience the chickens, Carrie and myself, and the native washwomen, scrubbing clothes under a big tree behind the house.”<sup>26</sup> In time, Henry came to attend Oahu College until 1878 when he went to the United States to study at Oberlin College. It was through his sister Helen that Henry first learned about John Dewey.

As fate would have it, Henry became roommates with George Herbert Mead while at Oberlin. The two young men became close friends, a friendship that endured as they were graduate students at Harvard. In time, Henry introduced George to his sister Helen Castle. While George and Helen hit it off, Henry made his way back to Honolulu, where he married German woman Frida Steckner, with whom he had one daughter named Dorothy before Steckner was killed in an accident.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Helen married George H. Mead, and, when George took up a position at the University of Michigan, the newlywed couple moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1891. It was there that Mead and Dewey became close colleagues, and their wives Helen and Alice became fast friends.<sup>28</sup> The Castles played an important part in shaping the contours of Dewey’s career. Helen Castle helped to prepare Dewey’s *School and Society* to be printed, and it was George and Helen who helped to convince the Deweys to come to Chicago in 1894.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Helen Castle, “A Few Recollections of Henry’s Childhood,” in *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, x-xiii.

<sup>27</sup> “Guide to the Henry Northrup Castle Papers, 1863-1942,” University of Chicago Special Collections, University of Chicago, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/src/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.CASTLEHN>.

<sup>28</sup> Helen Castle hosted Alice Dewey in Honolulu in 1892. According to Aulii Silva, “By 1892, the wives of this progressive pair of thinkers have become close friends, as evidenced by Alice C. Dewey’s travels to Hawai’i with Helen Castle Mead.” Silva, “Dewey in Hawai’i, 1899,” 32; McEwan, “John Dewey’s Visits to Hawai’i,” 14.

<sup>29</sup> Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 11.

By 1891, Henry had grown restless in Hawai'i. After his university education on the mainland, he had come back to Honolulu and became an editor at the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* and the *Hawaiian Gazette*. But the life of a newspaper magnate did not satisfy him. "I am not doing anything these days, except idling, reading novels, surrendering myself to the spell of this climate and land, and so trying to reconcile myself to the necessity of staying here," he wrote to his sister Helen in Ann Arbor.<sup>30</sup> Instead, he yearned to continue his studies. "I wish to spend my whole time in the study of history and literature," he wrote her. For this reason, Henry was especially piqued by George and Helen's frequent mention of John Dewey and his part in what would become known as the "new education." Henry soon made plans to investigate what all the fuss was about: "[I] want to go to Ann Arbor before the term closes, in order to see the work, go into classes, and get acquainted with Mr. Dewey, etc."<sup>31</sup>

But events in Hawai'i soon gave him something else to think about. In 1891, King Kalākaua died, precipitating a crisis for the Big Five oligarchs who had long relied on missionary schooling, English education, and political patronage to manipulate the Kingdom of Hawai'i's government. During King Kalākaua's reign, American oligarchs such as the Castles had proven quite successful in projecting their influence upon the monarchy. Tom Smith offers a concise summation: "As Hawaiian monarchs in the late nineteenth century reinvigorated Native Hawaiian culture and claimed greater executive power ... the *haole* planters who now dominated the islands' economy, prominent among whom were the children of American missionaries, formed an increasingly potent and antagonistic lobby."<sup>32</sup> The Castle family was near the center of

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<sup>30</sup> Henry Castle to Helen Castle Mead and George H. Mead, August 23, 1891, in *Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 715-716.

<sup>31</sup> Henry Castle to Helen Castle Mead and George H. Mead, April 24, 1893, in *Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 726-728.

<sup>32</sup> In 1883, William R. Castle, along with a dozen other former legislators, ABCFM missionaries, and businessmen formed the Independent Party to discuss the prospect of bringing the monarchy to heel. While "these members

this lobby. Efforts to control the Native Hawaiian government resulted in a series of increasingly coercive political measures pressed on the Hawaiian monarchs. In 1887, a group of Euro-Americans formed what they called The Hawaiian League and forced King Kalākaua to adopt a new constitution. This constitution, which became known as the “Bayonet Constitution,” cleared the path for Euro-American politicians to gain powerful offices within the kingdom’s government while diminishing the powers of the Native Hawaiian king.<sup>33</sup> As Nancy Beadie notes, that missionary education by the likes of the Castle family had been a handmaiden to the Bayonet Constitution “powerfully illuminates the way that constitutionalism itself could be a tool of colonialism. In the Hawaiian case, ostensibly republican ideas and ideals, as embodied by a series of constitutions, with their literacy and citizenship provisions, were clearly used by whites to alienate land and appropriate power for capitalist enrichment and development.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1891, Kalākaua’s successor Queen Lili’uokalani was determined to take bold action to restore the monarch’s powers. She had every intention to limit the power long wielded by Euro-American families like the Castles in the kingdom’s government. As queen, she attempted to repeal the Bayonet Constitution and throw off the yoke of the Euro-American planter class on the kingdom’s governance. Queen Lili’uokalani’s fierce determination and strategic political intervention caused a ripple of fear among men like Henry and families like the Castles. If Hawai’i’s new queen was allowed to run her kingdom as she saw fit, the Castle family, their

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considered themselves spokesman for the planters and the businessmen,” Osorio notes that the executive committee—which featured Sanford B. Dole and William R. Castle—made overtures to Native Hawaiians who were disaffected with the monarchy and eager for reform to join them. However, this was hardly a coalition between Euro-Americans and Native Hawaiians. “If there was an ideological common ground, it was the issue of the government’s monetary policies,” Osorio explains. Whatever William Castle’s attitude, “the party did not ask any Natives to sit on the executive committee or to serve as officers.” Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui*, 211-13; Smith, “Hawaiian History and American History,” 163.

<sup>33</sup> Tom Smith, “Hawaiian History and American History: Integration or Separation?” *American Nineteenth Century History* 20, no. 2 (2019): 162.

<sup>34</sup> Beadie, “War, Education, and State Formation,” 71.

massive investment in Castle & Cooke, and their missionary legacy seemed in jeopardy. In response to Queen Lili'uokalani's reassertion of Native Hawaiian sovereignty, Americans in the Hawaiian Islands organized themselves as a "Committee of Safety" and called on the United States to intervene. The U.S. minister to Hawai'i became a party to this plan and on August 12, 1898, U.S. marines from the U.S.S. *Boston* joined the Euro-American militia known as the Honolulu Rifles on their march through downtown Honolulu to Iolani Palace, where they affected a coup d'état against the queen. That evening, the "republic's" new president, Sanford B. Dole, received guests at a party held in the palace celebrating what they believed was the termination of Native Hawaiian sovereignty.<sup>35</sup>

From Honolulu, Henry wrote his thoughts about the coup against the queen to his friend George and his sister Helen in Ann Arbor:

The real basis of the revolution is very easily explained. It sprang simply from a universal feeling that native misrule was not to be borne any longer; that palace corruption, royal usurpation, and legislative stupidity had abridged the rights of freemen, and played fast and loose with every moral and material interest long enough. The point had been reached where manhood and self-respect were directly involved. The situation could not be ignored. We would have been curs if we had not resisted. For fifty years white men had quietly submitted to aboriginal rule. Can the world present a parallel? In that time they had built up a national prosperity, and created a civilization. It is quite true that these 30 or 40 millions were at stake, but so was every political and moral and social interest.

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<sup>35</sup> Queen Lili'uokalani immediately petitioned President Benjamin Harrison and later Grover Cleveland to disavow the coup. Cleveland dispatched a commission to investigate. That commission, which became known as the Blount Commission after its leader James. H. Blount, found that the U.S. armed intervention was illegal. Yet the federal government took little further action beyond ordering the flag of the United States lowered in Honolulu, in effect simply standing pat as the Euro-American usurpers declared themselves an independent republic in 1894. Meanwhile, Native Hawaiians organized in a series of political associations intended to support Native Hawaiian sovereignty. Amongst these groups were the Hui Aloha 'Aina o na Kane (Hawaiian Patriotic League Men's Branch), Hui Aloha Aina o na Wahine (Hawaiian Patriotic League Women's Branch), and Hui Kalai aina (Political League). Noenoe K. Silva estimates the membership of these groups amounted to nearly 17,000 Native Hawaiian people between 1893 and 1898. Their petition drives against annexation, sporting as many as 21,000 signatures, helped to successfully foil annexation efforts driven by William Richards Castle between 1894 and 1897. Noenoe K. Silva, "The Importance of Hawaiian Language Sources of Understanding the Hawaiian Past," *English Studies in Canada* 30, no. 2 (June 2004): 4-12; Ronald Williams Jr., "Race, Power, and the Dilemma of Democracy: Hawai'i's First Territorial Legislature, 1901," *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 49 (2015): 2-3; Smith, "Hawaiian History and American History," 163.

We could not have been quiescent without surrendering every gain which civilization has made here in the last seventy years.<sup>36</sup>

After the coup, Henry Castle joined William R. Castle in Washington, DC, to lobby for annexation by the United States.<sup>37</sup> Apparently satisfied that William would sufficiently advance the Castle family's case against Queen Lili'uokalani, Henry finally could turn his attention towards his friends in Ann Arbor, where he intended to stay for some time. After he arrived in Michigan, he wrote to his father back in Honolulu to thank him for sending a typewriter to him in what he jested was "this unworthy Ann Arbor colony." To Henry's eyes, having grown up in burgeoning Honolulu, southern Michigan in 1893 still seemed like something of an "inland" frontier. He could jest that Ann Arbor was itself sort of a pastoral backwater, "one of the loveliest villages I have seen anywhere; all the streets pretty, up hill and down, fine lawns, old trees, and all about the undulating meadows and pasture, and forest"—quaint except for the presence of the truly innovative philosopher in John Dewey.<sup>38</sup>

Henry quickly became enamored with John and Alice alike. "Mr. Dewey is a tall, dark, thin young man, with long black hair, and a soft, penetrating eye, and looks like a cross between a Nihilist and a poet," Henry wrote. As for Alice Chipman, in her element at home in Michigan, "she is one of the most refreshing persons I have come in contact with."<sup>39</sup> Resolved to learn more from John, Henry enrolled at the University of Michigan and took four of Dewey's courses, "all of which I find very interesting and edifying," he wrote. "I am getting much new light from

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<sup>36</sup> Henry Castle to Helen Castle Mead and George H. Mead, March 1, 1893, *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 723-26.

<sup>37</sup> Williams Jr., "Race, Power, and the Dilemma of Democracy," 1-4; "Guide to the Henry Northrup Castle Papers, 1863-1942," University of Chicago Special Collections, University of Chicago, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.CASTLEHN>.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Castle to Samuel Northrup Castle and Mary Tenney Castle, June 10, 1893, *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 729-732.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

him.”<sup>40</sup> He was not alone. “Helen and George are on terms of the most delightful intimacy with the Deweys,” Henry corresponded with his father. This familiarity grew to be both personal and professional; Henry’s daughter Dorothy became one of the Dewey children’s best friends. One day when Henry was on campus at a lecture given by Dewey, his second wife Mabel took over the typewriter and put into her own words what everyone else could plainly see about Henry: “He likes Prof. Dewey.”<sup>41</sup>

In addition to Helen and Henry, a third Castle soon came into Dewey’s orbit in Chicago.<sup>42</sup> Harriet Castle, born in 1847, became increasingly convinced that Dewey’s work at the Laboratory School was relevant to their home in Hawai’i. After Harriet visited Hull House where Dewey frequently lectured, she “grew increasingly confident that Hawai’i could also have success with Dewey’s educational innovation.”<sup>43</sup> In 1894, Harriet wrote to the Deweys, “I am thoroughly interested in the practical problems of the day and my soul is now possessed with a great enthusiasm—inspiration perhaps—for the Kindergarten.” In 1896—the same year that Dewey launched the Laboratory School—Harriet attended the Chicago Froebel Association Training School for Kindergartners that was overseen by Dewey. Before long, Harriet Castle became convinced that kindergartens could serve an important function in the synthesis of education and democracy in Hawai’i.<sup>44</sup> In particular, Harriet saw the applicability of a kindergarten modeled like a settlement house in Hawai’i.

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Castle to Samuel Northrup Castle, November 7, 1893, *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 736-744.

<sup>41</sup> Henry was remarried to Mabel Wing in 1892. Mabel Castle to Mary Tenney Castle, October 3, 1893, *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 734.

<sup>42</sup> The Castle and Dewey families remained close in Chicago. Henry instructed his sister, “When you write to Mrs. Dewey, Helen, thank her very much for her kind expressions in *re* my affairs. Thank her also for Dewey’s *Ethics*, which I suppose she sent, and which I shall read with pleasure.” Henry Castle to Helen Castle Mead and George Herbert Mead, August 16, 1892, *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 720-21.

<sup>43</sup> Castle, “Introduction,” *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, xv.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

To accomplish this, Harriet went on to Columbia University Teachers College and the Pratt Institute to solicit funding for the FKCAA. She distributed a pamphlet entitled “The Kindergarten and the Public School,” which insisted on training “a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. If the child is saved to a good life, there will be no grown-up man to punish.”<sup>45</sup> Alfred L. Castle characterized her belief that a “kindergarten teacher could play [a role] in producing independent future citizens.”<sup>46</sup> Harriet channeled Dewey when she wrote that kindergarten education could “develop in these citizens of today as well as tomorrow the habits, attitudes, appreciations, and skills necessary for the life in democracy.”<sup>47</sup> This message would have appealed to Euro-Americans in Hawai’i who were eager to enlist schooling in the racial management of the island’s non-White population, including Native Hawaiians. “I think we are going to really build up a great work here in the Kindergarten line—The wave has reached us from the Eastern Shore and we are waking up to our responsibility in it,” she wrote to the Deweys.<sup>48</sup> Harriet had a vision that Hawai’i would not simply follow the innovations of the mainland, but that Hawaiians could lead the movement itself.

Such a project would have been increasingly important, for Native Hawaiian resistance to the overthrow of their kingdom was not diminishing. Like her brother Henry before her, Harriet communicated to the Deweys the Castle family’s unease at Native Hawaiian unwillingness to accept the coup her family had supported. In the earlier part of 1894, Harriet wrote to the Deweys that “I suppose I can hardly tell you any news about ourselves for Helen tells you all there is to tell from time to time and as for Politics you can get more from the papers than we know ourselves,” she explained. Nevertheless, she offered her appraisal of the situation: “We are

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<sup>45</sup> Castle, “Introduction,” *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, xvi.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>48</sup> Harriet Castle to John and Alice Dewey, March 26, 1894, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.



preparing to resolve ourselves into some kind of a constitutional government. It seems an easy matter to some I doubt not but it is like dancing on the edge of an active volcano—for the condition here would be a serious question for the wisest Statesmen. We need a Gladstone—We have a rare man in Mr. Dole.”<sup>49</sup> This would be Sanford Dole, corporate partner with Castle & Cooke in the formation of the Dole Fruit Corporation and future president of the republican government and territorial governor.

Through such correspondence, both Alice and John were well aware of the developing political situation in Hawai’i via the Castle family. For example, when John first came to Chicago from Ann Arbor in the summer of 1894, he arrived in the city during the Pullman strike. Embedded within his reaction to the Pullman strike, however, is a potential clue about his attitude about the political struggle for Native Hawaiians. In a July 9, 1894 letter to Alice back in Ann Arbor, Dewey wrote of the scene in the city: “Cleveland seems getting ready to declare martial law for Chicago! His advisers on this business are equal to those on the Hawaiian question. Of course, the govt [*sic*] can’t put up with actual rioting, but a more sympathetic attitude, a discrimination between the strikers and the looting rioting crowds of bums, and the attempt to bring a little pressure to bear on Pullman instead of all on the strikers w’d [*sic*] have made a vast amount of difference.”<sup>50</sup> In his letter, Dewey condemned the federal government’s heavy-handed tactics against the Pullman strikers. In doing so, Dewey appears to draw a direct parallel between President Cleveland’s harsh reaction to the Pullman strikers to the U.S. policy of annexation in the face of Native Hawaiian resistance. Could this passing reference to Hawai’i in his letter to Alice be a clue that suggests Dewey was in sympathy with Native Hawaiians in their negotiations with the United States?

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<sup>49</sup> Harriet Castle to John and Alice Dewey, March 26, 1894, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>50</sup> John Dewey to Alice Dewey, July 9, 1894, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

Dewey's own philosophical predilections likely would not have led him to support Native Hawaiian self-determination as expressed in the restoration of monarchy. From his and Alice's correspondence with the Castles, Dewey was fully aware that the aim of the Native Hawaiian restorationists was to foil an ostensibly republican government in order to restore self-determination in the form of a monarchy. But what was lost on Dewey was the fact that the democratic nature of Native Hawaiian self-determination would not necessarily correspond to the form of government in which it was ultimately expressed. If democracy was at its root a form of associated living grounded in the principle of self-determination, then for Native Hawaiians it was not the territorial or even state government, but rather their monarchs, who represented their sovereignty. In light of such torturous logic, Dewey may very well have consigned the Hawaiian kingdom to the dustbin of history and welcomed the settler colonial republic as the true development of democracy on the islands.

Dewey's impression that Native Hawaiian monarchs were incompatible with democracy might have been underscored in 1895, when the Castles' situation once again was jeopardized. That year, Robert William Kalanihiapo Wilcox mounted an attempt to restore the Native Hawaiian monarchy to power.<sup>51</sup> From January 6 to 9, 1895, Wilcox and about a hundred and fifty royalists fought against the republicans at Diamond Head and Manoa Valley. While traveling in

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<sup>51</sup> Wilcox, the son of a Native Hawaiian woman named Kalua from Maui and William Slocum Wilcox of Newport, Rhode Island, was a firm supporter of Native Hawaiian sovereignty even before the coup. After the imposition of the Bayonet Constitution in 1887, Wilcox had led an armed group to attempt to restore power to the monarchy. Wilcox, who was eager to see the monarch stand up to the Euro-American cabinet that had been installed as a result of the Bayonet Constitution, led a revolt against the kingdom's government in 1889. When he was tried and ultimately acquitted, he went on to serve in the royal legislature representing Oahu from 1890 to 1893. There he founded a newspaper called *The Liberal*, which he edited in Native Hawaiian and English. When the Committee of Safety seized the Queen's palace by force in their coup, Wilcox pleaded with the Queen to allow him to command her palace guard in her defense. When she refused to use violence, Wilcox began fomenting his own plan. When the Republic of Hawai'i was declared by Euro-American usurpers on July 4, 1894, a group of royalists appealed to Wilcox to lead them in open rebellion against it. Wilcox agreed, and six months later, he led an armed group of nearly 150 people against the republic. On the complicated nature of Wilcox's position in royal politics, see Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui*, 242.

Leipzig, Germany, Henry Castle got wind of Wilcox's effort; he was shaken. "I have been very much cast down since this news from Honolulu came, but am feeling more hopeful this afternoon," he wrote to his wife Mabel. Worried about the safety of his family, their land, and their wealth in Hawai'i should Wilcox be successful, Henry concluded that "doubtless, all will come out well."<sup>52</sup>

That same day, Henry voiced more uncertainty when he wrote to Alice Dewey in Chicago. His letter suggests the extent to which the Deweys were aware not only of how the Castles had accrued their wealth, but that Wilcox's effort represented a threat to it. "My Dear Mrs. Dewey, I have had you down on the books for a letter ever since this news came from Honolulu. You are right in conjecturing that I would turn my face westward," he wrote darkly. Should Wilcox and his royalist partisans succeed, the Castles' station in Hawai'i would be in peril. Henry felt he had no choice but to return home: "The uprising seems to be suppressed, but it is impossible to say just what will come now, and Honolulu is unquestionably the place for me to be." The news compelled him to move quickly: "We sail in the North German Lloyd Steamer *Elbe* from Bremen next Tuesday. If I were studying here, or otherwise accomplishing anything, I would not go back; but as it is, there is nothing to keep me." With such a great distance between himself and the events unfolding that would shape the frame of his family fortune in Hawai'i, Henry concluded that "I should be simply miserable if I stay." He told Alice that if Wilcox and his Native Hawaiian allies prevailed, he would depend on her and John's support. "If we get bad news in America, however, I may leave Mabel and the children there." He apologized for the haste in which he wrote, begging Alice to "ascribe its deficiencies and mine for the moment to the effect of the news from Honolulu, which has not been soothing." But as his letter went on, he

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<sup>52</sup> Henry Castle to Mabel Castle, January 24, 1895, *The Collected Letters of Henry Townsend*, 802-3.

seemed to regain his confidence that the Native Hawaiians would be defeated: “The government, however, seems to have come out gloriously. Please remember me to Mr. Dewey.”<sup>53</sup>

Wilcox’s uprising in 1895 was a reminder that despite the coup against Queen Lili’uokalani in 1893 and the declaration of a republic in 1894, Native Hawaiians had never surrendered their sovereignty. While there was a single death in the skirmishes fought at Diamond Head and in the Manoa Valley, the danger of the uprising to Euro-Americans was very real. Wilcox’s forces were defeated, however, and he attempted to go but was taken into republican custody. Soon after Wilcox’s action in the Manoa Valley, on January 16th Queen Lili’uokalani was imprisoned in Iolani Palace. For his part in the “rebellion,” Wilcox was tried and sentenced to death. Sanford B. Dole, president of the Republican government and Harriet’s “Gladstone,” tried to use Wilcox’s life as a bargaining chip to compel Lili’uokalani to abdicate as queen once and for all. She refused. When Sanford’s gambit failed, Wilcox’s sentence was reduced to thirty-five years in prison. In January of 1898, he was pardoned. Six months later, the Hawaiian Islands were annexed by the United States as a territory.<sup>54</sup>

Henry Castle, however, did not live to see it. Six days after he wrote to Alice Chipman about his concern for Wilcox’s rebellion and resolved to head to Honolulu immediately, Henry was killed in a maritime accident aboard the steamship *Elbe*. En route to New York, Henry and his daughter Dorothy became two of the three hundred people who perished at sea when the passenger ship was struck by a cargo vessel in heavy weather in the North Sea. Their deaths rocked the Castle and Dewey families.<sup>55</sup> Sharing in the grief of Henry’s and Dorothy’s death, the

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Castle to Alice Chipman Dewey, January 24, 1895, *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, 800-801.

<sup>54</sup> Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, 161.

<sup>55</sup> When the Deweys lost their son Gordon Dewey to typhoid while traveling in Europe in September of 1904, the Castles lent a kind ear. Recalling Henry’s death in 1895, Helen Castle Mead reassured Alice that she remained an invaluable member of their family, writing, “Oh, you are surely needed.” In the same letter, Helen informed Alice that her son with George Herbert Mead Henry (born in Ann Arbor in 1892 and who would go on to marry Irene

Castles became even closer with the Deweys. To commemorate Henry's passion for Dewey and his ideas about education, Mary Tenney Castle decided to create a memorial to Henry's memory in the form of a kindergarten in Hawai'i. The Castles approached Dewey with a request: Would he help them establish a kindergarten in Henry's memory that would be a cutting-edge exemplar of the new education? Dewey agreed. This was a portentous moment, for Dewey's professional work was to become entangled with the Castles' role in the settler colonialism of Hawai'i. His cooperation would mark a turning point in his legacy in the islands. What had up until 1899 been an intellectual influence and discursive affinity between the Great Lakes and Hawai'i was about to materialize in the form of the Castles' memorial to their lost son.

The first order of business for the Castle family and their foundation was to hire a teacher for their school who had been trained at the Chicago Normal School, an institution that was later consolidated into John and Alice Dewey's Laboratory School. Martin notes that the Castle family aimed to ensure that their school would operate as a "Parker-Dewey school" by recruiting an alum of this institution. Dewey recommended Flora J. Cooke (no relation to Cooke of Castle & Cooke), one of the teachers at Francis Parker's Cook County Normal School. Dewey wrote to Cooke to suggest that the Castles' kindergarten was "a great chance to do something for primary education in the Islands."<sup>56</sup> Together, the group made their way west heading for the islands.

However, the party had one stop to make first: California.<sup>57</sup>

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Tufts, the daughter of Dewey's co-author James Hayden Tufts) was doing well. "Henry... is in perfect condition—as black as an Indian, and sturdy." While Alice would mourn Gordon's death for many years, Helen's friendship conveyed in letters like this one was an important source of emotional support. Helen Castle Mead to Alice Chipman Dewey ca. September 27, 1904, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 202.

<sup>57</sup> While she jumped at the chance to travel to Honolulu, Cooke never took the job at the Castles' kindergarten. Instead, Cooke came to attend Townsend's summer institute. Dewey eventually recruited Florence La Victoire for the position at the Henry and Dorothy Castle Memorial Kindergarten. See McEwan, "John Dewey's Visits to Hawai'i," 13-14; Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 202.

## Henry Townsend and the Racialization of Native Hawaiians in Education, 1893-1899

In April of 1899, Dewey took a leave of absence from the Laboratory School in Chicago and made his way to California. After a series of lectures and visits with friends, in July Dewey joined the assembled ranks of educators who had gathered at the NEA meeting in Los Angeles, where Dewey was featured as a member of the executive committee. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, the event was billed as a major gathering, featuring nearly a thousand visitors. At this meeting, Dewey would have likely crossed paths with his mentor, W. T. Harris, and a rising figure in the new education, Henry S. Townsend. The two men were set to address the association's members at the keynote opening session held at Hazard's Pavilion on the evening of July 11th. The question of schools in Hawaii dominated that opening session. Harris lectured on "An Educational Policy for Our New Possessions," while Townsend followed Harris with a speech entitled "The Educational Problem in Hawai'i." Their billing together was intentional; the assembled educators understood that schooling was at the crux of the nation's attempts to reconcile empire with democracy. The speeches by Harris and Townsend offer important context for the debate among Euro-American educators over the nature of education and democracy for Native Hawaiians upon which Dewey was about to enter.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> While there is no direct evidence placing Dewey at Harris and Townsend's speeches at Hazard's Pavilion, there is strong circumstantial evidence. According to the Center for Dewey Studies chronology of Dewey's career, Dewey is listed as "1899.07.08-11; Executive committee of National Council of Education, annual session, Los Angeles." This is according to the article "Tips for the Teachers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 27, 1899, 4, which listed Dewey as a member of the executive committee as early as May of that year. Dewey was a prominent member of the committee, and unlike other people who had to cancel their attendance, his absence was not noted in the major newspaper coverage of the event in July. Dewey is also listed in the NEA program where he was slated to meet as part of the National Council of Education on July 14th. Meanwhile, Harris and Townsend's speeches were held on July 11th. By tracking Dewey's correspondence, we know that four days later, Dewey wrote from Pacific Grove, California. Nine days later, he wrote from San Francisco, California, where he would depart for Hawai'i on July 26th. This suggests Dewey was traveling north from Los Angeles. If he was present at the NEA, there is every reason to believe he was present at the keynote addresses at the conference's opening. *Official Program and Guide of the N.E.A. 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Educational Publishing, 1899), 24.

While Harris was suffering from neuralgia and his address ultimately had to be read for him, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that this “in no way interfered with the deep interest with which the great audience upon his word.”<sup>59</sup> In this case, his “word” was an argument for settler colonialism through schooling in places like Hawai’i. In his address, Harris gave “a masterly argument in favor of colonial expansion.” Harris argued that the emerging colonialism of the United States in the midst of the Spanish-American War was distinct from that of its European antecedents because of its commitment to self-determination for colonial subjects. Harris believed that the United States and its democratic ethos required more of Americans than their European colonial predecessors. “To the United States, pressing free and equal rights for all men, a new step would appear to be possible. One expects from this nation more altruism, more government of the people for the people.”<sup>60</sup>

Harris told his audience of educators that this democratic mantle would make them the vanguard of such expansion. “Is it not our duty to have our hands in this work,” he told the assembled educators, “and show that we can hold inferior races for their benefit and lift them toward self-government?” More specifically, Harris qualified this “self-government” as “an apprenticeship in local self-government,” a qualifier to the democratic synthesis of education and democracy in most American communities which excluded the self-determination of schooling. Harris went on to outline the role of schooling in U.S. imperialism as the vehicle for colonial “training in individualism and in citizenship.” Invoking the tutelary phase of the Northwest Ordinance, Harris proclaimed that “a people is ready for self-government only when it has

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<sup>59</sup> “Colonial Expansion,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1899, 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

developed a sense of fair play, of tolerance, and submission to legal authority,” he insisted. “It must be ready for productive industry and enlightened political authority.”<sup>61</sup>

Though some anti-imperialists suggest that such colonial expansion would pervert American democracy by including racialized Others such as Native Hawaiians and a growing number of Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese laborers in Hawai’i, Harris turned this objection on its head. Instead of corrupting American democracy, acquiring Hawai’i rather would be the consummation of American democracy. “We, the people of the United States, agree that it is our burden to take up the education of the people of our new possessions,” proclaimed Harris in crescendo. “It is our duty to create a system of education for our colonies that will enable their inhabitants to enjoy a mastery of nature and to enter into possession of the achievements of the race, spiritual and material.” Harris decried opponents of U.S. imperial expansion who cited the unreadiness of Pacific peoples for annexation by the United States by dint of their non-Whiteness. “It is said by some people that if our democratic government undertakes such a task we must necessarily tyrannize and show ourselves cruelly neglectful of the best interests of the weaker races. I believe that we must accept the charge of as many colonies as come to our hand.” By extending democracy through education to people of “weaker races” such as in Hawai’i, Harris was assured that the United States could realize its own democratic potential.<sup>62</sup>

Harris also came ready to rebut those anti-imperialists who objected to the expansion of the United States into the Pacific on the grounds that such acquisitions were beyond the procedures set forth in the Northwest Ordinance. “It is said that it is a new departure for the United States to acquire colonies which cannot be admitted to statehood,” Harris told his

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<sup>61</sup> “Colonial Expansion,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1899, 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*



audience.<sup>63</sup> Even without the teleology of the Northwest Ordinance leading inexorably to statehood, Harris was confident American schooling could transform the territory of Hawai'i into a democracy. To Harris, the distinction between polities organized by the Northwest Ordinance or the Newlands Resolution was secondary to the primary function of imposed schooling for the management of Indigenous political and cultural sovereignty. "It is generally agreed that the school is to be the great feature of the American government of our ne[w] colonies," Harris proclaimed. He would know; as we have seen, Harris had sanctioned Thomas Morgan's system of off-reservation Indian industrial schools, which included the one built at Mount Pleasant, Michigan. In annexed polities, schools for Indigenous people—regardless of their operation by the federal government, missionaries, or public schools—could smooth out the wrinkles presented by Indigenous sovereignty. Now, it was up to educators to get to work.<sup>64</sup>

Under the tutelage of Euro-American instructors such as the many gathered at the NEA, Harris charged that Native Hawaiians could not only develop a democratic polity, but rise to the ranks of civilization, which he defined on terms very similar to Dewey's account: "A people is civilized when it has formed institutions for itself which will enable each individual to profit by the efforts of every other individual, and to be aided by the experience, the wisdom and the thought of others." Dewey surely would have agreed with Harris' assertion that civilization, like

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<sup>63</sup> With an eye towards the annexation of Hawai'i just months earlier, Harris believed that colonial expansion was predetermined by history. "Soon no territory inhabited by uncivilized races will remain outside the domination of the civilized nations. There is no long future for decaying political powers, wherever they may be." Harris's term "decaying political power" surely meant imperial Spain, but it also implied Hawai'i to those who were listening closely. By sealing the overthrow of Hawai'i's Queen Lili'uokalani and annexing the islands as a territory, the United States had transformed Hawaiian people from subjects into citizens. Just as Henry Castle had expressed little but disdain for the monarchy during the events of the 1893 coup, so too did Harris portray American colonial expansion in Hawai'i in 1898 as a striking a blow for democracy against the "ancien regime" of the Hawaiian monarchs. "Colonial Expansion," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1899, 2, and W. T. Harris, "An Educational Policy for Our New Possessions," *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899), 69.

<sup>64</sup> "Colonial Expansion," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1899, 2.

democracy, “enables man to conquer nature and make it his servant. It should give man command of the earth and fruits thereof, and of the experience of the human race.”<sup>65</sup> Yet education and democracy had by this juncture become so abstract that it could very well accommodate schooling “for” Indigenous people, rather than “by” them. In so doing, schooling was the medium by which imperialism flowed into settler colonialism, and washed from the waters of the Great Lakes to Hawai’i.

Few of these school administrators were more enthusiastic about Harris’ vision than Henry S. Townsend. In his role as Inspector of Hawai’i’s schools, Townsend was determined to use the republic-cum-territorial schools to Americanize the islands. When Samuel Northrup Castle arrived in the Hawaiian Islands in the 1840s, there was a fractured consensus among Euro-Americans about the purpose of Native Hawaiian schooling. Merchants wanted to secure Native Hawaiians as a labor force in their shipping industries, while missionaries sought to encourage Native Hawaiians to attend their schools as a matter of connection. In this way, schooling was a point of settler colonial friction.<sup>66</sup> But by the time Hawai’i was annexed by the United States in 1898 and became a territory in 1900, a Euro-American consensus had been reached about the schooling of Native Hawaiians. Part of the reason for this change was that whereas the schooling of Native Hawaiians had been regarded as a problem for Euro-American merchants in the sandalwood trade, it now offered a solution to a new class of planter barons. As the sugar industry grew in the nineteenth century, the demography of Hawaiian Islands began to rapidly change. The contract labor system that supported the planting industries brought

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<sup>65</sup> “Colonial Expansion,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1899.

<sup>66</sup> Kashay, “Agents of Imperialism,” 280-98.



Figure 9.2. Henry S. Townsend, *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, August 5, 1896, 1.

thousands of Japanese, Chinese, and other people from across the Pacific world to work in Hawai'i.<sup>67</sup>

While this importation of workers filled a need of the Big Five for cheap labor, the racial and cultural diversity these workers brought also seemed to present a new risk to Euro-American control over the polity of Hawai'i. Whereas missionaries had used schooling to exert their control over Native Hawai'i government, now public schools were needed to control a rapidly diversifying racial population. Not

long after Dewey published *Democracy and Education*, the U.S. Department of the Interior reported that the racial makeup of Hawai'i's students were "Japanese (54%), Part Hawaiian (10%), Chinese (9%), Portuguese (8%), Filipino (5%), Hawaiian (5%), Caucasians (4%), all others (5%)."<sup>68</sup> From the perspective of the tiny Euro-American minority, something had to be done to transform this fractured cultural landscape into a unified political order through which their interests would be protected. Before long, the public schooling of Native Hawaiians was regarded by Euro-Americans as the foremost tool for racial management.<sup>69</sup> In his NEA speech, Townsend charged that Hawai'i's racial diversity—Native Hawaiians, Polynesians, Japanese laborers, Chinese immigrants, and European interlopers—presented territorial schooling officials

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<sup>67</sup> When the debate over annexation became a major proxy for disputes over the plantation system of contract labor, members of the Castle family came to its defense. Samuel N. Castle, son of William R. Castle, dismissed critics of the system, suggesting that "our 'forced labor' system" was "just to both parties, and both are protected by them, and he who tries to throw odium on our system abroad as a semi-slave system, or to unsettle it at home, unless he brings something practically better, strikes a blow at *every interest* [original emphasis] in the country, not the planting interests alone." Osorio, *Dismembering Lauhi*, 176, 272.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in K. Beyer, "A Century of Using Secondary Education," 529.

<sup>69</sup> Henry S. Townsend, "The Education Problem in Hawaii," *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899), 81.

with a major problem. How could they create a polity that they could effectively administer, head off the resistance to labor practices of the Big Five, and all while extinguishing Native Hawaiian sovereignty?

Schooling offered the means to accomplish these knotty problems of social control. “The great art which our pupils of the various races must learn,” Townsend proclaimed, “is the art of living together in peace and harmony.”<sup>70</sup> In echoing Harris’ call for schooling in colonial polities like Hawai’i, Townsend spread the myth of Native Hawaiian passivity to the assembled educators at the NEA. Native Hawaiian people “sought no part in the government, and have never magnified their office as voters,” Townsend informed his mainland audience.<sup>71</sup> How could mentally despotic Native Hawaiians and democratic-minded Euro-American settlers possibly hope to live in a unified polity? Townsend had the answer: “The problem of adjusting these two elements to each other, under a common civilization, is a part of the larger problem which the schools of Hawai’i must solve.”<sup>72</sup> While Hawai’i was different from Michigan, Euro-Americans in both places faced a common problem posed by the presence of Indigenous peoples. “Different races and different localities come to have their own peculiar educational problems—corollaries, as it were, of the world’s great educational problem,” he told his audience.<sup>73</sup> “When peoples of different races, different civilizations, different ideas, and different ideals become mingled, the problem becomes especially complicated.”<sup>74</sup> For this reason, Townsend invoked Dewey and the new education in the course of his own scheme for schooling as a form of racial management in Hawai’i.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>75</sup> The *Hawaiian Gazette*, later owned in part by Castle & Cooke, reprinted and reviewed excerpts of Townsend’s speech, calling it “thoughtfully conceived upon the subject.” In the article “Townsend Talks,” the newspaper explained to readers how Townsend “said that minds in general develop in accordance with certain fixed and

Dewey was not the first mainland pedagogue who became a focus of Townsend's recruiting efforts. Earlier in the decade, Townsend established a series of summer schools for teacher development in Honolulu. At these summer schools, Euro-American instructors across the islands would gather to hear lectures from mainland pedagogues brought in expressly for the purpose of addressing their ranks. These summer schools had been the occasion upon which Colonel Francis Parker had come to Hawai'i in 1898.<sup>76</sup> Parker had been a major "get" for Townsend, and he relished the hope that he could convince Dewey to come to Hawai'i. Like Harriet Castle before him, Henry Townsend figured that bringing figures like Parker and Dewey to Hawai'i was one way to ensure that the island's schools, though at the geographical periphery of the American empire, would remain central to the developing trends in the schooling of Indigenous people in the United States. Consequently, Townsend must have been greatly pleased to learn that after the NEA, Dewey was sailing for Hawai'i.

### **The Deweys in Hawai'i, 1899**

The Deweys left the NEA and traveled to San Francisco, where they set sail for Hawai'i on July 26, 1899. The Deweys intended the trip as a kind of working vacation; while they stayed with the Castle family, they would do some sightseeing, participate in a fledgling university extension program, and try to induce Flora Cooke to join the Castles' kindergarten enterprise.<sup>77</sup> When Dewey arrived in Honolulu, the *Hawaiian Star* hailed him as an able "university

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ascertainable laws, yet the first principles of the science imply that no two men think, or feel, or will, or develop alike, since no two have the same temper and environment. In like manner, he continued, it follows that different races and people develop differently and hence have their own educational problems." Not only is this a faithful account of Townsend's speech, but this is a serviceable description of Dewey's attitude towards Indian education writ large. "Townsend Talks," *The Hawaiian Gazette*, July 21, 1899, 6.

<sup>76</sup> McEwan, "John Dewey's Visits to Hawai'i," 13.

<sup>77</sup> McEwan, "Introduction," *Educational Perspectives*, 2.

extensionist.”<sup>78</sup> The first day of the extension program saw Dewey share the stage with Henry Townsend. The *Gazette* described the event as a rally, with a large audience “anxious to see the extension system placed on a firm footing on these Islands.”<sup>79</sup> Over the course of the following five weeks, Dewey lectured to an audience of over a hundred teachers at the university extension program, many of whom were also attending Townsend’s summer school.<sup>80</sup> Dewey’s lectures at these programs were summarized and circulated by the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, which billed Dewey as something of a mainland celebrity who spoke to interests beyond technical matters of education. While Dewey did not take the podium at Townsend’s summer institute, on several occasions he dropped in to observe its proceedings. As Hawai’i’s leading progressive pedagogue, Townsend settled on the Laboratory School director making several appearances, evidently satisfied that Dewey’s mere appearance at the summer school would bolster its prestige.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, the Deweys worked with Mary Castle to launch her own pedagogical enterprise, the Henry and Dorothy Memorial Free Kindergarten. By the time Dewey came to Honolulu, the Castles’ designs for a kindergarten soon ballooned into something larger. The Castles had a vision for an institution that would blend American missionary activity with a contemporary settlement house, reflecting Dewey’s expertise and his wider synthesis of

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<sup>78</sup> Cited in McEwan, “John Dewey’s Visits to Hawai’i,” 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Even the venue for Dewey’s lectures represented the contested nature of the political self-determination of Native Hawaiians. Dewey gave his lectures at Honolulu High School, a building constructed in 1883 as a residence for Princess Ruth Ke’elikolani. As a royal residence, the Victorian building was intended to signal the power of the Native Hawaiian state through a Western architectural medium. However, Ke’elikolani died soon after it was completed, and the republican legislature repurposed it after the coup as an instrument that would further obscure its Native Hawaiian origins: a high school. Today, it is the site of Central Middle School. “School History and Profile,” Central Middle School, accessed February 8, 2021, [https://www.cmshnl.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=814294&type=d&pREC\\_ID=1200010](https://www.cmshnl.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=814294&type=d&pREC_ID=1200010)

<sup>81</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 202; see McEwan, on the university extension program and its connection to the University Club, which McEwan described as “the model of a prestigious men’s club” composed of “Hawai’i-based university graduates,” most if not all of whom were Euro-Americans. McEwan, “John Dewey’s Visits to Hawai’i,” 11-13.

education and democracy. When the Castles moved from King Street in Honolulu to a new property in Manoa Valley, they decided to devote their former home for the purpose. “Mrs. Castle and her children felt they wanted the [King Street property] to go on with its missionary work as in years past,” reported the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. “It was finally decided that the time came to give up the family residence [and] it should be devoted for a home for those children made eligible for it.” The *Advertiser* further suggested that such criteria would make the building “a home for the homeless children of the foreign population.”<sup>82</sup> What eventually opened on King Street was the Henry and Dorothy Castle Memorial Free Kindergarten. It combined the Castles’ repurposed housing as an orphanage with a new kindergarten classroom. One teacher recalled that the nursery school had classes of “Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiian, *haole*, Filipino, and Korean” students.<sup>83</sup> In 1935, “Hawaiians” made up just 1.5 percent of the students, and “Mixed Hawaiian” made up 11 percent. In 1937, the former number went to zero, and the latter jumped to 16 percent.<sup>84</sup> The end result was something that resembled a settlement house, just the kind of institution that embodied the application of Dewey’s democracy to Hawai’i students at the Castle School.<sup>85</sup>

While they were few in number, Native Hawaiians were still caught up in the settler colonial mesh. Like Dewey’s Laboratory School in Chicago, the Castle School was also eventually acquired and absorbed by the teachers college of the University of Hawai’i as a laboratory school in 1940.<sup>86</sup> In this fashion, some have depicted the institutional life of the Henry and Dorothy Memorial Free Kindergarten as representative of the development from missionary

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<sup>82</sup> McEwan, “John Dewey’s Visits to Hawai’i,” 14.

<sup>83</sup> Dr. Alida V. Shinn to Alfred L. Castle, June 10, 1991, cited in Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 53.

<sup>84</sup> Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 57.

<sup>85</sup> Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 48-65.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

schooling to progressive education. By enlisting Dewey to achieve their vision of pluralist schooling in Hawai'i, the Castles cast Dewey as a progressive and pluralist modernizer of older missionary logics of homogenizing assimilation. From the perspective of Native Hawaiian students, this was a distinction without much of a difference. The Castles' kindergarten represented another school among many where they were culturally marginal and politically nondistinct from their non-White peers. Both the school itself and Dewey's role in it were little more than further obstacles to their self-determination in education.

During his time in Honolulu, Dewey came face to face with anti-democratic schooling for Indigenous people. According to Jay Martin, on August 19, Dewey broke away from his lectures at Honolulu High School in order to make a visit to "a school for Native Hawaiian girls."<sup>87</sup> Although it is not named in Martin's account, this was the Kamehameha School, just over a decade old when Dewey visited. The Kamehameha School began in 1887 when Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, the final direct descendant of King Kamehameha I, passed away. According to Rohrer, Princess Pauahi "was very concerned about the suffering of her people from the devastating effects of colonialism [and] she believed education was an important key to a better future."<sup>88</sup> As a consequence, she wrote into her will her wish to transfer a large part of her royal estate—375,000 acres of land—to fund two schools for Native Hawaiian children, one for boys and one for girls. Critically, Princess Pauahi demanded that the school give enrollment "preference to Hawaiians of pure or part aboriginal blood."<sup>89</sup> Because the school itself represented assets of the sovereign kingdom devoted to education, this "blood logic" was arguably less racializing than it was a recognition of Native Hawaiian political distinction. As a

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<sup>87</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 203.

<sup>88</sup> Judy Rohrer, "Attacking Trust: Hawai'i as a Crossroad and Kamehameha Schools in the Crosshairs," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (September 2010): 437-55.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 440.



consequence, the basis for the Kamehameha School threatened to puncture the settler colonial mesh in the American synthesis of education and democracy. Controlling the Kamehameha School was therefore an important way for Americans to contain Native Hawaiian sovereignty as expressed through schooling.<sup>90</sup>

Consequently, the administration of the Kamehameha School has been contested since its inception. Many Euro-American educators had their hands in the construction of the school. Foremost among them was Samuel Armstrong Chapman.<sup>91</sup> According to Veronica Pasfield, Chapman “returned to Hawai’i in 1880 to create Kamehameha School, a new facility for Kanaka Maoli youth that more forcefully furthered the goals developed at Hampton and Carlisle.”<sup>92</sup> As a consultant, Armstrong placed the school squarely in the tradition of assimilative education, disciplining the Native population for Euro-American settlement as a pliant workforce. Henry Townsend himself had been vice principal of the school in 1888.<sup>93</sup> Where Armstrong had implemented a curriculum of vocational training taught through Protestant-sanctioned toiling, Townsend aimed to create industrial education based on experiential learning, not unlike his reading of Dewey. The Deweys went on a tour of the school likely because Townsend and his cohort of American educators wanted to show off their modern administration of the schooling for Native Hawaiians.

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<sup>90</sup> On Native Hawaiian contestation of the Kamehameha School by students and educators, see Bruce Ka’imi Watson, “Ka Mo’olelo o Ka Nuha: The Safety Zone at the Kamehameha Schools Didn’t Happen by Accident,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 16, no. 3 (2020): 268-75 and David A. Chang, “‘We Will Be Comparable to the Indian Peoples’: Recognizing Likeness between Native Hawaiians and American Indians, 1834-1923,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (September 2015): 859-86.

<sup>91</sup> C. K. Beyer, “The Connection of Samuel Chapman Armstrong as Both Borrower and Architect of Education in Hawai’i,” *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2007): 23-48.

<sup>92</sup> Pasfield, “The Head, the Heart, and the Hands,” 16.

<sup>93</sup> Robert E. Potter, “The Evolution of Summer Sessions for Teachers in Hawai’i,” *Educational Perspectives* 27, no. 2 (1990): 1.

That the Kamehameha School had been adorned in the window dressing of experiential education would have been visible to the Deweys. They visited the girl's school. Dewey not only toured the school, but made a point to observe a class of Native Hawaiian girls and their instructors.<sup>94</sup> Alice Dewey, who wrote of her travels to her children back on the mainland, related their visit:

This is a very large property which was left by one of the queens to educate Hawaiian boys and girls.... The Hawaiian young people care much more for what they can learn to do than for what they can learn out of books and here the boys have many things to do. The girls are separate from the boys and do all their work by themselves and they have not so many things to do. But the house they live in has beautiful rooms and is beautifully situated on high ground where they can overlook both the sea and the mountains and also the town. The boys do all the work even the cooking or at least most of it, and the girls do all theirs including the washing and ironing.<sup>95</sup>

Like the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School in Michigan, the Kamehameha School was an invitation for Dewey to consider Native Hawaiian children as a class of students that might have been worthy of special consideration in Hawaiian education. The evidence suggests Dewey was perfectly aware of the history of the Kamehameha School as a result of Euro-American colonization in Hawai'i. For example, Alice explicitly noted in her letter to their children that the school's origins lay not in the territorial government as a form of public schooling, but in the monarchy's specific provisions for Native Hawaiians.<sup>96</sup> How would his emerging philosophy of education work if it was mapped onto Native Hawaiians—not simply as a part of Hawai'i's rapidly diversifying racial demography, but as a sovereign people who had

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<sup>94</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 203.

<sup>95</sup> Alice Chipman Dewey to Dewey children, August 19 and 26, 1899, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Writing to his children, Dewey narrated the Hawaiian history he had learned on Oahu. "The different islands used to be all at war with one another until early in this century their greatest king conquered all the others & united them in one kingdom. This was the last island he conquered, & they say this valley is the first place where he settled with his followers—He taught them to farm & used to work in the fields with them." John Dewey to Dewey children, August 17, 1899, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

once enjoyed unfettered self-determination over their education? Did the fact that the sovereign kingdom of Hawai'i had operated its own schools just six years prior to his visit complicate Dewey's picture of the relationship between schooling and self-determination? If so, how?

Perhaps the Kamehameha School's 1899 curriculum of vocational education appeared to Dewey as an extension, rather than an imposition, upon Native Hawaiian students. Or perhaps the Deweys believed the school was a material improvement for the students over their domestic lives at home. The Deweys' Euro-American hosts at the school were quick to inform them that the families of the Native Hawaiian students at the school had all the assets they could hope for: "Their buildings are many of them beautiful and they have so much land that Mr. Thompson said that if it increased much more in value that in 25 years they would have more money than they could use," Alice remarked.<sup>97</sup>

Or perhaps Dewey saw his own philosophy at work at the school. As a Deweyan devotee, Townsend knew Dewey was interested in the function of the environment in shaping social occupations.<sup>98</sup> As we have seen, Dewey understood "savage mind" as the result of the habitual interaction of Indigenous peoples with wilderness. This mental accommodation to one's environment had led to a "hunting psychosis" of mental accommodation among those who lived in the wilderness. In concert with Frederick Jackson Turner and the frontier thesis, Dewey came to believe that Euro-American pioneers in the same wilderness conditions had broken the habit of accommodation and ushered in a new psychological regime of experimental intelligence. This supplied Dewey with a historical origin story for not only experimental intelligence, but

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<sup>97</sup> Alice Chipman Dewey to Dewey children, August 19 and 26, 1899, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 202.



Figure 9.3. *First Graduating Class of the Kamehameha School for Girls 1897*, Wikimedia Commons.

American democracy itself. Perhaps a school such as the Kamehameha School or Mount Pleasant was making a warranted intervention in the lives of primitive people.

Townsend understood the relevance of Dewey to Hawai'i in part through the racialization of the frontier discourse. For example,

Townsend had told his audience at the NEA about Native Hawaiian students such as those at the Kamehameha School: “It is the psychical response to the stimulus of environment which really influences development,” Townsend said. “This response is determined, in turn, by the temper of the individual concerned. And that temper comes down to him mysteriously from all his ancestors, thus making him in a peculiar and just sense ‘the heir of all the ages’ thru [*sic*] which he has, in regular order, descended.” Townsend dismissed the mainlanders who believed that Hawai'i’s “emerald isles, our perpetual summer, our balmy breezes, and our beryl seas will exert an influence upon the characters of our boys.” To the contrary, Townsend insisted, “race differences are seen to be deep-seated and not dependent upon present environment. So at every turn we of Hawaii find ourselves face to face with the race problem.”<sup>99</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Townsend, “The Education Problem in Hawaii,” 81.

Dewey's foiling of the experimental intelligence of Euro-American settlers with Indigenous mental habituation mapped perfectly on to Townsend's attitudes about Native Hawaiians on display at the Kamehameha School. Townsend's lecture was littered with language like "acquiescence," "content," and "passive" to make Native Hawaiians' tolerance of monarchy legible to his fellow Euro-Americans as a product of race and environment. "The white race is pre-eminent for active, self-assertive, strong individuality. It is in this race that individualism is found in its extreme form," Townsend told his mainland audience. On the other hand, "the Hawaiians are of the extreme passive type, influenced somewhat by their contact with the white race. The Hawaiian 'ancient régime' was based upon and fostered absolute submission to authority; and all authority was fortified with the strongest religious sanctions. Men of the passive races wish to be governed well. Those of the active races wish to take part in their own government and in the government of others."<sup>100</sup> The habitual nature of the psychology of Native Hawaiians, like Indians, suggested they were satisfied to accommodate monarchical tyranny; Euro-American settlers, on the other hand, were psychologically disposed towards democracy.<sup>101</sup> We can only speculate as to what Dewey thought of the Kamehameha School, as he was ultimately silent on the matter. Nevertheless, that silence speaks volumes. Whatever he thought of the school, Dewey proved unable to discern the function of the curriculum at the Kamehameha School as an instrument of social control.<sup>102</sup>

If Townsend was eager to have Dewey visit the Kamehameha School, than he must have been positively champing at the bit to have his pedagogical idol inspect his public schools. To be

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<sup>100</sup> Townsend, "The Education Problem in Hawaii," 82.

<sup>101</sup> The theme of Indigenous accommodation to the environment and passivity to tribal (or monarchical) despotism was a running theme of "Indianness" as it was first authored on the mainland and transposed on the islands. On the enduring harm of this component of the frontier discourse in Hawai'i, see Silva, "The Importance of Hawaiian Language Sources for Understanding the Hawaiian Past," 4-12.

<sup>102</sup> Cif Stratton, "Hawaiian Cosmopolitans and the American Pacific," in *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 85-117.

sure, like the Castle family and the ABCFM before him, Townsend was convinced that schooling for assimilation was part of a benevolent project of racial uplift for Native Hawaiians. But unlike this earlier nineteenth-century program of schooling for assimilation, Townsend was more ambitious. Townsend's plan meant rejecting the older model of parochial schooling for the assimilation of Native Hawaiians in favor of a state-based system for their incorporation. "The usual social and religious institutions which serve to unify peoples, or to bring them into pleasant relations, are either entirely lacking here, or they fail to reach at once all of the important elements of the population," Townsend wrote.<sup>103</sup> For Townsend, this was the lesson from the mainland: religious groups could not be left to carry out the project of state-building in Hawai'i. "The case of 'Poor Lo' should serve as a warning against believing anything of the kind," he warned. Townsend urged caution for adapting the assimilative mission of schooling for Indigenous people demonstrated by "the Americans, who have not yet developed a civilization sufficiently broad and sufficiently Christian to bless the white man and the red.... No; the problem is more difficult than this."<sup>104</sup>

In other words, Townsend believed that nineteenth-century missionaries and their industrial schools such as the Kamehameha School alone were insufficient to incorporate all Native Hawaiians into the social order of the new Territory of Hawai'i. Townsend wanted a program for schooling that not only curbed the use of the Native Hawaiian language in common schools, but offered a systematic, professional, and centralized approach to the disciplining of Native Hawaiians writ large. The new philosophy of John Dewey seemed to offer one path

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<sup>103</sup> This is not to say that schooling in Hawai'i had not been effective in erasing the Native Hawaiian language. By Paul Nahoia Lucas' count, there were 150 schools in the islands in 1880 where Native-Hawaiian was spoken, and only 60 English-speaking schools. Three years after Dewey's 1899 visit to Hawai'i, there were 204 of the latter and none of the former. Paul F. Nahoia Lucas, "E Ola Mau Kakou I Ka 'Olelo Makuahine: Hawaiian Language Policy and the Courts," *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 34, (2000): 9.

<sup>104</sup> Townsend, "The Educational Problem in Hawaii," 83.

forward for the ambitious scheme Townsend had in mind. Progressive education, with its suite of innovations regarding child-centered learning, careful attention to the influence of the environment on individuals, and emphasis on experiential learning, was particularly appealing to Townsend.<sup>105</sup> In Deweyan terms, Townsend believed that if schooling could harmonize a varied cultural nationalism among a racially and culturally diverse Hawaiian society, then a singular political nationalism buttressed by the territorial government would follow. In Townsend's vision, the Kamehameha School would be one strand in a settler colonial mesh that was woven by English-only public schools, elite private schools, and eventually a territorial university.

Townsend was uniquely positioned to import Dewey's progressive pedagogy to Hawai'i. In 1896, the republic government passed Act 57, known as the School Law of 1896. It was under this act that Henry S. Townsend became the inspector general of schools.<sup>106</sup> Act 57 instituted a new centralized bureaucracy, outlawed sectarian curriculum, established districts, created the office of school agents, and led to the hiring of a number of professional educators trained in the United States.<sup>107</sup> Most deleterious to Native Hawaiians, the act created a top-down governance structure at the cabinet level, instituted compulsory attendance, and, most critically, established English-only education in public schools.<sup>108</sup> The cumulative effect of these reforms was that the act "devalued ethnic cultures, instead seeking a unitary, melting pot community" that proved "devastating to the Native Hawaiian."<sup>109</sup> While progressives hailed Act 57 as a welcome shift to

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<sup>105</sup> For example, Townsend was convinced that the eradication of Native Hawaiian language and its replacement by English through schooling was only the beginning: "Polynesians and Asiatics cannot be made to think and feel as Anglo-Saxons by the simple process of teaching them the English language, or by any other process which does not involve evolution thru [sic] generations. It will be a long time before we have a homogeneous people, even in the sense that the cognate races become homogeneous in the ordinary American community. Yet in the meantime we must live together." Townsend, "The Educational Problem in Hawaii," 83.

<sup>106</sup> Potter, "The Evolution of Summer Sessions for Teachers in Hawai'i," 26-33.

<sup>107</sup> *School Law of 1896* (Honolulu: Republic of Hawai'i, 1896).

<sup>108</sup> Benham and Heck, *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawaii*, 110.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

universal education and opportunity for all the children of Hawai'i to be exposed to the new education, Benham and Heck rightly conclude that for Native Hawaiians, it "legitimized centralized control of all educational activity, prevented culturally sensitive activities, restricted involvement of the public in the schools, and drove the curriculum toward teaching students how to think and behave in appropriate, Western ways."<sup>110</sup> Especially in the select schools, "Native Hawaiian children were often sharply punished, ridiculed, and embarrassed if they were caught speaking their native tongue."<sup>111</sup> Townsend's progressive reforms meant more English-only education, taught by American teachers, and fewer Native Hawaiian instructors who taught in the Hawaiian language. Benham and Heck note that in the biennial report of 1897 published by Townsend's office, "although Hawaiians had dominated the teaching field, representing 41 percent (91 teachers) of the total in 1892, by 1897 they represented only 33 percent with 97 teachers."<sup>112</sup> In this way, increasingly progressive forms of bureaucratic school reform meant greater incorporative power: "Political pressure encouraged English-only instruction in the schools, employing the argument that, in order for Hawai'i to be a democracy patterned after the United States, it must have an educated and civilized citizenry."<sup>113</sup>

There is a lesson from Townsend's invocation of Dewey to promote his public schools at the expense of Native Hawaiian students. "The universal movement toward education for all did not mean equal opportunity for all," concludes Benham and Heck.<sup>114</sup> In fact, universal education in Hawai'i's public schools represented an impediment to Native Hawaiian self-determination in

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<sup>110</sup> These scholars identify a number of areas where public schooling disrupted Native Hawaiian cultural practices, including observational, kin-based learning as part of the extended *'ohana*; the pedagogical dimensions of *mana*; and the balanced nature of labor and leisure in *ukupau*. Benham and Heck, *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawaii*, 106-132.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>112</sup> Benham and Heck, *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawai'i*, 104.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.



schooling. Kalani Beyer argues that whether it was private schools like Kamehameha School, or public schooling like Townsend's high schools and the Castles' kindergartens, the outcome was the same—schooling was doing little more than preparing Native Hawaiians “to serve as second-class citizens.”<sup>115</sup> What statehood, counties, and schools did to transform Michigan into a settler colonial polity deemed fit to join the United States, schools did largely on their own in Hawai'i. It should trouble us, then, that Dewey, his prestige, and his philosophy was held up as a major inspiration for those schools.

Not long after Dewey's visit to the Kamehameha School, Townsend got his wish when the mainland pedagogue made a tour of the territory's public schools. On September 12, Hawai'i's school term began, and Dewey visited several of Townsend's public schools around Honolulu. From his visits, Dewey concluded that teachers at these schools had done an admirable job “in giving instruction to classes in which the nationalities are so mixed.”<sup>116</sup> Whereas Dewey regarded Japanese and Chinese residents of the city as proxies for racial harmony in Hawai'i, Native Hawaiians appeared to Dewey like racial novelties. For example, McEwan chronicles how John and Alice also played tourist during their time on Oahu: “They took a trip to Kīlauea volcano on the island of Hawai'i; they were taken out on an outrigger canoe off Waikīkī; they went on a picnic by horseback up the Ko'olaus, visited the Bishop Museum—on two occasions, at least—and were taken to the Chinese Theatre in Honolulu.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> K. Beyer, “A Century of Using Secondary Education to Extend An American Hegemony Over Hawai'i,” *American Educational History Journal*, 39, no. 2 (2012): 515-35.

<sup>116</sup> *The Hawaiian Star*, September 19, 1899, 1. Impressed by the island's racial diversity, the Deweys also went on a “tour” of Honolulu's Chinatown, what McEwan calls a form of slumming. Their trip was recorded in a local newspaper, which quoted John's praise for the constabulary. “It is clear from Dewey's remarks, quoted in the paper, that he had done this sort of thing previously, in San Francisco and Chicago, perhaps, or New York City as he compared the police work in Honolulu favorably to that conducted in other cities.” In this fashion, Dewey's interest about ethnic assimilation and racial incorporation into the United States which would come to fruition in New York was primed by his visit to Hawai'i. McEwan, “John Dewey's Visits to Hawai'i,” 18.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

John was particularly animated by the novelty of an outrigger canoe ride, hosted by a Native Hawaiian mariner. In a letter to his children on August 17, he previewed the venture, explaining, “We are going out canoing in the surf with a native to manage the boat someday soon—You have to go in your bathing suits.”<sup>118</sup>

The Castles’ station in Hawai’i also further turned Dewey’s attention away from Native Hawaiians as a constituency who might have benefited from his philosophy and its synthesis of education and democracy.<sup>119</sup> Throughout their stay, the Deweys stayed with the Castle family in Manoa Valley. When Dewey returned to San Francisco in the fall, he was interviewed by a journalist about the trip. In the interview, Dewey presents himself as the bringer of democratic tidings from Hawai’i. “The people in Hawai’i are very much upset by the action of President McKinley in annulling all public land sales made since the annexation of the islands,” he said, an action which had resulted in “invalidating all railroad franchises.” When Dewey spoke of “the people in Hawai’i,” he was clearly referring to people like the Castles and their corporate interests in Castle & Cooke, which had recently expanded to include railroad construction.<sup>120</sup> When Dewey spoke as a mouthpiece for the Castles’ vantage point, he betrayed his own lack of concern for the Native Hawaiians.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> John Dewey to Dewey children, August 17, 1899, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>119</sup> On September 1st, John and Alice Dewey made an appearance at Hawaiian territorial governor and Castle family friend Sanford Dole’s residence. The Deweys were hopeful they might meet the man who began his career in Hawai’i as the principal of the Punahou School and become the leader of the new annexed territory. But as luck would have it, “Mrs. Dole was there, but the President wasn’t,” John recorded. During his stay with his hosts at their Manoa Valley home, Dewey evidently visited with William R. Castle Sr. Dewey was impressed by William, and the two made plans to travel Oahu together. See John Dewey to Dewey children, August 17, 1899, and John Dewey to Dewey children, September 2, 1899, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

<sup>120</sup> “Labor Wanted in Hawai’i,” *Wilkes-Barre Times*, October 10, 1899.

<sup>121</sup> After the Deweys’ stay with the Castles in 1899, their friendship served as a bridge between the islands and the mainland for other members of the Dewey family. Evelyn Dewey went to the island of Hawai’i in 1909. She was hosted by Ermine Cross, who had taken the job as director of the Henry and Dorothy Castle Memorial Kindergarten. While she was on the island, Evelyn hewed to an itinerary of leisure set forth by the Castle family: “There certainly is enough scenery crammed into these dinkey little islands to last a good sized country a life time.” The Deweys’ adopted son Sabino also traveled with them to Hawai’i. While the Deweys returned to Honolulu for a brief layover

In the five weeks that the Deweys stayed with the Castles, they made quite an impression on Mary Castle. In Dewey's lectures at the university extension program, his glowing endorsement by Townsend, and his assistance in supporting Henry's memorial kindergarten, Mary had seen firsthand Dewey's genius for education, so often related to her in letters by her late son Henry and her daughters Helen and Harriet. She resolved to use the wealth channeled from Castle & Cooke to financially support Dewey's growing Laboratory School. In fact, a year prior to Dewey's trip to Hawai'i in preparation for his consulting services, the Castle Benevolent Trust issued \$303 to the "University of Chicago for John Dewey's Lab School." This was followed in 1899, when a further \$400 was earmarked for "John Dewey, University of Chicago."<sup>122</sup> After the Deweys returned from Hawai'i to Chicago, Mary was moved to donate again. On December 21, 1899, Dewey wrote to President William Rainey Harper with the good news. "I am also glad to be able to report that a gift of \$1000 toward the one million needed, has been made. Mrs. Mary Castle of Honolulu has promised that amount to the Elementary School for the current year," he wrote. If a thousand dollars seemed like a comparatively paltry sum, Dewey accounted for exactly what the funds would cover. "This will enable us to carry the French and Gymnasium salaries, hitherto unprovided for after the first of January, and also to meet some other much needed expenses. I will forward a statement of details soon. Yours truly, John Dewey."<sup>123</sup>

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on his way to Japan in 1919, Sabino remained in Honolulu where he worked at the University of Hawai'i. As he explained his postmarks from Honolulu to Lucy Dewey, that "(T) stands for territory (sic) and (H) for Hawai'i, and combined it is Territory of Hawai'i, but the of is left out, as it is in U.S.A." When Sabino had a daughter of his own, he named her Alice in honor of his adopted mother from Fenton, Michigan. This Alice Dewey eventually earned her doctorate and became a professor of anthropology at the University of Hawai'i. Evelyn Dewey to John and Alice Dewey, August 15, 1909 in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1; Sabino Dewey to Lucy Dewey, April 27, 1919 in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2; Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*, 331-333; Nancy I. Cooper, "In Memoriam: Alice G. Dewey (1928-2017)," University of Hawai'i Center for Southeast Asian Studies, last modified June 21, 2017, accessed December 14, 2020, <http://www.cseas.hawaii.org/2017/06/in-memoriam-alice-g-dewey-1928-2017/>.

<sup>122</sup> Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 71.

<sup>123</sup> John Dewey to William Rainey Harper, December 21, 1899, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

While the Deweys could breathe a little easier with wealth from Castle & Cooke in their school's coffers, the letter casts a cold wind over Dewey's philosophical legacy in Hawai'i. The Castle family transferred the wealth derived from Hawaiian plantations, railroads, and newspapers to directly sponsor Dewey's Laboratory School in Chicago. In short, Mary Castle's donation further entwined the entanglement between Dewey's professional life and the Castle family's history of wealth derived from settler colonialism in Hawai'i.

Though Alfred L. Castle acknowledges the source of the wealth that powered these philanthropic efforts, his analysis is largely unfazed by it. "Paradoxically ... foundations and trusts with a missionary background were funded by plantation profits while much of their gift distributions were to promote democracy and opportunity through education."<sup>124</sup> Despite the paradox, Castle concludes that the Castle family's enthusiasm for Dewey was evidence of their earnest desire "to see early childhood education serve as a means of diminishing differences among races while preparing all students for life in a democracy."<sup>125</sup> This conclusion ultimately is far too uncritical of the role Dewey and the Castle family played in bringing a settlement house synthesis of schooling and democracy to the islands. As I have argued, this synthesis not only racialized Native Hawaiians in their own homeland, but made schooling in Hawai'i even less responsive to *Kānaka Maoli* aspirations for self-government in education.

The anti-democratic stakes of Dewey's popularity in Hawaii for Native Hawaiians has been difficult to grasp in part due to the historiography on Henry Townsend. In 1900, Townsend was replaced as de facto leader of the territorial schools by the more formalist Alatau Atkinson.<sup>126</sup> Benham and Heck conclude that Townsend's unbridled enthusiasm for Dewey's

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<sup>124</sup> Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 88-89.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>126</sup> McEwan, "Introduction," 6.

philosophy in Hawai'i ran afoul of the Big Five planter class. They suggest that Townsend's "efforts to create better educational opportunity for all students, patterned after the ideals of John Dewey, however, became the root of his undoing."<sup>127</sup> Robert Potter agrees, writing that "a liberal, progressive schoolman, Townsend was unacceptable to the Territory's ruling sugar plutocracy and was forced to resign in 1900."<sup>128</sup> According to this interpretation, the planter class saw Dewey's experiential education at odds with their support for a strictly vocational education in public schools.

While it is certainly true that Townsend's curricular reforms were associated with progressive pedagogy (and as such were criticized by many of his opponents), the notion that Dewey's broader synthesis of education and democracy was at odds with the interests of the Big Five is misleading. As far as the Big Five planter class was concerned, a modern, centralized, and professionalized system of public schooling under Act 57 quashed any Native Hawaiian pathway to operate their own schools on the basis of their political distinction. In so doing, they ensured that schooling—progressive or otherwise—could not become a front for the assertion of Native Hawaiian sovereignty. Moreover, the Castle family's financial support for Dewey is one example that outright contradicts this claim altogether. Rather than interpret Townsend's Deweyan-inspired reforms as being at odds with the interests of the Big Five, Dewey himself was a direct benefactor of their largesse. Instead, the interpretation that it was Townsend's embrace of Dewey that led to him being pushed out of his job by the planter class stems from the writings of another Euro-American Deweyan educator in Hawai'i, Benjamin Wist.

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<sup>127</sup> Benham and Heck, *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawai'i*, 108.

<sup>128</sup> Potter, "The Evolution of Summer Sessions for Teachers in Hawai'i," 30. A better reading of Atkinson's opposition to Townsend's progressive education might conform with Frederick Hoxie's argument that late 1890s Indian educators such as Thomas Morgan and their appetite for assimilation was increasingly eschewed in the 1900s by pedagogues who were interested only in Native inclusion. This latter group favored a form of racialized vocational education what some scholars have called "racial proletarianization." See Hoxie, "Redefining Indian Education," 5-18.

## **Benjamin Wist and the Closure of the Frontier in Hawaiian Statehood, 1949-1951**

Benjamin Wist was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and had been educated at Yale before he came to Hawai'i as a teacher in 1911. He took on a series of positions at the Territorial Normal and Training School and joined the University of Hawaii in 1931. In 1940, he wrote his seminal book, *A Century of Public Education in Hawaii, 1840-1940*. In this book, Wist narrated the history of American schooling in Hawaii across three “epochs”: “First, a period under American missionary influence—when public education took on characteristics of American practice because the missionaries themselves were steeped in New England traditions . . . second, a period under expanding industrial influence which predicated the desirability of annexation—when public education was deliberately patterned after American practice as preparatory to annexation; and, third, a period under the American flag—when public education has been directed toward eventual statehood.”<sup>129</sup> Wist, perhaps more than any other singular figure, argued that Dewey had played a substantial role in bringing modern American schooling to the islands in the second and third “epochs.” Wist was explicit about Dewey’s innovations: “His contributions to Hawai'i are, of course, in keeping with his contributions to the world at large—a fact increasingly evident as the history of these Islands unfolds before us in retrospect. These are: The modern concept of how learning takes place, and the role of the school in the social order of which it is an integral part.”<sup>130</sup>

Like the Castles and Townsend before him, Wist proved to be quite well read in Dewey’s philosophy. Wist understood Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy as a call for schooling to prepare students not for an unknown future, but to grapple successfully with the

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<sup>129</sup> Benjamin Wist, *A Century of Public Education in Hawaii, 1840-1940* (Honolulu: Hawaii Educational Review, 1940), 141.

<sup>130</sup> Wist, “The Influence of John Dewey Upon Education in Hawai'i,” *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

social problems of the present. “Dewey has convinced at least some of us that schooling predicated upon an anticipated future is not only unsound, but futile. Education concerned with a known present, on the other hand, gives at least some promise of developing individual and collective intelligence to the point where the future can be faced with some degree of assurance.” Wist went on: “The public school, Dewey contends, is that institution in a democracy where the many divergent societies—political, social, economic, religious—come into juxtaposition [*sic*], each playing upon the others, each contributing something new to an enriched and more virile democratic way of life,” he explained. As a result, Wist felt that Dewey was a perfect figure for educators in Hawai’i. “Perhaps nowhere have the potentialities of public schooling in the development of a democratic social order been better illustrated than in Hawaii.” Wist proceeded to map Dewey’s philosophy directly on to the development of the settler colonial polity of Hawai’i:

Should Dewey need proof of the unpredictability of the future and the inadequacy of educational practices designed to meet the needs of an imaginary, anticipated future, such proof he would find in abundance here in Hawai’i. In the half-century since his visit in 1899, Hawaii has emerged from virtual colonial status to the status of a community eager and ready for statehood. Hawaii’s residents have learned to meet their problems of today—that unpredictable future of 1899—by means of an educational process, in school and out, concerned with an ever changing and dynamic present. The concept of the school as a dynamic institution in a democracy, concerned with the over-all development of each individual and providing for each individual the opportunity to experience the ways of democratic behavior—this concept, of all the Dewey contributions to education, has been most conspicuously exemplified in Hawaii.<sup>131</sup>

According to Wist, schools built by Euro-Americans in Hawai’i had worked so effectively to reproduce American culture and norms among Native Hawaiians that annexation by the United States had been nothing short of inevitable. Wist and many other American Hawaiian educators insisted that the Americanization at the heart of the frontier synthesis of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

education and democracy of the Northwest Ordinance had been brought about through schooling in a Deweyan mode.

While Wist did not employ the term “frontier,” he was giving voice to a similar “transit of empire” by connecting schooling in Hawai’i to the principles of the Northwest Land Ordinance. Without the promise of statehood at the end of what W. T. Harris had described as the “apprenticeship of self government” defined by the Northwest Land Ordinance, Hawai’i’s best chance for statehood seemed to rest on the shoulders of its educators. Advocates for statehood argued that, unlike unincorporated territories like the Philippines or Puerto Rico, the people of Hawaiian territory had become sufficiently Americanized, if not democratized, to be admitted as a state. According to Wist, statehood would overturn the federal jurisdiction in territorial schools and bring Hawai’i’s schools closer to all Hawaiian people. “In a state the people, through provisions established by themselves, select their own educational leaders by appointment or election. In a territory such leadership is subject to the provisions of an organic act of Congress,” Wist explained. Therefore, “public education in Hawaii is not a legal responsibility of its citizens.”<sup>132</sup> Statehood and the local control of schools it enabled would therefore consummate democracy in Hawai’i.

As the territory became increasingly important to U.S. mainland interests after World War II, and Hawai’i’s multiculturalism was increasingly portrayed as a national security asset during the Cold War, Dewey’s legacy there came to fruition. Wist used Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy and its cultural multiculturalism to undermine the objection to statehood advanced by the racial segregationists in the U.S. Senate. Wist used Dewey to play directly into the paradox of statehood as described by Miller-Davenport: Hawai’i was both like

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<sup>132</sup> Wist, *A Century of Public Education in Hawaii*, 141-42.



America and also different, simultaneously. “Here one finds much of the tolerance and the cooperative effort with which democracy is so closely identified. Yes, Hawaii is a democratic community; Hawaii is an American community—perhaps more American, more democratic in some respects than are many communities of continental United States. But Hawaii, too, is different—different because it is the sum-total of contributions from the East and the West.” Wist credited Dewey’s influence on Hawaiian education ultimately as “the recognition in educational practice of the *sine qua non* of a democratic society: respect for the individual.”<sup>133</sup>

By the 1950s, Wist felt that the democratic culture embodied in the racial harmony wrought by schools had become a central exhibit in the case for Hawaiian statehood thanks in no small part to Dewey. Wist was determined to finish what the Castle family had started in the 1890s: make John Dewey synonymous with Hawaiian education. “Would that John Dewey could be with us in person tonight, to share with us our pride in the emergence of this democratic, American, but still different Hawai’i—to accept personally our humble thanks for his contribution, through public education, to the attainment of this result!” Wist concluded triumphantly.<sup>134</sup> On the heels of Wist’s speech, Dewey received a telegram from “Students and Friends in Hawai’i” who wrote to “send [a] cordial aloha and their gratitude for the help they have found in your lucid statements.”<sup>135</sup>

When Dewey stepped foot once again in Hawai’i two years later, it was no surprise that he was greeted by a gaggle of appreciative members of the University of Hawai’i, eager to greet the famous philosopher of education, by now ninety years of age. Dewey made the trip with his second wife, Roberta, and their two adopted children, Adrienne and John. The intermittent fifty

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<sup>133</sup> Wist, “The Influence of John Dewey Upon Education in Hawai’i,” *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> “Students and Friends in Hawai’i” to John Dewey, *ca.* October 14, 1949, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

years since Dewey had first stepped foot on the islands had not dimmed his own interest in Hawaiian schools. During the Deweys' stay at the Halekulani Hotel, the children went swimming while Dewey revised a new edition of *Experience and Education*. Meanwhile, Roberta saw to Adrienne and John's enrollment in a school in Punahou, and later John made a visit to the Hanahauoli School. It was then that he shared dinner with Robert Clopton and his daughter. And while there is little extant evidence, Dewey is also said to have made a passing visit to the Henry and Dorothy Castle Memorial Kindergarten, which had since moved from King Street when it was acquired by the University of Hawai'i's College of Education.<sup>136</sup> As late as 1951, the kindergarten was evidently still a reminder of the circuit that the Castles had built for Dewey's family and his philosophy that stretched from the Great Lakes to Hawai'i.

When he traveled to Hawai'i in 1899, Dewey had attempted to help the Castle family recruit Flora J. Cooke as the principal teacher of their new Henry and Dorothy Memorial Kindergarten. Cooke ultimately decided not to take the job. "We are very sorry indeed that you can't do it—more sorry indeed than I can express. But of course we don't question your decision," Dewey wrote to her back in Traverse City, Michigan. "On one account, I am sorry on your behalf that you had to decide as you did—I feel sure the climate & life in Hawaii would have done you good physically."<sup>137</sup>

In time, the idea that Hawai'i's tropical climate would improve mainlanders' health proved to be more compelling to Dewey than it ever had to Cooke. In fact, his amenability to the climate is what brought him back to Honolulu in 1951. Though he was nominally there to attend the first East-West Philosophers' Conference to be held in April (where he would be an honored guest

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<sup>136</sup> McEwan, "John Dewey's Visits to Hawai'i," 20.

<sup>137</sup> While she declined to take the job, Flora did accompany the Deweys to Hawai'i in 1899 to collaborate with Townsend's summer institute, give lectures to the university extension program there, and tour the islands. John Dewey to Flora J. Cooke, September 20, 1898, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 1.

reflecting on his travels in Japan and China in the 1920s), Dewey hoped that the visit would be a recuperative venture. By the dawn of the 1950s, he was suffering from respiratory problems, and he and Roberta hoped that the Hawaiian “climate and life” would prove more agreeable to his own health. Dewey was just one of many Euro-Americans by the 1950s who increasingly regarded Hawai’i’s “climate and life” as amenable to Americans, no matter their health. After World War II, Hawai’i was increasingly sold to mainlanders by travel agents, hoteliers, musicians, artists, and other hospitality industries as an exotic yet familiar getaway, often through Native Hawaiian lifeways like hula, pineapples, and leis.<sup>138</sup> In a letter from Halekulani, Dewey signed off that “the weather justifies the advertising slogan—Paradise of the Pacific.”<sup>139</sup>

Just as the climate seemed to be amenable to mainlanders, so too was Hawai’i’s political culture depicted as increasingly compatible for admission to the United States as a state. As Sarah Miller-Davenport argues in her book *Gateway State*, a longstanding cultural interest in the island’s edenic climate and exoticized peoples soon morphed into a cultural and political project that emphasized both Hawaiian difference and similarity with the United States, which accelerated calls for Hawaiian statehood.<sup>140</sup> As Miller-Davenport argues, while Hawaiian statehood was briefly entertained after annexation in 1899, such incorporation would not have benefited the corporations like Castle & Cooke, as it would have made their operations subject to the labor laws of the United States. It was not until the onset of the Cold War that statehood for

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<sup>138</sup> See Rona Halualani, *In the Name of Hawaiians: Native Identities and Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 133-94; Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits Through the US Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 59-102; Sarah Miller-Davenport, *The Gateway State*, 116-81.

<sup>139</sup> Incidentally, it was in this letter that Dewey also offered an important corrective about his seminal work *Nature and Experience*. “I’ve tried to do some writing the last 2 weeks for a new edition for the Beacon Press of Experience & Nature changing the title as well as subjectmatter from Nature & Exp—to Nature & Culture,” he emphasized. “I was dumb not to have seen the need for such a shift when the old text was written. I was still hopeful that the word Experience could be redeemed by returned to its idiomatic usages—which was a piece of historic folly.” John Dewey to Arthur Bentley, January 18, 1951, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

<sup>140</sup> For broader trends in Native Hawaiian identity, nationalism, and resistance to incorporation with the United States during this period, see Noenoe K. Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

Hawaiian territory became increasingly appealing to Euro-Americans on the island and the mainland alike. With its supposed interracial harmony, Hawai'i as a state would serve as a rejection of Soviet-style imperialism and the consummation of democracy.<sup>141</sup> By the 1950s, the Euro-American push for Hawaiian statehood was gathering momentum.

In the end, it is perhaps fitting that during this trip, Hawai'i's American educators tried to make Dewey literally one of their own by encouraging him to settle on Oahu. During the weeks they spent in Honolulu, John and Roberta had attempted to find a property they might purchase in a place more amenable to John's health. Robert Clopton remarked that Dewey "came within an ace of buying a home on the slopes of Diamond Head." Clopton was not the only Euro-American Hawaiian who wanted to claim Dewey for the islands. "I am sure you know how sad I have been over the years that we were not able to find accommodations which would be suitable for you and Professor Dewey, so that you could stay in Hawaii," Charles A. Moore wrote to Roberta in 1965. Moore, a philosopher at the University of Hawai'i, was himself a Great Lakes transplant to Honolulu, having been born in Chicago in 1901. "I had a feeling that you would both have been very happy here and much more comfortable than in many places in America," he wrote.<sup>142</sup> Certainly, Moore and his cohort of Euro-American educators had done their best to make Dewey into a *haole*. Still, Hawai'i's climate did not alleviate Dewey's respiratory problems, and he left for the mainland after several months. While they were ultimately unable to claim John Dewey the man, the same cannot be said for their claim to his philosophy. "No word in any tongue conveys more nearly the true spirit of democracy than does the Hawaiian

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<sup>141</sup> However, not everyone on the mainland was enthusiastic about Hawaiian statehood. Many southern segregationists in Congress were skeptical that Hawai'i's supposedly propaganda advantages would offset a state with a majority of non-White voters. See Sarah Miller-Davenport, *The Gateway State*, 50-78.

<sup>142</sup> Charles A. Moore to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, February 10, 1965, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 4.

word, ‘aloha’; for its meaning is love,” Wist had declared on Dewey’s ninetieth birthday. “No other word can more fittingly express our feeling of indebtedness, our sincere appreciation of a significant contribution to Hawai’i, to America, and to the world at large. We salute you, John Dewey.... We extend our heartfelt ‘aloha.’”<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

For the better part of his career, John Dewey’s philosophy found great purchase among *haole* educators of Native people in Hawai’i. In this chapter, I have sought to plumb Dewey’s great appeal to these American educators in order to understand what was at stake for Native Hawaiian people. I have found that Dewey’s ideas had three principal effects when applied to a Hawaiian context. First, nineteenth-century mission schooling’s assimilatory logic got a twentieth-century facelift in Dewey’s image. Second, Native Hawaiian incorporation in the settler colonial polity as a racialized minority through public schooling—hailed as a racial harmonization, pluralism, and cosmopolitanism—found intellectual resources in Dewey’s philosophy. By invoking Dewey, *haole* pedagogues argued that Hawai’i had implemented a distinctly American synthesis of democracy and education. Third and finally, Hawai’i’s readiness for statehood was evidenced by non-Native educators and pro-statehood advocates who claimed to have established an American pattern of schooling in part by their realization of Dewey’s philosophy. The net effect of all these innovations was less self-determination in education for Native Hawaiians.

The three most significant parties who sought to apply Dewey’s ideas to Native Hawaiians were Mary Castle and her children Harriet, Helen, and Henry; Henry S. Townsend; and Benjamin O. Wist. The Castle family was not only responsible for Dewey’s 1899 visit to the

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<sup>143</sup> Wist, “The Influence of John Dewey Upon Education in Hawai’i,” *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 3.

islands, but also proved pivotal in shaping Dewey's impressions of Indigenous Hawai'i. To the Castles, Dewey's philosophy offered an injection of the energies of the new education to garnish their family's long history in missionary schooling of Native Hawaiians, a project that led them to financially support Dewey's Laboratory School in Chicago. The Henry and Dorothy Memorial Free Kindergarten that they consulted with Dewey to create resembled the settlement house synthesis of education and democracy, which signified little more than a dead-end of Native Hawaiian self-determination in education.

To the Castle children in particular, Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy was the next logical evolution in their own family's legacy in Hawaiian education. For example, in "The School as Social Centre" (written just two years after his trip to Hawaii in 1899), Dewey argued that schools could—and should—teach morals, but not in a sectarian way. Dewey insisted that as ethics had emerged from human history as a form of associated life, an education in such matters was an appropriate function of schooling. This appealed to the Castles, who were eager to merge the ends of missionary uplift with the means offered by the pedagogy of the "new education." Even Alfred L. Castle concedes that his ancestor Mary Castle "shared [a] common understanding that the missionaries and their descendants were destined to rule Hawai'i politically and guide its educational and cultural institutions indefinitely."<sup>144</sup> As Castle suggests, Hawai'i was nothing less than an archipelagic Laboratory School: "For Mead, Castle, and Dewey, Hawai'i itself would be the ultimate lab school for educational change in a multiracial, multicultural environment."<sup>145</sup> In effect, Dewey's philosophy offered the Castles a pedagogical update to an earlier conception of mission schools and their core function of assimilating Native Hawaiians.

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<sup>144</sup> Castle, *A Century of Philanthropy*, 45.

<sup>145</sup> Castle, "Introduction," in *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, x.

Meanwhile, Henry S. Townsend turned to Dewey to solve another problem, one made in part by the Castle family themselves. A massive influx of non-White immigrants to labor in the island's plantations had seemed to exacerbate Hawai'i's "race problem" originally represented by Native Hawaiians. Townsend saw in Dewey's synthesis of education and democracy a means to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, a system of English-only public schools made in the image of Dewey's social centers afforded a way to impose racial management on Hawai'i's diverse non-White people. On the other hand, Townsend made public schooling support the settler colonial polity of the territory by reducing the number of Native Hawaiian teachers and language instruction in common schools. Such schools worked to erase Native Hawaiian history, culture, and sovereignty by reducing the *Kānaka Maoli* to the status of an ethnic group within their own homeland—all with the patina of democracy derived in large part from Dewey. When Native Hawaiians attended schools such as the Henry and Dorothy Castle Memorial Free Kindergarten, or the Kamehameha School, or Honolulu High School, they were regarded by educators as simply another race among Hawai'i's non-White population, rather than as political inheritors of a sovereign kingdom that could be the basis for claims to greater self-determination in schooling.

Finally, Benjamin O. Wist explicitly enrolled Dewey in support of the campaign for statehood. Wist believed Dewey, more than any other pedagogue, had outlined a kind of preparation for democratic life that included the changing conditions of the future shape of associated living. In Hawai'i, this meant preparing students for the settler colonial state, which had grown from a primitive monarchy to an enlightened republic and to an incorporated territory—and which he felt should now culminate in U.S. statehood. For Wist, statehood was portrayed as the ultimate confirmation of Hawaiian democracy, and John Dewey had been its

foremost pedagogue. Though the campaign for Hawai'i statehood did not have the benefit of the Northwest Ordinance, Wist felt it had one better: schools in the image of John Dewey. What all three *haole* parties saw was the applicability of Dewey's philosophy to their part in the respective project to make Hawai'i compatible with the United States by emphasizing a shared democratic culture.

Jodi Byrd has shown how the associations of "Indianness" as ascribed by Euro-Americans to North America's Indigenous people travelled from places like the Great Lakes to Native Hawaiians. But the transit of empire was not only a one-way cultural project, and the domain of education was no exception. A growing host of scholars have offered the language of a circuit to describe the flow of ideas, educators, and institutions across the Pacific and the mainland which paralleled these cultural flows. In particular, this scholarship has focused on figures like Samuel Chapman Armstrong.<sup>146</sup> When Dewey helped the Castle family with their kindergarten, endorsed Townsend's summer schools, and was elevated by the likes of Wist, he became implicated in the circuit of settler colonialism through schooling that stretched from the Great Lakes to Hawai'i as well. In translating ideas forged in Michigan, Dewey's philosophy served as a conduit for Byrd's transit of "Indianness" from the mainland to the islands.

And yet, Dewey was not so much extending the frontier discourse from the Great Lakes as he was bringing it full circle. What had left the islands in Samuel Chapman Armstrong in the form of nineteenth-century missionary uplift came back to the islands as modern, progressive, and experimental through John Dewey. If Samuel Chapman Armstrong had exported from Hawai'i the industrial boarding school to the U.S. mainland and thus opened a circuit of empire,

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<sup>146</sup> Donal Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877-1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Pasfield, "The Head, the Heart, and the Hands"; and Kalani Beyer, "Comparing Native Hawaiian Education with Native American and African American Education During the Nineteenth Century," *American Educational History Journal* 41, no. 1 (2014): 59-75.



then the Castles, Townsend, and Wist hoped that bringing John Dewey and his new education to the islands would help to close it.

I argue Dewey ought to be included in Hawaiian education history, but not as Benjamin Wist imagined. At best, progressive education in the mold of Dewey can be added as a single thread to an ever-thickening cable that ties together Indigenous histories of anti-democratic schooling in the mainland United States and the Hawaiian islands. At worst, Dewey should be counted in the ranks of what Carl Beyer calls “the White Architects of Hawaiian education” who helped to make racialized schooling a feature of Native Hawaiian education.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, whereas few have suggested that Armstrong’s approach might be applicable for an anti-colonial praxis, the same cannot be said of commentators about Dewey.

The nature of Dewey’s legacy in Hawai’i hangs on the balance of this issue and its impact on Native Hawaiian people. For many, Dewey’s prestige remains an asset to Hawai’i’s history, not a liability. Without interrogating how their pedagogy paralleled the settler colonial transformation of Hawai’i, Alfred L. Castle concluded in 2012 that “Dewey, Mead and Castle ... wanted schools to inculcate habits that would enable individuals to control their surroundings rather than merely adapt to them.”<sup>148</sup> As we have seen, this account of experimental intelligence was a product of the frontier discourse which foiled and backgrounded Native people. Dewey’s application to a Hawaiian context should be less of an occasion for celebration than an invitation for more careful study.

In this light, Dewey became a part of the expression of what Paul Kramer has called schooling’s “civilizing power” in Hawai’i. Whereas the absolute power of the U.S. empire and settler colonialism was wielded against Indigenous people in the shape of a closed fist, civilizing

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<sup>147</sup> Beyer, “The White Architects of Hawaiian Education,” 1.

<sup>148</sup> Castle, “Introduction,” in *The Collected Letters of Henry Castle*, xiv.

power appeared like an outstretched hand. W. T. Harris had said as much in his 1899 speech to the NEA. Rather than the outright violent elimination of Native Hawaiian people, Harris offered schooling as a more humane—and more democratic—alternative. “If we cannot come in contact with lower races without exterminating them we must still be far down in the scale of civilization,” Harris told his audience at the NEA.<sup>149</sup> Only through schooling could the United States hope to realize democracy not only for Native Hawaiians, but for itself. While that civilized power was cloaked in the rhetoric of democracy, when it was embodied through schooling, it proved to be no less coercive than absolute power.

In failing to take heed of Indigenous sovereignty in matters of schooling, Dewey’s multiculturalism reduced Indigenous people to the status of a racial or ethnic group. This synthesis of education and democracy in Hawai’i threatened to fray the braid that connected Native Hawaiians’ cultural distinction with their political autonomy. The result was that Dewey’s philosophy played a part in the denial of self-determination in education to several generations of Native Hawaiians. This legacy contributed to the ongoing—but never uncontested—claim that Hawai’i was at the bleeding edge of the U.S. frontier synthesis of education and democracy.

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<sup>149</sup> “Colonial Expansion,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1899, 2.

## CONCLUSION:

### Relevance

I was virtually paging through John Dewey's correspondence one day when I came across a letter by Edward Gottlieb. Gottlieb was a Polish American scholar who studied at the Teacher's College, eventually earned his JD, and went on to a career as a public school teacher, principal, and professor. In August of 1969, Gottlieb was struck by an illustration published by the Center for the Study of Urban Education and their journal, *Center Forum*. He recommended it to Dewey's widow, Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey: "Please note the drawing of Eleanor Magid on the cover page of *The Center Forum*," he wrote, enclosing the cover page with the illustration in question.<sup>1</sup> Magid's illustration depicted two Indian people, one of whom was bearing a sign that read "JOHN DEWEY WHERE ARE YOU NOW THAT WE NEED TO BE RELEVANT?"

As it turns out, Magid was something of a Deweyan devotee herself. Magid was born in Tiffin, Ohio, in the early 1930s. Her father was a ceramics engineer who appreciated the technical skill of drafting, and her mother encouraged her to use her talent for sketching to spend time outdoors. Magid recalled her mother driving her across the Ohio countryside in order to find vistas from which she could practice sketching the landscape. But when she later expressed a desire to attend Black Mountain College to pursue a career in art, her parents feared that such an education would not lead her to a secure job. She acceded to their concerns and enrolled at Smith

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<sup>1</sup> Edward P. Gottlieb to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, August 15, 1969, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 4.

"Edward P. Gottlieb Papers, 1929-2000," Swarthmore College Peace Collection, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/DG151-175/DG172EdwardGottlieb.html>.

College in 1951, but found it disappointingly like a finishing school. Describing Smith as “under-stimulating,” Magid ventured to New York shortly thereafter.<sup>2</sup>

In New York, Magid found the fine art scene there no more inspiring than Smith. “It was the era of abstract expression and action painting,” Magid told me, “which interested me but was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to look at the world and record it,” she insisted. For Magid, sketching was a way of being in the world: “Each medium has its own particular qualities to open up the mind,” she told me. “With drawing, it slows you down. Practically nothing else makes you stop and look so long. Long, slow, and careful looking. Drawing and the sciences grew up together.” This attitude was in large part due to her own reading of Dewey’s 1934 *Art and Experience*, which she found to be an invigorating argument for the compatibility of art and science. This Deweyan sensibility shaped her career in New York. Magid came to believe that New York’s fine art community was too detached from the world of the everyday—not only in subject matter, but in the political utility of the art they produced. “I always felt like there was a tension between what artists did and what people who were trying to make the world better,” she concluded.

More interested in praxis than profit, Magid became involved in printmaking and eventually moved to the Lower East Side and opened a print shop. Over the course of her long career, Magid worked with renowned printmaker Robert Blackburn and was inspired by the democratic ethos of his workshop. In 1968, she was hired to teach art at CUNY Queens College in the Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) program, which was aimed at promoting art for primarily Black, Latinx, nontraditional, and first-generation college students. She told me with pride that when she began teaching, she ignored the previous instructor’s

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<sup>2</sup> Eleanor Magid, phone interview by author, November 18, 2018.

syllabus and began her class by asking the students what they wanted to learn. Their priority was to end boring slide lectures regarding the canon of European art; she was happy to oblige. In lieu of this staid pedagogy and overly determined by Euro-centric content, Magid decided to take the SEEK students out into the city, where she made a point to find local artists who were making art out of their activism. To accomplish that, she did not have to travel far.

That same year, the teachers of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) of New York City went on strike. The 1968 strike pitted the mostly White members of the teachers' union against the mostly Black leaders of a new school district, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district of Brooklyn. This district had been created just one year earlier by New York's Board of Education as an experiment in something they called "community control." For years, the predominantly Black residents of the neighborhood had called for greater local control over the area's public schools. To many Black residents of Brooklyn, the state board of education and its officials (mostly White bureaucrats) made decisions that were out of touch with the priorities of the Black parents who made up the community around the school. To counter this top-down control, the African-American Teachers Association (ATA) called for the formation a new school district that would have greater autonomy from the state in matters of personnel, curriculum, and budgetary discretion. Creating such a school district was seen as a means to empower the community to exercise local control over the education of their children. The state agreed to try it. In this fashion, the core of the coming conflict was framed as a contest over the principle of local control of schools.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Daniel Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* (New York: P. Lang, 2004); Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Charles S. Isaacs, *Inside Ocean Hill-Brownsville: A Teacher's Education, 1968-1969* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014); Dana

The furor over local control in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district has since been remembered as a proxy conflict over the efforts of racism and segregation to shape public schooling. Earlier in the 1960s, the middle-class, politically moderate, and mostly White members of the UFT had pushed out the Teacher's Union, a group with more leftist and collectivist convictions. At the same time, the ATA splintered off from the UFT in 1964 to pursue the collective empowerment of Black parents and teachers in opposition to the individualist ethos of UTF. As a result, the brewing conflict between the state and Black Ocean Hill-Brownsville district community paralleled the mostly White UTF and the Black membership of the ATA. Reflecting much of the dynamics of racial tension felt across the country as a result of the Civil Rights movement and its backlash, Brooklyn entered 1968 with schools primed like tinderboxes.

This powder keg was touched off in May, when the newly created Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, seeking to assert its newly devolved powers over personnel and curriculum, dismissed a score of teachers and administrators from Junior High School 271. UTF leader Albert Shanker condemned the Ocean-Hill Brownsville district, arguing that the firings were a violation of teachers' union contracts. With explicit backing from the union, the fired teachers and administrators attempted to return to their jobs at JHS 271. Chaos ensued. Mostly Black parents, teachers, and community members surrounded JHS 271, forming a human wall around the school to prevent the fired teachers from entering the building. Three hundred municipal police officers were dispatched to break the blockade. When the fired teachers finally managed to get inside the building, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district cancelled the school day. In

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Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015), 133-63.

response, a contingent of UTF teachers began to walk off the job elsewhere across the city. A major crisis was brewing.

New York Mayor John Lindsay tried to acknowledge that the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district had the right to shape curriculum and make personnel choices while simultaneously backing the UTF. “The Ocean Hill-Brownsville demonstration project was undertaken ... as an experiment in local participation,” he reiterated in a press release. Lindsay denounced the firings, however, concluding that “under no circumstances will we achieve anything worthwhile through anarchy and lawlessness.”<sup>4</sup> Few in the predominantly Black neighborhood appreciated Lindsey’s description of their assertion of the principle of local control of schools as “anarchy and lawlessness.” The conflict simmered over the summer, but erupted into a city-wide crisis the following autumn when the UTF approved a work stoppage by a vote of 12,021 to 1,716. For thirty-six days, New York’s schools were closed due to the absence of the UTF’s 58,000 teachers. They walked off the job as a reproach to Ocean Hill-Brownsville district’s local control.

The teachers’ strike offered an occasion to put Magid’s Deweyan commitments into practice. Magid soon joined protests of Albert Shanker, whom she and her allies regarded as acting against the will of the parents whose children were most immediately affected by the dispute over the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. The visual drama of the protests proved irresistible for Magid’s artistic eye. “At all these community meetings that we were going to, I was drawing. I started out with community drawings from around here, mothers and children sitting around trying to figure out what we could do about the strike,” she said. It was in these

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<sup>4</sup> “Statement by the Mayor,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1968, 44.

circumstances that she sketched the illustration featuring Indigenous people that Gottlieb had sent to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey the following year.<sup>5</sup>

Magid's drawing depicted two protestors in the act of demonstrating. One was a mustachioed man with a broad hat clad in a poncho, and the second was a school-aged girl in buckskin, moccasins, and braids, sporting a feather in a headband. The two—respectively coded as Indigenous people from the Southwest and the Great Plains—are wearing sandwich boards, as if engaged in the act of picketing a school, city hall, or the state board of education. Their signs speak volumes. The girl in buckskin bears a sign imploring “AMERICANIZE AMERICA,” while her comrade sports a sign that is as bold as it is specific: “JOHN DEWEY WHERE ARE YOU NOW THAT WE NEED TO BE RELEVANT?” The rhetorical nature of the question seems to provide its own answer—wherever Dewey was, it was not the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district. Magid's illustration seemed prescient. Eager to end the crippling strike, the state of New York walked away from its experiment at Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. To appease the UTF, the state commissioner of education revoked the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district's autonomous powers and integrated them back under the state board of education. Three principals who had led Ocean Hill-Brownsville district schools were relocated to other schools, and the dismissed teachers were reinstated by the state. A system of trusteeship then replaced the district's governing board. The experiment in local control was over.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Eleanor's neighbor was the editor of the Center for Urban Education's newsletter. He was familiar with Eleanor's work, and he asked her if he could use some of her illustrations in *The Center Forum* a year later. Gottlieb had subsequently clipped the image and sent it to Robert Lowitz Grant Dewey.

<sup>6</sup> Magid's drawing may have been a pointed reclamation of Dewey for the predominantly Black community of Brooklyn from Bayard Rustin. As Daniel Perlstein argues, Rustin had been the member of the civil rights movement with the highest national profile to side with the UTF during the strike. Just a month before the controversy in May which touched off the strike, Rustin had received the UTF's John Dewey Award in recognition of his “incalculable contributions to progressive social activism.” Broadly, Rustin's platform was to ally the civil rights movements of Black people with the labor movement. Rustin was “convinced that black educational progress depended on wider social change and that such change depended on the ability of blacks to ally themselves with progressives among the





Figure C.1. Eleanor Magid's 1968 illustration, "The Open School: A Way of Thinking About Children, Learning, Knowledge," *Center Forum* 3, no. 7 (July 1969), 1-2.

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white majority," Perlstein notes. "His appeal to teacher-unionists to work for social justice thus paralleled his conviction that black school activists needed to maintain ties to the labor movement." This led Rustin to support the UTF, much to the chagrin of many in Brooklyn. In this fashion, Magid's illustration of Indigenous people calling for Dewey may have been a means to reclaim the educator for the cause of community control as it was contested at the schools in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice*, 81-85.

When I asked Magid how she came to make this sketch, her memory was indeterminate. “We had a lot of marches and things around here. It may have been a drawing from marches, but I cannot remember whether that drawing was from direct observation or from finding a photograph,” she told me. While she was confident the scene had come from the teachers’ strike in the late summer of 1968, she could not recall the provenance of the two Indigenous figures she had depicted. “The clothing that she’s wearing may have been from a demonstration,” Magid told me, pointing at the woman in buckskin. Of course, it was entirely feasible that two Indigenous people were involved in the protest. And if Magid’s observational method held true, it seemed to me to be quite likely that her sketch depicted an actual scene from the strike. Maybe there really was an Indigenous man in 1968 Brooklyn who marched to a protest wearing a sandwich board demanding John Dewey be applied to his circumstances. I admit, while I continue to be floored by this possibility, I cannot help but wonder: What course has our understanding of Dewey taken such that we have arrived at a place where his philosophy is regarded as particularly relevant to Indigenous people’s struggle for self-determination in education?

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In this dissertation, we have traveled an Indigenous trace through the life and career of the United States’ foremost philosopher of education and democracy, John Dewey. It has taken us to familiar places in the narration of Dewey’s career with a fresh perspective and visited some new places altogether. We began our journey in Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was in his decade in Michigan that Dewey became immersed in the frontier discourse. We tracked Dewey across the Great Lakes, from Ann Arbor to Chicago, Illinois. In the decades in between, places like Taos, New Mexico, become unexpected but important vantage points for considering Dewey’s

relationship to Indigenous people. Once in New York, we then went to Muncie, Indiana, to follow how Dewey understood this former frontier town as the bleeding edge of the crisis of democracy and trekked to a summer camp in Rifton to find its supposed amelioration. Following the frontier discourse, we finally made our way to Hawai'i, where Dewey's ideas came to define an era of education for Native Hawaiian children. In Hawai'i, his philosophy offered a bridge between the mainland and the frontier, a synthesis of education and democracy that smoothed over imperialism and settler colonialism, of conquest and incorporation.

Along the way, we have populated Dewey's biography with a new cast of characters who shaped the pragmatist's intellectual development. I have argued that perhaps more than any other individual, it was Frederick Riggs who shaped Dewey's understanding of U.S. history through the dyad of Indians and pioneers. Riggs was a personification of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis; he made pioneering a matter of personal experience. At the same time, W. T. Harris, Thomas J. Morgan, Henry S. Townsend, and Estelle Reel represent educators who shaped Indigenous schooling who not only knew Dewey and his philosophy, but cited him in their schemes for the schooling of Indigenous people. During the 1930s, John Collier, W. Carson Ryan, Moisés Sáenz, Willard Beatty, and Pedro T. Orata formed a Deweyan brain trust to chart the course of the Indian New Deal. And historians like Benjamin O. Wist interpreted Dewey at the dawn of the 1950s as the preeminent voice for cultural pluralism through schooling that benefit Hawai'i and U.S. liberalism writ large.

Had Dewey been less restricted by the frontier discourse, Andrew J. Blackbird, Charles A. Eastman, Henry Roe Cloud, Benjamin Reifel, and Andrew Wilcox might have joined his cadre of would-be interlocutors. Immersed in the frontier discourse, Dewey failed to register that these Indigenous historians, activists, educators, warriors, and philosophers endeavored tirelessly

under the apparatus of their own philosophies of experience to call for self-determination in education. What conversations they might have had with Dewey will forever remain speculation. In the meantime, it behooves scholars interested in Dewey's philosophy of education to pay closer attention to these Indigenous thinkers who not only considered schooling's relationship to democracy, but lived it. It seems to me that the pragmatic tradition needs to make room for these Indigenous experimentalists in education.

Finally, we have made stops at a number of schools and institutions, some familiar to Dewey scholars and some brand new. In the Great Lakes, we treated the University of Michigan as a product of settler colonialism; the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School (MPIIS) as the most mendacious form of imposed schooling on Indigenous people right at Dewey's doorstep; and the Laboratory School in Chicago as an experiment in Re-playing Indian. Some places, such as Hull House, are familiar to Dewey scholars; others, such as the Fort Dearborn Massacre "Memorial," are less so. In New York, we scrutinized the People's Institute as an important node in a settler colonial articulation of the synthesis of education and democracy; John Collier's Training School for Community Workers, where he cut his teeth on Dewey's pragmatism; and a summer camp sponsored by the Young Pioneers of America in Rifton, New York. We spent less time in the halls of Columbia University, and more at the Cooper Union Hall of the People's Institute of New York, where Dewey crafted a theory of cultural pluralism for immigrants that excluded Indigenous cultural autonomy. Finally, we sojourned to jurisdictional oddities beyond those established in the Great Lakes by the Northwest Ordinance, taking a brief tour through Mexico's rural schools for Indigenous people; examined Dewey's philosophy on the Pine Ridge reservation at the Little Wound Day School; and stopped in Hawai'i to consider Dewey's visits to the Henry and Dorothy Castle Memorial Kindergarten and the Kamehameha School on the

path to statehood. At each turn, we have found the profound consequences of Dewey's—and other Euro-American philosophers'—thinking in the grip of the frontier discourse.

Centering Indigenous people in Dewey's life and thought has necessitated a different approach to many current scholarly treatments of his career. For example, instead of privileging Dewey's mature works written at Columbia in New York, we followed an Indigenous trace toward Dewey's earlier works that he wrote while at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It was there that Dewey's impression of Indian people was first formed and the pattern by which he invoked them was established. Similarly, reading Dewey through Indigenous studies supplements existing attention to settlement houses where Dewey was active—such as Hull House in Chicago or the People's Institute in New York—with the institutions that dominated the education of hundreds of thousands of Native youth, the off-reservation Indian industrial boarding schools such as the Morris school in Minnesota or the MPIIS in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Instead of plumbing Dewey's intellectual relationships with various Euro-American philosophers such as Charles Pierce, William James, Jane Addams, Horace Kallen, or Walter Lippmann, following an Indigenous trace points us toward various potential Indigenous interlocutors invested in interrogating the relationship between democracy and education, such as Andrew J. Blackbird, Charles A. Eastman, Henry Roe Cloud, and Benjamin Reifel.

Consequently, we have employed different theoretical contexts to make sense of Dewey's work. Analytics for reading Dewey's work such as race, liberalism, and pluralism give way to Native sovereignty, settler colonialism, and survivance. Dewey's vision for schools' democratic communities must be paired with the lack of self-determination in federal schooling “for” Indians. Finally, the viability of the pragmatist's vision for a democratic culture of associated living must be evaluated in light of the fact that its consummation rested upon incorporating

Native communities into the polity United States. As some scholars have suggested, Dewey's critical democracy has the theoretical capacity for addressing Native difference not as a matter of race but as a distinct political class. This suggests that anti-colonial potential might be drawn from his experimentalism. Any consideration of Dewey's viability for anti-colonial praxis originating from the standpoint of Indigenous studies, however, ought to insist on beginning such an inquiry with his silence on the matter of imposed schooling during his own lifetime. For this reason, just as much as I am interested in answering the question "What did Dewey and his philosophy have to say about American Indian people?" I conclude that what is more consequential is what he did not say.

The most significant consequence of Dewey's immersion in the frontier discourse is that the vocabulary of savagery, the ideology of the vanishing Indian, and the frontier thesis made Indians into an instrument by which Dewey could define his experimentalism. Of course, the frontier discourse does not preclude other racialized non-White peoples from being read into Dewey's category of "savages." Nevertheless, when Dewey invoked "savages" in conjunction with his immersion in the frontier discourse, it is impossible to ignore that he and his American readers would have read "Indian" into that category. I have analyzed many of the hundreds of occasions in which Dewey used the term "savage" or referred to the state of "savagery" with American Indian people in mind. When read in such a fashion, Indians appear across Dewey's many writings on epistemology, ethics, history, and education. In fact, supplementing racial recapitulation for the frontier discourse to explain how Dewey invoked Indigenous people does not simply make Dewey's philosophy more consistent (simultaneously racialized but also historicized), it also opens up a new possibility that Indians were an instrumental part of Dewey's philosophy. Through a pattern that I called backgrounding and foiling, Dewey reduced

Indigenous people to mere Instrumental Indians. Throughout his philosophy, Dewey rarely treated Indigenous people as a constituency that might benefit from his philosophy, but rather only as evidence for it.

### **The Legacy of the Frontier Discourse on Pragmatism**

Scott Pratt has suggested that Dewey's philosophy represents an "indigenous attitude" that was a legacy of the Native influence on early pragmatism in contradistinction to a "colonial attitude" of European philosophy. In this sense, the word "indigenous" is doing double duty. On the one hand, pragmatism is often described as a distinctly American philosophy. To describe it as indigenous is then to imagine it as a philosophy autochthonous to North America. On the other hand, a philosophical attitude that is deemed indigenous to North America is also meant to attribute its central commitments to the cultural exchange of Indigenous and Euro-Americans. In fact, it was Robert Clopton, the educator who opened chapter nine, who was the first to call Dewey's method "indigenous." Clopton wrote: "In a peculiar sense, Dewey was the instrument of the coming of age, the reaching of fruition, of a tradition that might be said to be indigenous in American life. He was distinctly in and of the American tradition."<sup>7</sup>

To the contrary, Deloria and Wildcat suggest an "indigenous attitude" that goes beyond this appellation of pragmatism: "American Indians have a long history of rejecting abstract theologies and metaphysical systems in place of experiential system properly called indigenous—indigenous in the sense that people historically and culturally connected to places can and do draw on power located in those places."<sup>8</sup> Understood in such a way, Dewey's "indigenous attitude" did not facilitate anti-colonial outcomes in his own lifetime because it fell

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Clopton, "John Dewey: An Appreciation," enclosed in Robert Clopton to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, May 24, 1962, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Deloria Jr. and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 31.

well short of the “indigenous attitude” expressed by actual contemporary Native people. The difference was, ironically, a matter of acute experience. “The manifestation of European Enlightenment idealism in the institutions of Western Europe had a very dark side, one that Nietzsche, Dewey, Marx, and the Frankfurt School of critical theorists all saw in one respect or another, but that indigenous peoples all over the world *experienced* [my emphasis],” notes Wildcat.<sup>9</sup> This “dark side” was not a matter of philosophical critique, but was rather experienced by Indigenous children through the imposition of anti-democratic schooling in their lives and communities. In matters of education and democracy during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, it is clear that an “indigenous attitude” remained distinct from an “Indigenous attitude.”

In my estimation, this makes Dewey’s philosophy of education an expression of not so much an anti-colonial attitude, but rather a frontier attitude. In labeling Dewey’s experimentalism a “frontier attitude,” I build off Katharyne Mitchell’s observation that Dewey invoked the frontier as a “metonym for the endlessly expandable ‘spaces’ of democracy” that served as “the foundational touchstone for democratic expansion.”<sup>10</sup> Dewey was committed to the frontier thesis, wherein “the image of the frontier shifted from the spaces of the ‘wild West’ to the spaces of the ‘wild’ American body [politic].”<sup>11</sup> The challenge for democracy after the closure of the frontier, Dewey believed, was to find a twenty-first century alternative that might serve as a problematic situation at the scale of the nation, one that would necessitate the continued cultivation of experimental intelligence. By the late 1920s, Dewey wholeheartedly embraced the frontier as a diagnostic for democracy.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>10</sup> Katharyne Mitchell, “Education for Democratic Citizenship: Transnationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Limits of Liberalism,” *Harvard Educational Review* 71, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 53.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell, “Education for Democratic Citizenship,” 54.



This made Dewey one of the foremost members of a cohort of Euro-American thinkers whom I have called the frontier progressives, interested less in renouncing America's frontier heritage than in reconstructing it for a more democratic future. Though his position on the legacy was critical, his matrix of inquiry mapped rather seamlessly on to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis; the endless frontier that Dewey imagined was nothing short of his method of reconstruction turned inward through education.<sup>12</sup> This formulation, however progressive, was constructed through Dewey's backgrounding and foiling of Indian people. Rather than treat abstract resonances between Dewey's philosophy of experience and Indigenous thought as a source of the distinctive American quality of pragmatism, I conclude that Dewey's concrete use of Instrumental Indians evacuated the potential for his philosophy to align with a truly Indigenous attitude.

As a consequence of his failure to treat with Indigenous contemporaries, Dewey's philosophy was left vulnerable to Euro-American educators' efforts to shape Indian education in his name. Between 1880 and 1950, Dewey had a number of close connections with administrators, educators, and reformers who were involved in Indigenous schooling. For example, William Torrey Harris, the U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906, who oversaw Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas J. Morgan's construction of an off-reservation industrial boarding school in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, was an early mentor to Dewey. Harris personally encouraged a young John to pursue philosophy in his capacity as editor of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and later became a family friend to the Deweys. The family of Samuel Northrup Castle and Mary T. Castle, scions of the Castle & Cooke fortune, one of Hawaii's Big Five corporate oligarchs who toppled Queen Lili'uokalani in a 1893 coup, were close friends

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<sup>12</sup> For a useful discussion of how Dewey's philosophy has fueled a discourse of multiculturalism in Canada that is at odds with racial politics of immigrant peoples, see Mitchell, "Education for Democratic Citizenship," 68-71.

with Dewey. They recruited Dewey to Hawai'i to create a kindergarten and settlement house that inspired by his Laboratory School which came to include Native Hawaiian students. Similarly, when he returned to the mainland in 1899, his ideas were plundered by Estelle Reel, who authored the Uniform Curriculum of 1901, a document that condemned a generation of Indian boys and girls to grueling manual labor in boarding schools under the guise of the new education – an interpretation of his philosophy that Dewey almost certainly would have disavowed on philosophical lines, but never actually condemned. In failing to address, let alone critique, Reel's curriculum at imposed schools such as Morris, Mount Pleasant, and the Kamehameha School, Dewey did little to disrupt anti-democratic schooling in Indigenous lives.

Most important was John Collier, the notable critic of federal Indian policy and later Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the New Deal. Collier was not only familiar with Dewey's writings, but founded two schools inspired by his pedagogy. One was a settlement house school as part of the New York People's Institute, but also a school for his own children, explicitly informed by his readings of Dewey's philosophy. Collier later recruited what I call a Deweyan brain trust to carry out his educational reforms during the Indian New Deal, including W. Carson Ryan, Moisés Sáenz, Willard Beatty, and Pedro T. Orata. Finally, when leading educators of the Territory of Hawai'i lobbied for statehood in the 1950s, they cited Dewey's influence on the island's schools as grounds for the compatibility of the territory with democracy in the United States. When Hawai'i eventually was admitted to the union as a state, the hope of many Native Hawaiians that schools could be both assertions and stewards of *Kānaka Maoli* political and cultural autonomy were deferred. Therefore, when it comes to the intersection of progressive education and American Indians, Dewey was positioned as if in the center of a

hurricane—largely silent himself, but providing a focal point for those engaged in the imposition of schooling on Indigenous people.

### **The Consequences of Instrumental Indians**

It has been a priority in my argument to show that Dewey was not without contemporary potential Indigenous interlocutors. To the contrary, Dewey had many opportunities to cite, invoke, and draw inspiration from Native contemporaries such as Andrew J. Blackbird and Charles A. Eastman. Andrew J. Blackbird offered Dewey a clear historicist alternative to the Germanic germ theory of democracy in Michigan, but Dewey eschewed it in favor of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. Likewise, Charles A. Eastman's philosophical analysis of Dakota winter counts could have augmented Dewey's account of savage mind, but it would have disrupted his foiling of Indians-as-savages with pioneers for the purposes of using the frontier as a democratic diagnostic. Whatever anti-colonial potential in Dewey's philosophy of experience or his reconstruction of local control, it was squandered when he mobilized Instrumental Indians. By instrumentalizing Indians in his philosophy, Dewey reduced Indigenous people to evidence for his ideas about education and democracy, not as a constituency those ideas might serve.

Dewey's silence has not gone unnoticed among an increasingly large chorus of Indigenous scholars. As Sandy Grande observed, "Like other whitestream thinkers ... Dewey's vision for an education system presumed the colonization of Indigenous peoples."<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Robbins "found that much of what Dewey promoted was at variance with the basic American Indian worldview." Despite Dewey's critique of vocational education, Robbins concluded that Dewey remained an odd fit in the history of schooling Indian Country.<sup>14</sup> Kimberly Richards

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<sup>13</sup> Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Robbins, "John Dewey's Philosophy and American Indians," 1-9.

commented on “Dewey’s belief that Native peoples should be incorporated, not only into the national society, but also into ‘modern life,’” adding, “His discussion of standards, environment, horizon and assimilation all revolve around the process of Americanization, which would maintain white supremacy with the changing political, economic and cultural landscape of the United States.”<sup>15</sup> In Hawai’i, Aulii Silva related how she “labored through a class reading Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* and *Art as Experience*—often without disguising my irritation and impatience with his writings during class discussions. Whether my professor or classmates wanted to hear it, I imparted a healthy amount of critique about the value of John Dewey’s contributions to the chronicles of American education.”<sup>16</sup> Red flags are being raised about Dewey’s relationship to Indigenous people, and they are coming from Indian Country.

To these critiques, I add my own: Dewey was both a consumer and producer of the frontier discourse. As such, his philosophy was an extension of the logic of Native elimination. I contend that this is a part of Dewey’s legacy that deserves closer interrogation. Whatever the status of his use of racial recapitulation or his turn towards pluralism, the fact of the matter is that Dewey’s work instrumentalized Indians, making them into evidence for his method of experimentalism. Dewey’s omission of contemporary Indigenous people as a constituency in his philosophy was not a mistake or the product of individual malice. It was a logical conclusion of his reliance upon Instrumental Indians. At the same time, it is important to note that despite its structural quality, settler colonialism did not predetermine the outcome of Dewey’s engagement with the frontier discourse. Historicists like Turner and Dewey were not fated to background and foil Indigenous people. The anti-colonial potential of Dewey’s philosophy ultimately marred his pattern of backgrounding and foiling Instrumental Indians. It matters that Dewey, who was an

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<sup>15</sup> Richards, “Ancillary Citizenship and Stratified Assimilation,” 101-2.

<sup>16</sup> Silva, “Dewey in Hawai’i, 1899,” 28-29.

otherwise humane, tolerant, and critical philosopher, became caught in the grip of this frontier discourse, because it illustrates just how pervasive the logic of Native elimination truly was—and remains.

While he was not singularly responsible for the way the frontier synthesis of education and democracy unfolded, Dewey is culpable in its ongoing harm against Indigenous people. His philosophy acted sometimes as a permission structure for the likes of Estelle Reel at places like MPIIS; corroboration for Henry Townsend at the Kamehameha School; and inspiration for John Collier and the Indian New Deal. In this way, Dewey is implicated in the lasting violence against Indigenous people wrought through anti-democratic schooling. That culpability should complicate his place in the critical pedagogy as much as it ought to upset many of the shibboleths about the historical role of schools in United States. In the wake of the Standing Rock resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline one hundred years after Dewey published *Democracy and Education*, the combined guest editors of *Daedalus* reminded readers that “the United States and the American dream—of freedom, democracy, a divine mandate to lead the world—are built on Indian land.”<sup>17</sup> Its schools are no different. Rather than seeing Dewey as hopelessly tainted by the intellectual iron cage of settler colonialism, we need to see him as a philosopher whose works affected Native elimination not as a result of an inherent incompatibility of Euro-American philosophy with Native anti-colonial politics, but rather as a result of his contingent immersion in the frontier discourse so particularly intense in Michigan. Dewey backgrounded and foiled his way out of relevance to critical democracy for Indigenous people.

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<sup>17</sup> Philip J. Deloria, et al., “Unfolding Futures: Indigenous Ways of Knowing the Twenty-First Century,” *Daedalus* 147, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 14.

## Decolonization and Reconstruction

If Dewey's philosophy was inextricably entangled with the frontier discourse, it is clear that before his experimentalism can be enlisted in advancing critical democracy for Indigenous people, it must first be decolonized. What might that mean?

To my mind, decolonizing Dewey does not mean simply dispensing with his terminology such as "savage," "savages," "savagery," or "civilization." Though some philosophers seek to rehabilitate the concept of civilization, scholars have largely already jettisoned this ethnocentric, chauvinistic, and racist vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> Rather, we must acknowledge how Dewey's experimentalism—from his concept of experimental intelligence and problematic situations to his reconstruction of local control—are the fruits of his backgrounding and foiling Indigenous people through the frontier discourse. We will need to find a new basis for the Indigenous intelligence.<sup>19</sup> We will need to wrench Dewey's concept of problematic situations away from Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. And above all else, we must pay closer attention to the way Dewey was invoked by non-Native educators during his own lifetime.

This underscores an important point: there is no place for Indigenous political distinction in Dewey's theorization of schools as centers for cultural pluralism. The settlement houses of Chicago and New York are often regarded as the origins of what has been variously dubbed pluralism, cultural pluralism, proto-multiculturalism, or multiculturalism in the United States. Louis Menand has argued that Dewey was at the center of a cohort of progressives such as Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne, Alain Locke, and others who articulated a new understanding of American identity. As Roger Daniels writes, "A few advanced thinkers, such as John Dewey,

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<sup>18</sup> John Armstrong, *In Search of Civilization: Remaking a Tarnished Idea* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Contemporary psychology offers one path to do this, as Mark Johnson has suggested in works such as *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Horace Kallen, and Randolph Bourne, wrote of the need to redefine Americanism to mean not a simple exchange of the old immigrant identity for the new American one, but rather the creation of a new identity which partook of some elements of each.”<sup>20</sup> Such immigrants would be incorporated into a dominant political culture, while conserving the unique contributions of their own cultures. As a result, those cultures would contribute to a transnational stockpile of cultural richness. While such a program was sometimes rendered by settlement houses less as gifting immigrant cultural products to a communal stockpile and more akin to plundering, there is no denying that the progressives who challenged the melting pot conception of the nation shifted American culture in powerful and resounding ways.<sup>21</sup>

To make matters worse, the constructivist, consensual, and historicist cultural pluralism that would provide a pathway for immigrants to become American was built through the frontier discourse. Rites and rituals of Americanization (what Dewey might call political nationalism) were founded on the frontier discourse. The frontier discourse convinced many Euro-Americans that Indians were relegated to an ancient past and were little more than mythic characters, available to be performed as symbolic shorthand for quintessential Americans. John Collier’s 1914 Pageant of Nations, where European immigrants and their children dressed up in Indian costume, serves as a window into the quandary such a cultural pluralism poses for Indigenous people. As Trachtenberg argues in *Shades of Hiawatha*, performing an identity that implies constructivism through an essentialized category was not only self-contradictory, but it was self-defeating for a program for the incorporation of Indigenous people into the polity in a way that was consistent with radical democracy.

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<sup>20</sup> Roger Daniels, *Not Like Us*, 93.

<sup>21</sup> Castle, *Century of Philanthropy*, 83.

Perhaps worse still, when Indians were included in this multiculturalism, they had their political distinction shorn away. “As the liberal state and its supporters and critics struggle over the meaning of pluralism, habitation, inclusion, and enfranchisement, indigenous people and nations, who provide the ontological and literal ground for such debates, are continually deferred into a past that never happened and a future that will never come,” observes Byrd.<sup>22</sup> What good was the Euro-American celebration of Native art, handicrafts, or dress if it was not accompanied by their respect for the right of Native nations to teach it to their children in school? “Though advocated as a ‘democratic’ model premised on the incorporation of all peoples and values, ‘multiculturalism’ operated in a homogenizing way,” notes Sandy Grande. “‘Diversity’ could be expressed only within the preexisting, hegemonic frames of the nation-state, reading democracy as ‘inclusion.’”<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, cultural pluralism, proto-multiculturalism, and multiculturalism are rarely adequate political theory to realize democracy and education in Indian Country.<sup>24</sup>

We must also acknowledge the extent to which Dewey exacerbated the toothlessness of cultural pluralism as a program for self-determination in Indian schools. Even when John Collier and his Deweyan brain trust sought to end harmful assimilation policies by citing Dewey’s synthesis of education and democracy, they continued to advance political and curricular reforms that fell well short of a truly democratic program for Indian schools. Democracy in education, even Dewey’s most radical iteration of the reconstruction of local control, did not translate to self-determination in schooling during the Indian New Deal. Collier’s enthusiasm for Dewey’s brand of democracy as the criterion for self-determination in Indian education might have been

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<sup>22</sup> Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, 221.

<sup>23</sup> Grande, *Red Pedagogy*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> For such an attempt, see Iris Marion Young, “Social Movements and the Politics of Difference,” in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990 repr. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 157-91.



good in theory, but in practice, the Deweyan brain trust did little more than substitute local control for indirect rule. Vine Deloria Jr., in a pretty good description of twentieth-century progressives in general, seemed to implicate Dewey's lack of purchase towards a critical democracy in Indian Country: "The white man is problem-solving. His conceptualizations merge into science and emerge in his social life as problems, the solutions of which are the adjustments of his social machine."<sup>25</sup> What if that social machine had been built on the dispossession of Indigenous land, the erasure of Indigenous languages, and the attempted genocidal elimination of the cultural bonds of Indigenous intergenerational community? Dewey, it seemed, had no good answer for this problem.<sup>26</sup>

This has led Indigenous scholars such as Kimberly Richards to emphasize that for all of Dewey's innovations, he was "simply updating the colonial rhetoric of the scientists that came before him by advancing the same narratives about virgin lands, primitive economies, and simplemindedness that have been used to describe Indigenous peoples for over three hundred years."<sup>27</sup> Yes, Dewey offered these conclusions as historicisms; it's true that he did not traffic in the essentialisms that undergirded other Euro-American invocations of the frontier discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But for Indigenous children in boarding schools often against their or their parents' will, the distinction between racial essentialism and historicism in Dewey's philosophy amounted to the same thing: his silence. The lesson for pragmatists, it seems, is that Dewey's historicism, universalism, and anti-dualism was no inoculation against the settler colonial logic of the elimination of the Native.

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<sup>25</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 189.

<sup>26</sup> Grande, *Red Pedagogy*, 50-53.

<sup>27</sup> Richards, "Ancillary Citizenship and Stratified Assimilation," 95.

Decolonization of Dewey might then actually appear something akin to Dewey's method of reconstruction. "It is certainly no dishonor to Dewey to admit that we need to confront problems with which he did not concern himself," concluded Robert Clopton. "It is not even dishonor to him to entertain the hypothesis that the very method of inquiry which he elucidated may need to be reconstructed, or even superseded."<sup>28</sup> But for Clopton's prescription to work, contemporary pragmatists must first acknowledge that the "tradition" of education and democracy in American has included a long history of anti-democratic schooling for Indigenous people. Lomawaima and McCarty describe the history of anti-democratic schooling taking place between "two realities." "One is the reality of a revolution in Indigenous education, of opportunity seized by Native people in the name of self-determination. A second reality is of an entrenched federal bureaucracy that, despite its public rhetoric, has protected its own powers and stifled Native determination at every turn." De-colonizing Dewey would mean applying his own ideas to a reality in which he lived, but due to his immersion in the frontier discourse, could not discern. Until we can reconstruct Dewey's experimentalism from its debt to the frontier discourse, I suggest that scholars be cautious in their use of his philosophy in conjunction with the ongoing struggle for anti-colonialism in Indigenous education and democracy. The assertion of Native parents like Corbett and Elsie to determine the schooling of their children, Joseph, Mary, and Henry Villeneuve, supplies an alternate construction to the sign in Eleanor Magid's 1968 illustration: "John Dewey, where were you when we needed you to be relevant?"

For my part, I believe the most Deweyan educators today are Indigenous pedagogues, who are working in a wide variety of schools, including language nests, charter schools, and tribal community schools across Indian Country and Hawai'i. In these schools, Native teachers

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Clopton, "John Dewey, an Appreciation," enclosed in Robert Clopton to Roberta Lowitz Grant Dewey, May 24, 1962, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 4.

continue experimenting with old and new forms of pedagogical training.<sup>29</sup> Today, innovations in culturally relevant curriculum, language immersion, and place-based learning in Indian Country has arguably surpassed the progressive education of the early twentieth century as the cutting edge of pedagogical innovation in the United States. But we need not start in the present to locate such creativity. Indigenous people such as Andrew Blackbird, Charles Eastman, Henry Roe Cloud, and Benjamin Reifel all offered substantive Indigenous alternatives to Dewey's reconstruction of local control during Dewey's own lifetime. Furthermore, their writings suggest a program of self-determination for Indigenous schooling in the hands of Indigenous educators that realizes and surpasses Dewey's vision of radical democracy for American Indian people. We can include Dewey in Scott Pratt's genealogy of the Native roots of pragmatism by treating Indigenous educators at the forefront of the synthesis of education and democracy, in Dewey's own day and in our own, as experimentalists in their own right.<sup>30</sup>

In their ongoing experiments in education, there is a lesson. As Lomawaima and McCarty conclude, "Native visions for an Indigenously rooted and inspired education hold promise for schools and a promise of a nation that can look cultural difference in the face, not as an enemy but as an ally. American Indian schools today, run by Indian parents and communities in accord with their deeply rooted, persistent, but not unchanging cultural values provide a model for meaningful, challenging, locally controlled education for all Americans."<sup>31</sup> I hope that this dissertation invites more discussion about the possibility of reconciling Dewey's philosophy with Indigenous history. Reconstruction of Dewey's place in the history of Indian schools might lead

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<sup>29</sup> For one such contemporary example at the Canadian side of the Great Lakes, see Nicole Bell, "Just Do It: Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 36, no. 1 (2013): 36-58.

<sup>30</sup> Their various articulations of an Indigenous synthesis of education and democracy might be characterized, as Dahl suggests, as a means to counter their "disavowal and epistemological elimination in American democratic theory" of which Dewey proved to be a part. Dahl, *Empire of the People*, 20.

<sup>31</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 170.

to new insights of benefit to everyone invested in trying to make democracy deliver on its bedrock premise of self-determination in education. Should it be properly reconstructed, I still believe there is anti-colonial potential in Dewey's philosophy. Dewey's philosophy promises a vision for democratic culture, like all human culture, that is mutable. Maybe the convergence between Dewey and Deloria, pragmatism and Indigenous experimentalism, democracy and self-determination, is only yet to come into view.

In traveling this Indigenous trace, we have taken a new path not only through Dewey's own corpus, but through the wider twentieth-century intellectual history of which it was a part. What began as a search for a Deweyan critique of boarding schools to render my ancestors Corbett and Joseph Villeneuve's struggle for self-determination in education grew into a new genealogy of not only the philosophy of John Dewey, but perhaps American pragmatism and progressivism writ large. By charting this Indigenous trace from the point of view of Indigenous experiences with anti-democratic schooling, I hope to make a useful contribution to the scholarship not only on Dewey's life and career as a philosopher, but in the history of progressive education, and the intellectual history of pragmatism. Native people—real and imagined—have played an instrumental part in this history.

Despite its shortcomings even in 1927, Dewey was still bullish on experimentalism in service of prompting critical democracy in American life. "Be the evils what they may, the experiment is not yet played out," he wrote with optimism for the future. "The United States are not yet made; they are not a finished act to be categorically assessed."<sup>32</sup> Six years later, the same year that Collier's brain trust brought Dewey to the Sioux nation through the Little Wound Day School, Oglala Lakota Luther Standing Bear suggested a different idea altogether. "Why not a

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<sup>32</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 350.

school of Indian thought, built on the Indian pattern and conducted by Indian instructors?

America can be revived, rejuvenated, by recognizing a native school of thought. The Indian can save America.”<sup>33</sup> I believe Standing Bear is right that a Native school of thought could save America, but for now, I’d settle on saving Dewey first. After all, you cannot teach what you do not learn; you cannot learn what you cannot teach. For Native people, education is not preparation for life; it is life itself.

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<sup>33</sup> Luther Standing Bear, *The Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 254-55.

## EPILOGUE:

### **Nanabush: Towards an Indigenous Experimentalism**

There's a certain story told across Anishinaabewaki about Nanabush and a tree. A fixture of many stories, Nanabush (more commonly known as Nanabozhoo) is an Anishinaabe trickster. Capable of great deeds of heroism and daring, Nanabush is also mischievous and self-absorbed. Like a good trickster, he keeps people on their toes—and is rarely as fleet of foot himself as to escape the consequences when others get wise to his antics. He gives as good as he gets.<sup>1</sup> While the tellings of this particular story are never exactly the same, the many accountings of Nanabush's quest for food always seem to hinge on the trickster's encounter with a certain tree.<sup>2</sup> The story always seems to begin when Nanabush's hunger compels him to venture into the forest to find food. In some tellings, he craftily tracks and kills a deer; other times, it's elk or moose. Whichever animal a given storyteller puts on his path, Nanabush invariably betrays his obligations to his four-legged relation. When it comes time to do the hard work of properly dressing his kill and preserving the meat for times of future hunger, Nanabush becomes lazy. He opts to eat all the meat in an indulgent feast. But as he prepares to dig in, Nanabush's gluttonous feasting is interrupted by a grating noise emitted from a nearby tree.

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<sup>1</sup> On Nanabozhoo and “trickster hermeneutics,” see Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 13-15, 172-76. On such figures in the Great Lakes and beyond, see Franchot Ballinger, *Living Sideways: Tricksters in American Indian Oral Traditions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 111-33.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Chosa, Anishinaabe Storytelling, Public Radio Exchange, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://beta.prx.org/stories/151387>.

What happens next was perhaps first recorded in English by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and Jane Johnston.<sup>3</sup> As the story was presented by Schoolcraft in his 1839 *Algic Researches*, Nanabush was about to take his first bite “when a tree close by him made a creaking noise, caused by the rubbing of one large branch against another.” The sound immediately upset Nanabush. “‘I cannot eat when I hear such a noise. Stop! stop!’ he said to the tree.” Satisfied that he had resolved the problem, Nanabush went back to eating his fill. Mid-bite, the tree’s harangue returned to interrupt him. In fact, each successive time Nanabush raised a handful of food to his mouth, the tree began to squeak and groan. Resolved to silence the disturbance once and for all, Nanabush put down his food and resolved to climb the tree and break off its offending branches. “He climbed the tree and was pulling at the limb, when his arm was caught between the two branches so that he could not extricate himself.”<sup>4</sup> Caught in the branches of the tree, Nanabush could do little when a troupe of wolves passed by. Determined to throw them off the scent of his food, Nanabush called out innocently: “What would you come to get here?” Conferring amongst themselves, the wolves quickly see through Nanabush’s feint. “‘I begin to know him,’ said an old wolf, ‘and all his tricks.’” Sensing his deception, the wolves converge at the tree to investigate the suspended trickster. They discover the resplendent meal Nanabush had prepared for himself but had abandoned in his misguided effort to silence the tree. The wolves then eat heartily, leaving Nanabush without sustenance, save for the nourishment derived from the parable of which he has become a part: “See the effect of meddling with frivolous things when I had certain good in my possession.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Dale Parker, *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Schoolcraft’s Indian Legends from Algic Researches, the Myth of Hiawatha, Oneóta, the Race In America, and Historical and Statistical Information Respecting—the Indian Tribes of the United States*, ed. Mentor Lee Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

A hundred and seventy-five years after this Nanabush story was recorded in Michigan by the Schoolcrafts, another telling was composed in 2014. This one was by the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation as “Nanabush Loses the Meat.” Structured as a tool for teaching children Anishinaabemowin, Nanabush’s encounter with the tree—narrated in both Anishinaabemowin and English—is different from Schoolcraft’s telling:

Just then the wind picked up and the tree started to sway and creak. The tree creaked so loudly, it seemed to be talking—and it was talking, to Nanabush. But the tree was not saying nice things. “Foolish Nanabush! Greedy Nanabush! You eat like a pig Nanabush! Can’t you save your meat Nanabush,” said the wind and tree. “Stupid tree. Who cares what you say,” said Nanabush. But Nanabush cared and it made him very angry. Still, the wind blew and the tree continued to tease. Nanabush decided he would put a stop to this talking tree nonsense. So up the tree he went. Once he got to the top he noticed the wind caused all the branches to be tangled and rub against each other, giving the tree its voice. “Now I know how to make this tree shut up,” said Nanabush. Nanabush started to untangle the branches. But as soon as he got one loose other branches became tangled. So he put his legs and arms on as many branches as he could reach and pushed mightily. But then a powerful gust of wind came and Nanabush became as knotted and twisted as the branches he was determined to untangle.<sup>6</sup>

In this telling, Nanabush took the path of least resistance to immediate gratification.

When the wind and the tree shamed him for it, he quarreled with the tree and tried to silence it.

By wrapping him in its branches, the tree turned the tables on Nanabush. Thereafter, the tree saw to it that the bounty of the hunt went to people who were more worthy than Nanabush.

Furthermore, when Nanabush tries to fool the wolves (“Nothing to see here!”), they see right through his ploy. They fill their bellies while Nanabush wriggles in the branches, suspended in the air, left with nothing to do but shake his fist.

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<sup>6</sup> “Nanabush Loses the Meat/Nanabush Naajtoon Wiiyaas” Nish Tales: Walking and Talking with Nanabush, Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, accessed June 1, 2021, <http://nanabush.ca/>.



“Nanabush Loses the Meat” is not only of interest as a contemporary language teaching tool, an example of what scholars call culturally responsive curriculum,<sup>7</sup> but is also a telling of the story with some crucial distinctions from iterations intended for non-Native audiences. For example, in Schoolcraft’s English translation, it is written that “a tree close by him made a creaking noise, caused by the rubbing of one large branch against another.” But when the story is told in Anishinaabemowin, the narrator does not make an aside about the “real” or “true” origin of the sound Nanabush hears in the branches above. By their combined effort, the wind and tree simply play a trick on Nanabush. Given voice by the wind, the tree speaks to Nanabush, teasing him: “*Bezhig maaba mtig nooj go ggetin gii gziibweweshkaa, dbishko go daa giigdo, dbishko Nanabushoon gi noonaad*. The tree creaked so loudly, it seemed to be talking—and it was talking, to Nanabush.”

In this formulation, the narrator communicates that the efficient cause behind the noise is the wind, but the listener simultaneously knows that the tree is the one doing the talking. Telling the story this way does not require an ontological stutter step—something like “Nanabush heard a noise. He thought it was the tree, but what he really heard was the wind.” Instead, Nanabush hears the wind *and* the tree all at once—teasing him. This synthesis is further underscored when Nanabush climbs the tree and uncovers the nature of the conspiracy against him: “*Gaa ni dgoshing wodi shpiming, mii gii maamno-nendang noodin wi e ’snigshkang dikwaanhsan, doodaadoom- gadoon dash, dbishko gonaa daa giigda mtig*. Once he got to the top he noticed the wind caused all the branches to be tangled and rub against each other, giving the tree its voice.”<sup>8</sup> In this telling, Nanabush’s climb is also something of an investigation. It is only when

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<sup>7</sup> Teresa L. McCarty and Tiffany S. Lee, “Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy and Indigenous Education Sovereignty,” *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 101-24.

<sup>8</sup> “Nanabush Loses the Meat,” Ojibwe Cultural Foundation.

he gets to the top of the tree that he makes his discovery—that the wind and the tree have conspired to speak out against his indulgence. In this way, the story operates to illustrate an Indigenous epistemology that contemporary Anishinaabe scholars argue encompasses and unites both the everyday and the spiritual within the domain of experience.<sup>9</sup>

Mere comprehension of cause and effect, however, does not spare Nanabush from the consequences of his actions. Even though Nanabush might have uncovered the wind's role in the tree's teasing, the two are not yet finished teaching Nanabush a lesson. In Schoolcraft's telling, Nanabush becomes stuck in the branches seemingly by dint of his own haste. In this telling in Anishinaabemowin, it is the *wind* that imprisons him in the tree's branches. As the foiled Nanabush yells at the feasting wolves down below, the wolves consider the sound they hear: “*Hmmmm. Esnaa gii nishin. Gegoo na kii noondaan? Kaa gegoo aawzinoo, mdweyaashwag gonaa eta mtigoog, kida mahiingan.* Hmm, that was great. Say did you hear something? It's nothing, just the wind in the trees, said the wolves.” With Nanabush himself now acting as the noise from the trees—albeit far less capable of distracting those who would eat wolfishly—the story has gone full circle.<sup>10</sup> This telling allows the story to culminate in the tables being turned on the trickster—less Aesop's fable and more trademark Nanabush.

But when John Dewey learned of this story of Nanabush, this is not what he heard.

### **John Dewey and Nanabush**

It happened in 1893, two years after Dewey had become an advisor to a student monthly literary journal at Michigan called the *Inlander*. In addition to advising its undergraduate writers, Dewey also authored a column of his own called “The Angle of Reflection.” In his detailed

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<sup>9</sup> Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, eds., *Centering Anishinaabe Studies: Understanding the World through Stories* (East Lansing: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> “Nanabush Loses the Meat,” Ojibwe Cultural Foundation.

treatment of Dewey's career at Michigan, Brian Williams argues that it was through this column in the *Inlander* that Dewey began to imagine for the first time an audience for his philosophy beyond the academy. This is evidenced in his first "Angle of Reflection" column, where Dewey wrote that the *Inlander's* purpose was to represent the vitality of a university in a region regarded by East Coast intellectuals as a provincial frontier outpost. Dewey wrote that the magazine's objective was "to express and to encourage the articulate voicing of that part of the vast dumb Inland to which it belongs."<sup>11</sup> In other words, Dewey began his career as a public intellectual in defense of Michigan and its university, not as a primitive frontier outlier, but as a place of high learning as cutting edge as anywhere else in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

To make the case for Michigan, Dewey also published short essays in the *Inlander*. In April of 1893, Dewey wrote one such essay titled "Anthropology and Law." In this essay, Dewey contemplated the historical nature of laws. How does a society come to be shaped by certain sets of rules? Where do these rules come from: inheritance, invention, or some combination of the two? How do such rules change over time as societies develop? Except as an early draft of themes that would appear more fully in Dewey's later publications, "Anthropology and the Law" is perhaps unremarkable. As a result, it is rarely treated by Dewey scholars. However, the essay contains one of the rare moments when Dewey explicitly mentions Indigenous people, which for my purpose merits closer inspection.

Dewey used "Anthropology and the Law" primarily to explore the history of the legal concept of indirect liability as a feature of law in the United States. While Dewey suggested that the emerging discipline of anthropology might offer empirical insights about the historical

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<sup>11</sup> *Inlander* 1. no. 1 (March 1891): 35.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *Thought and Action*, 29.

origins of laws in general, Dewey asserted that this was particularly useful as a means to excavate the history of indirect liability in particular.

Citing Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s *The Common Law*, Dewey asserted that "it is a commonplace of anthropology that the primitive man sees only himself in all his surroundings. His whole world was himself spread out for inspection." Dewey illustrated this claim by imagining that if an anthropologist were to ask a "primitive" man why he engaged in such activities as, say, running, that this primitive man would surely respond "because he was alive." Dewey insisted that the same explanation would then be projected by this primitive man on to the world around him: rivers, clouds, the wind—all moved because they were also thought to be alive. Seemingly self-evident human qualities were understood by primitive people as ontological reality. "When he struck some one, he struck because he was angry and wished to hurt," Dewey declared of his imaginary man. "If a tree fell on his hut, there could be no other reason."<sup>13</sup> Savage mind anthropomorphized the world.

To underscore his point, Dewey offered his readers his own telling of the Nanabush story: "In one of the Chippewa Indian legends, it is told of the 'Good Spirit' that after a long and toilsome struggle with the Evil Spirit ... finally secures an elk for himself." The 'Good Spirit' in Dewey's version is Nanabush, often regarded by Euro-Americans as a sort of Chippewa demi-god. Dewey narrates that as Nanabush stoops low to dress his kill, "he hears a creaking in the tree above him, made by the rubbing of branches together." In Dewey's telling the sound is immediately attributed to the branches. "The Good Spirit, famished as he is, stops to say: 'Ah, you have troubled me enough, you evil one; but I am not going to hear you croak while I am eating my dinner.' So he climbs the tree and cuts off the limb!" With such an exclamation,

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<sup>13</sup> John Dewey, "Anthropology and the Law" (1893), *Early Works*, 4:38-39.

Dewey finishes the story as if it were a punchline. Dewey anticipated that his readers would treat the story's conclusion as of a humorous non sequitur based on what he wrote immediately thereafter: "What similarity is there between this frame of mind and the modern law regarding the responsibility of employers for the damage done by their employees, in the course of their work? None whatsoever!" he feigned. Except, however, Dewey then suggested that the story of Nanabush could be read as a window into the origin of constituent ideas that make up the modern concept of indirect liability. Dewey suggested that the Good Spirit's "frame of mind" might be "the undeniable offspring" of "the law of indirect liability for acts of servants, and for animals owned by one," which informed modern labor law.<sup>14</sup>

The Nanabush story slotted right into Dewey's emerging naturalism, specifically his psychological functionalism. "Going back in history is like going from the mouths of rivers now far separate, as separate as the Pacific Ocean from the Gulf of Mexico, to a common watershed," Dewey wrote in "Law and Anthropology." "I want to illustrate this general truth by some facts in the development of law; showing how some of the most highly developed legal ideas and practices of to-day can be traced to a beginning in the crude psychological structure of primitive man."<sup>15</sup> That meant Nanabush was ripe for the taking.

Immediately, though, Dewey got Nanabush wrong. In the story of Nanabush and the tree, Dewey argued that he had found an even more ancient iteration of the practice of ancient Greeks (described by Plato) to hold inanimate objects responsible in criminal proceedings. "Here the object is recognized as lifeless," Dewey explained, "but the story points, like a needle to a pole, to a time when the object was just as personal and just as personally responsible as any murderer

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<sup>14</sup> Dewey, "Anthropology and the Law," 39.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

can be.”<sup>16</sup> In his view, the attitude of Chippewa to regard trees as a living entity responsible for disrupting meals had simply evolved into Greek law. He conscripted the story of Nanabush into a historical account of this idea of the agency of inanimate objects, stating that it had developed so that in “the old maritime law the ship was made both the source and the limit of liability. Not the owner but the ship had to be proceeded against.”<sup>17</sup> This premise of indirect liability formed a link from Michigan Indian people, to Greece, to the American merchant marine, and finally to modern corporate law.

In his conclusion, Dewey made the Nanabush story and its important role in his account of indirect liability a part of his naturalistic method. “I do not mean, of course, that these early customs of the savage mind are the causes of our modern law practice,” Dewey clarified. Instead, the Chippewa story was evidence that illustrated a historicist account of a modern phenomenon; in this case, the Chippewa, the Greek, and the American conceptions of indirect liability were “simply a question of morphology.” Dewey used his understanding of Nanabush as the foundation for his naturalism: “The rules are nonetheless the historical children of the old customs, preserved and modified through the agency of natural selection.”

This last line is critical. In this otherwise unremarkable essay, Dewey invoked Michigan’s Indigenous people to stake out his most innovative ideas central to his method of experimentalism: just as natural selection was nature’s mechanism for change over time, so too was the scientific method humanity’s way to direct social change over time. If you knew a noise made by a tree was the result of the wind in its branches, and not the result of its intention to mock you, there was no need for anthropomorphizing the tree and no need to cut off its limb. In other words, Dewey understood the personification of tree as a logical outcome of “primitive

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 41.

psychology.” The scientific method had helped humans surpass earlier habits of thinking such as those seemingly embodied in the Nanabush story.

Dewey’s reference to natural selection is not analogy. More than illustrate mere continuity between Chippewa lifeways and U.S. law, Dewey suggested that the change over time that had elapsed between the Chippewa story and the modern law of indirect liability was the product of evolution itself: “Every new institution is, like the organ of an animal, an old one modified.” But whereas natural selection governed the changes in animals, what force dictated such similar changes in humanity? Dewey’s answer was the burgeoning insights of the new psychology: “It is a psychological law—a law which may be said to underlie all history—that the mind can attend to anything only as that thing enters into some action, only as it is to be put to some use. So far then as any law, any institution, loses all practical value, it inevitably drops back out of consciousness; the new use ... is read into the affairs.” In so doing, “interpretation has taken place, and the old institution has changed its form by taking on a new function—and all this without any breach of continuity having occurred in consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> For Dewey, the stories of Michigan’s Indian people therefore represented a window into that history of psychology. The meaning of the Chippewa story, Dewey suggested dismissively, “if we had time to go into it, would be simply a reflection of the struggle of the Indian himself for food against the odds of climate and a bad season.”<sup>19</sup> I argue that Dewey’s treatment of the Nanabush story is largely indicative of the way in which Indigenous people are represented throughout the entirety of his life’s work. The “Chippewa legend” he cited represents a tangible link between the frontier discourse and Dewey’s experimentalism.

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<sup>18</sup> Dewey, “Anthropology and the Law,” 42.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

Where Dewey got this “Chippewa Indian legend” story of Nanabush from for his 1893 article in the *Inlander* is unclear; there is no mention of Nanabush in Holmes’ *Common Law*, the text he cited. Could it be that Dewey encountered the story in reading a copy of Schoolcraft’s *Algonic Researches* or an excerpt in an Ann Arbor newspaper? Might he have seen it during his inspections of Michigan public schools reproduced in a classroom adaptation as fodder for a Euro-American primer, reader, or speller? Perhaps resident frontiersman and Anishinaabemowin speaker Frederick Riggs knew of it and told it to his granddaughter, Alice Chipman Dewey, or just maybe did Dewey hear it from Frederick himself during their sojourn through the Colorado mountains? Dewey’s papers offers no such clues.

While we cannot be sure *where* Dewey heard the story of Nanabush, we can be much more certain about what he heard *in* the story. In the story of Nanabush, Dewey did not discern folklore but, instead, history. That history was connected to the present in a way fairy tales only superficially gestured. Rather, Nanabush offered Dewey a genealogy of functional psychology. Insofar as Dewey read Nanabush into “the crude psychological structure of primitive man,” he sought to draw a line from Indians to Greeks to Americans. Yet, Dewey contorted the story into what he wanted to hear. Namely, he wanted to see how a story told by Indians-as-savages about vengeance on a tree flowed into Greek religious cults, which in turn developed into modern corporate law, as a through-line in human history about inanimate objects taking on a life of their own. An Indian story offered a convenient way to make this temporal portage. Dewey thought Nanabush was significant because of how it captured both primitive psychology and hinted at an experimentalist future. Where Dewey should have heard noise from a tree, he thought he heard a signal. He tried to extract it, and in so doing, he failed to learn the lesson that Nanabush might



have taught him—that there were still Anishinaabe people in Michigan, living all around him, still speaking.

### **Andrew Blackbird and Nanabush**

In his 1887 *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa*, Andrew Blackbird offered his own commentary about Nanabush. Blackbird introduced Nanabush as “Ne-naw-bo-zhoo ... who was the most remarkable, wonderful, and supernatural being that ever trod upon the earth.”<sup>20</sup> Blackbird told his readers that Nanabush had been born from a “maiden” who “had a vision of holding conversation with some deities.”<sup>21</sup> While she was living with her grandmother, the young woman was granted a vision that her children would one day bring both calamity and redemption to the world of humanity. The woman gave birth to two sons, “The first born was like any other human child, but the last one was a monster which caused the death of its mother, and, although shaped like a human being, as soon as born ran off in the wilderness and was never again seen by any person.” While the first child was orphaned and alone, its grandmother reared it with love mixed with bemusement, for the child grew quickly and was exceedingly chatty and playful. Before long, the grandmother told the child, “Your actions are like a Ne-naw-bo-zhoo.” Blackbird explained that “the meaning of this word in the Algonquin language is ‘a clown’ and therefore he meant that he was the great ‘clown’ of the world.” To which the child replied: “I am the great Ne-naw-bo-zhoo on this earth.”<sup>22</sup>

Blackbird was proud of Nanabush. “He could transfigure himself into the shape of all animals and live with them for a great length of time.” At the same time, Blackbird pulled no punches about Nanabush’s often destructive nature. “He has done much mischief and also many

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<sup>20</sup> Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan*, 72.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

benefits to the inhabitants of the earth whom he called ‘his nephews’; and he shaped almost everything.”<sup>23</sup> For example, when Nanabush eventually learned of his mother’s fate, he flew into “a great rage” and made plans to find and slay his brother. To arm himself, Nanabush went into the forest and pointed a finger at a pine tree, which dutifully lowered itself to the ground and allowed Nanabush to pluck a limb from its trunk as a war club. For days, Nanabush tracked his brother, a journey that finally led him to Grand Traverse Bay, “near the place now called Antrim City,” once called “‘Pe-wa-nago-ing,’ meaning ‘Flinty Point.’” There the brothers were locked in battle. The flint that makes up this region, Blackbird told his reader, comprises the broken remains of Nanabush’s brother’s body.<sup>24</sup>

To appeal to his Euro-American audience, Blackbird mostly framed Nanabush within a biblical tradition. It is worth considering how Dewey and Blackbird’s treatment of Nanabush differed. Unlike Dewey, who ruminated on the story of Nanabush and the tree as part of his philosophical speculations, Blackbird had a more concrete end in view: compel his fellow citizens of Michigan to care about Indigenous people as their fellow citizens. For Blackbird and his people, a great deal of meaning hung on his reader’s reception of Nanabush. If Blackbird could convince Michiganders that the Ottawa and Chippewa stories of Nanabush and their various lessons resembled the stories and morals from the Bible, he believed it might be possible to engender some concern for their political marginalization in the state. Blackbird therefore omitted the story about Nanabush and the tree and instead highlighted stories that he felt demonstrated a kind of Indian compatibility with Christianity.

In one instance, Blackbird delighted in the fact that the Anishinaabe cosmogony of the Great Lakes also began with a flooded world. He also took pride in one of Nanabush’s later

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>24</sup> Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan*, 74.

exploits against the great fish Mishi-la-me-gwe: “Ne-naw-bo-zhoo was once swallowed by a fish, and after being carried about in the midst of the deep, he came out again and lived as well as ever, like the Prophet Jonah,” Blackbird explained. Afterwards, “he went home and sat down to smoke his pipe, perfectly satisfied that he had saved many people by disposing of this great fish.” Blackbird was proud to share these “legends told among the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, as related in their own language, which are in some things quite similar to the records of the Bible.”<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, Blackbird found a way to preserve Nanabush’s ethos as trickster within the pantheon of heroes who exemplified Christian righteousness. For example, while Blackbird reveled in the fact that Odawa and Ojibwe people had their own cosmogony story about a flood, he also made it clear that the contours of that story were decidedly distinct from Christianity. “The legends say it was caused, not by a rain, but by the great Ne-naw-bo-zhoo.”<sup>26</sup> Unlike Noah, who became chosen by god to survive the flood, Nanabush had brought on the flood himself by slaying a god with an arrow. It all started with Nanabush’s boastful nature as an “expert hunter,” who had accomplished his prowess in partnership with a black wolf who served as “his hunting dog.”<sup>27</sup> Their success did not go unnoticed. As Blackbird told it, the “god of the deep” who dwelled in the heart of the lakes (often depicted by other Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes as an underwater panther) had grown envious of Nanabush’s canine companion, and so he kidnapped and killed the wolf. Infuriated, Nanabush devised a plan to exact his revenge: he transformed himself into a tree stump and waited for the god of the deep to emerge to sunbathe on Michigan’s sandy beaches before launching an arrow directly into his heart. While he had

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 73.

slain the god of the deep, the elements of his domain had not lost their potency. Nanabush was soon sent in flight pursued by “mountains of water.”<sup>28</sup> He ran and ran, but eventually Nanabush could not outrun the waters, which soon covered the whole world. “There was no great ark in which to float during the great flood, but when Ne naw-bo-zhoo could not find any more dry land to run to when he was pursued with mountains of water, he said, ‘let there be a great canoe.’ So there was a great canoe which he entered with his animals and floated.”<sup>29</sup>

It was at this juncture that Blackbird left Noah, Jonah, and the Bible behind and committed to the full narration of the cosmogony of the Anishinaabewaki, commonly known as an “earth-diver” story. The scene begins with Nanabush clinging to the gunwales of his canoe, joined by a cadre of his companions. Surrounded on all sides with nothing but an infinite expanse of water, Nanabush peered over the side into the glittering waves. Knowing there was nowhere to paddle, Nanabush determined that the only way they would ever reach land again was to remake the world from the earth beneath the waves. “Therefore, he ordered one of the beavers to go down to the bottom of the deep and bring up some earth if he could, as evidence that he did go to the bottom.”<sup>30</sup> Acceding to Nanabush’s imperative, the beaver took the plunge, but was unable to reach the earth beneath the waves: “The water was so deep the beaver died before he reached the bottom, and therefore, he came up floating as a dead beaver.” Fortunately for beaver, “Ne-naw-bo-zhoo drew him up into his canoe and resuscitated the beaver by blowing into his nostrils.” Despite Nanabush’s powers of resuscitation, his companions understandably got cold feet; when Nanabush turned next to order muskrat to make the same dive, muskrat quite reasonably refused.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 76.

As Blackbird told it, Nanabush “had to flatter him a little in order to induce him to go down, by telling him, ‘Now, muskrat, I know that thou art one of the best divers of all the animal creation; will you please go down and ascertain the depth of the water, and bring up some earth in your little paws, if you can, with which I shall try to make another world?’”<sup>31</sup> Though his new politeness was welcomed, muskrat was still on the fence about such an enterprise. Out of tricks, Nanabush gave up the act of flattery and spoke with earnestness: “‘Now go my little brother ... for we cannot always live on the waters.’ At last the muskrat obeyed.” Blackbird is careful to note that this enjoiner to muskrat was not one of Nanabush’s deceptions; instead, he spoke to muskrat as his relation. “The legend says that he called all the animal creation his little brothers,” Blackbird observes.<sup>32</sup> Muskrat was able to dive all the way to the bottom and successfully delivered to Nanabush a clutch of mud from beneath the water. “With this parcel, Ne-naw-bo-zhoo told the raven to fly to and fro all over the face of the waters; then the waters began to recede very fast, and soon the earth came back to its natural shape, just as it was before.” Only through kinship, Blackbird seems to say, could Nanabush and muskrat together remake the world.<sup>33</sup>

Blackbird’s stories of Nanabush are suggestive of the ways in which Indigenous people might have understood their political and cultural position across the Great Lakes at the close of the nineteenth century. At the very least, it suggests Blackbird’s political line of action; Blackbird had preserved this Nanabush story in his history while active on the local lecture circuit with groups like the Ypsilanti, Michigan chapter of the Friends of the Indians. Perhaps we might understand Blackbird’s *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa* as a political tract that

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

mirrored his telling of the Nanabush story of the flood. Just as Nanabush had tried (and failed) to command muskrat to dive to the bottom of the waters to recover the earth, so too did Blackbird's generation of Ojibwe and Odawa people lack the political power to command Euro-Americans to adhere to treaties, dismantle the plunder economy, and treat their Indigenous citizens with fairness. The next resort was to hail non-Native Michiganders in a similar fashion as when Nanabush had beseeched muskrat to take the plunge with politeness, kinship, and solidarity.

Even so, Blackbird never gave up making demands of the non-Native Michiganders. His 1900 *The Indian Problem* made it clear that should Michigan truly be invested in democracy, it had to do right by its Indigenous citizens. Like the world of the flood before it, the polity of Michigan might be remade for everyone's benefit if only all people of the Great Lakes first recognized one another as equal relations. Unfortunately, most Michiganders of Blackbird's day chose not to listen. The rest, like Dewey himself, took from the story of Nanabush what they wanted to hear. Had Dewey listened more attentively, he might have changed his tune about Nanabush. The story was not a tale from ancient history, but was a part of an Indigenous present.

### **Excluding Indians from Philosophy**

Dewey could not hear Blackbird's treatment of Nanabush as a kind of philosophy because he was otherwise deafened by the frontier discourse. Dewey contributed to the cacophony in another 1893 essay, "Superstition of Necessity," where he philosophized about the nature of necessity by way of the Instrumental Indian. Dewey claimed that his purpose in writing in 1893 was to show how "the idea of necessity marks a certain stage in the development of judgment." To make the argument, Dewey needed Indians to stand in for the psychology of the past. Dewey cited John Venn (of Venn-diagram fame) and his 1889 *Empirical Logic*. Venn had posed a thought experiment around a "savage" murderer: "What the savage mostly wants to do is

to produce something or to avert something, not to account for a thing which has already happened. What interests him is to know how to kill somebody, not to know how somebody has been killed. The outcome of the action—in this case, murder—was the fact of the matter most relevant in forming an account of cause and effect.” Venn went on: “What not only the savage, but also the practical man mostly wants, is a general result, say the death of his enemy.”

According to Venn, the assertion “the man was dead” was the fact of the matter most relevant to a savage killer, not “the man was dead and killed with a knife.” Venn argued that for savage thinkers, the bit of information about the knife was extraneous. In so doing, Venn offered a picture of savage people as vulgar instrumentalists, psychologically engaged with only outcomes and consequences.<sup>34</sup>

Dewey had disagreed—seemingly on behalf of the “savage” and “practical” men alike. According to Dewey, Venn had argued that “the ‘general result,’ the death of the hated enemy, is at first the fact; all else is mere accidental circumstance. Indeed, the other circumstances at first are hardly that; they do not attract attention, having no importance. Not only the savage, but also the common-sense man of to-day, I conceive, would say that any attempt to extend the definition of the ‘fact’ beyond the mere occurrence of the death is metaphysical refinement.” It is notable that Dewey threw in the lot of the savage thinker with the practical man. Despite this concession about the shared epistemology of common sense, Dewey maintained that Venn’s account was ultimately misleading. The murder weapon was as important part of the murder as “a matter of fact” as the outcome. “What has been done, in other words, is to abstract part of the real fact, part of this death, and set up the trait or universal thus abstracted as itself fact, and not only as fact, but as the fact, par excellence, with reference to which all the factors which constitute the reality,

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<sup>34</sup> Cited in Dewey, “The Superstition of Necessity” (1893), *Early Works*, 4:23-25.

the concrete fact, of this death, are circumstantial and ‘accidental.’” Dewey continued Venn’s thought experiment when he mused that if you were planning to commit murder, you might want to know how effective knives were at doing the job:

What is to be done, however, with these conditions of spear, of stone, of armor, which so obviously have something to do with the real fact, although, as it would seem, they are not the fact? They are considered as circumstances, accidental, so far as death in general is concerned; necessary, so far as this death is concerned. That is, wanting simply to get the net result of the removal of my enemy, so that he will no longer blight the fair face of nature, it is accidental how I do it; but having, after all, to kill a man of certain characteristics and surroundings in life, having to choose time and place, etc., it becomes necessary, if I am to succeed, that I kill him in a certain way, say, with poison, or a dynamite bomb.<sup>35</sup>

If we manage to look past the grisly violence of the example, what Dewey is asserting here is that the efficacy of the murder weapon—be it a knife, poison, or a dynamite bomb—would not be a superfluous concern to would-be murderers, whether they be “savage” or “practical.” Fully embracing the violent metaphor, Dewey underscored that “the savage has to hit his enemy with a club or spear, or perform a magic incantation, before he can attain that all-important end of getting rid of him,” Dewey concluded. “A man with a coat of armor on will not die just the same way as the man who is defenseless. These circumstances have to be taken into account.” Only from this totality of thought and action should facts be derived: “Just as the end of the savage is merely to kill his enemy, so the ‘fact’ is merely the dead body with the weapon sticking in it. The fact, as it stands in consciousness, is indeterminate and partial, but, since it is in consciousness by itself, it is taken as a whole and as the certain thing.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, knowledge of the weapon’s efficacy therefore becomes a prerequisite for effective action, collapsing ends and means into a continuum rather than two distinct entities. In this example, it

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<sup>35</sup> Dewey, “The Superstition of Necessity,” 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.



may seem as if Dewey saw a parallel between savage mind and experimental intelligence. In so doing, Dewey seems to suggest Indians-as-savages might have resembled the experimental psychology of “practical men.”

And yet, in a footnote, Dewey explained that because savage mind represented a less sophisticated form of experimental thinking, this parallel was just that—a parallel, not a convergence. It is here that Dewey’s 1893 essay excluded the thinking of Indian-as-savages from the domain of philosophy: “It is hardly worth while to attempt to persuade the savage; were he not only a savage, but also a philosopher, he might boldly challenge the objector to present any definition of object which should not refer objectivity to man’s practical activity; although he might, as a shrewd savage, admit that some one activity (or self) to which the object is referred has more content than another.” In this passage, Dewey reveals he is more than happy to do battle over epistemology with mistaken empiricists like Venn, but not Indians—because the latter could not even be the former. “In this case, I, for one, should not care about entering the lists against the savage,” Dewey continued. “But when the common-sense philosopher, who resists all attempts to reconstruct the original object on the ground that a fact is a fact and all beyond that is metaphysics, is also a case-hardened nominalist, it is time to protest.” In Dewey’s view, Indians at least had a good excuse for their lack of comprehension, but he could not say the same for empiricists like Venn.<sup>37</sup>

### **Paul Radin and Nanabush**

Nearly thirty years passed before Dewey considered Nanabush again. By the 1920s, Dewey began to embrace cultural pluralism. As Thomas Fallace suggests, Dewey’s rejection of racial recapitulation in the early 1920s meant that Indigenous people might have been included in

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<sup>37</sup> Dewey, “The Superstition of Necessity,” 27, FN 2.

the widening sphere of Dewey's cultural pluralism. Fallace surmises that Dewey's ethnocentrism gave way to cultural pluralism more amenable to affording dignity to contemporary Indigenous people whom he no longer dismissed as savages.<sup>38</sup> It was perhaps for this reason that when the anthropologist Paul Radin became familiar with the story of Nanabush and the tree, he was reminded of John Dewey.

Radin was an anthropologist, folklorist, and linguist who made his career studying American Indian people. In many respects, Radin perhaps exemplified the synthesis of education and democracy that Dewey had hoped could be achieved for immigrants. While Radin was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1883, his family emigrated to the United States a year later. They settled in Elmira, New York, in 1884. Radin attended City College of New York, where he became interested in anthropology and history under James Harvey Robinson.<sup>39</sup> He graduated in 1902 and took off to Europe to study at a series of German universities. Returning to New York in 1907, he became a graduate student at Columbia, familiar with Dewey while working under Franz Boas. This circle spun Radin in the direction of American Indian people, and he wrote a 1911 dissertation titled "The Ritual and Significance of the Winnebago Medicine Dance."<sup>40</sup> This began a long career in anthropology and folklore with Indigenous informants, particularly among the Ho-Chunk in Wisconsin.<sup>41</sup> In 1956, Radin published *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, a collection of stories purporting to feature trickster figures across several

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<sup>38</sup> To the contrary, Kimberly Richards has argued that Dewey's treatment of race prejudice in his essay "Race Prejudice and Friction" only intensified his credentials as a scholar of Native elimination. By reducing Indigenous people to the status of a racial or ethnic group, such an inclusion would have done little to dismantle the basis of anti-democratic schooling in Indian lives.

<sup>39</sup> Cora DuBois, "Paul Radin: An Appreciation," in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), ix–xvi.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Radin, "The Ritual and Significance of the Winnebago Medicine Dance" (PhD diss., New York: Columbia University, 1911).

<sup>41</sup> His reputation for careful study led even Vine Deloria Jr. to write that "friendly anthropologists like Paul Radin" had contributed to making Indigenous traditions otherwise dismissed as mere myths or legends of folklore grounded in history. Vine Deloria Jr., *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence*, 2.

Indigenous communities. As a part of his research, Radin reproduced a very similar version of the story of Nanabush and the tree.<sup>42</sup> Radin's unnamed Ho-Chunk informant (perhaps Crashing Thunder, his long-time research partner) related how Nanabush's feast had been disrupted:

He was about to eat and put a piece in his mouth when he heard a squeaking noise above him.... "Well," he said impatiently and did not eat the meat. Then, for the second time, he was about to put a piece of meat in his mouth and again he heard a squeaking noise.... A third and fourth time this happened. Finally, he looked around and, much to his astonishment, saw a big tree whose branches were squeaking. So he climbed up the tree and said, "Why, when I try to eat, do you tease me?" Thereupon he tried to split the fork of the tree but his arm got caught. It held fast and do what he could he was not able to free himself.<sup>43</sup>

As early as 1927, Radin had collected a number of such stories which grounded a book titled *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, a book he hoped would be a pathbreaking study of the historical and psychological origins of philosophy. As such, he insisted that it would be none other than John Dewey who would write the introduction. In the book's acknowledgments, Radin saved his most profound expression of gratitude for last, writing his "sincere thanks to Prof. John Dewey for his kindness in reading the proof and to write the foreword."<sup>44</sup> The six pages of that foreword are perhaps Dewey's most explicit writing about American Indian people.

At first glance, Dewey's introduction to *Primitive Man as Philosopher* seems to suggest a notable change over time in his own thinking about American Indian people. First, Dewey concurs with Radin's rejection of racial recapitulation and the application of cultural relativism to the study of "primitive people," which includes "Fuegians ... Aztecs and Mayans, bushmen ... peoples of the Nigerian coast, Australians [and] Polynesians," and American Indian people. Second, in his foreword, Dewey seems to endorse Radin's fundamental idea that Indigenous

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<sup>42</sup> Radin's version of the story was presented to readers as part of "the Trickster Myth of Winnebago Indians." Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, 30-31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>44</sup> Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, xiv.

people were capable of doing something that resembled philosophy. In such a concession, Dewey finally appears to have conceded that the category of presumed “savage” was not incompatible with “philosopher.”<sup>45</sup> Extending the status of philosophers to Indigenous people was explicitly a rejection of his 1893 essay “Superstition of Necessity.” Dewey praised Radin’s work by explaining to readers that “no one concerned with the intellectual history of mankind, especially with the background of what has now become more or less conventionally set apart as philosophy, can fail to be intensely interested in the material which he has advanced.”<sup>46</sup> Whereas a generation of Euro-American scholars had located the origins of philosophy in a rudimentary form in the “beliefs and rites” of Indians-as-savages which civilized philosophy had since surpassed, Radin told a different story.

According to Dewey, Radin’s reading of Nanabush suggested that “philosophic origins are not to be sought for in the cruder and conventionalized forms which religious beliefs assumed among the populace at large, but rather in the interpretations of the small intellectual class, whose ideas may have been crude because of limitations of subject matter at their command, but which at least were bold, independent, and free within these limitations.”<sup>47</sup> Radin may have found the origins of philosophy in primitive society, but relative to their civilized counterparts, such primitive philosophers were constrained only by their social occupations. Nevertheless, Dewey continued his long critique of essentialist variants of racial recapitulation when he emphasized how the social occupations that had created “limitations” were products of

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<sup>45</sup> This was a mutual exclusion that David Martinez worked to abolish in his work on Dewey’s only Indigenous citation, Charles Eastman. Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher*, 3-6.

<sup>46</sup> John Dewey, “Foreword,” in *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, Paul Radin (1927; repr. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), xvii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

the environment, and Indians could hardly be blamed for those constraints upon philosophy. In their own context, Indian thinkers were quite capable of doing philosophy.<sup>48</sup>

Dewey seemed particularly animated by the resonances with Radin's approach to the historical origins of philosophy and his own developing critique of constituting philosophy as a means of inquiry isolated from experimentalism. "Under the influence of modern philosophic theories, it has been assumed that the object and world were first regarded as collections of sense-data, while the obvious inconsistencies with this notion have been accounted for as animistic and supernatural injections." Radin's scholarship, Dewey suggested, "explodes this traditional notion. He makes it clear that objects and nature were conceived dynamically; that change, transition, were primary, and transformation into stability something to be accounted for."<sup>49</sup> Rather than his 1893 reading of the story of Nanabush and the tree as a story born from the savage mind and his 1893 "Superstition of Necessity," now Dewey appeared much more willing to include American Indian people in the history of not just philosophy, but his own method of experimentalism.

As a consequence, his introduction to Radin's *Primitive Man as Philosopher* consequently seems like the crucial hinge point for the purposes of tracking the place of Indigenous people in Dewey's turn toward cultural pluralism. Several years later, Dewey would insist that in such "myths" authored by the savage mind, careful scholars might come to detect the power of historical contingency upon psychological development. Should philosophers

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<sup>48</sup> Almost a decade later, Dewey opined in an essay on the question of nurture versus nature, "I do not doubt at all the existence of differences in natural endowment. But what I am questioning is the notion that they doom individuals to a fixed channel of expression. It is difficult indeed to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. But the particular form which, say, a natural musical endowment will take depends upon the social influences to which he is subjected. Beethoven in a savage tribe would doubtless have been outstanding as a musician, but he would not have been the Beethoven who composed symphonies." John Dewey, "Does Human Nature Change?" (1938), *Later Works*, 13:293.

<sup>49</sup> Dewey, "Foreword," in *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, xx.

abandon their “mentalistic psychological interpretation of experience” and instead embrace the paradigm that psychology was a product of interactions with the environment, then Dewey suggested that “the historic course of the experiential development of the sciences out of experiences of the sort found among savage peoples would suffice to prove that experience” was itself the naturalistic method of evolution, science, and experimentalism.<sup>50</sup> “When we explain a curious superstition entertained by members of a savage tribe we do not do so, on my theory, by referring it to ‘consciousness,’ but to specifiable natural conditions—traditions and institutions being included in this case among natural conditions.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, Dewey’s introduction seems to mark his explicit refutation of his older attitude about Indians-as-savages with a new concession about the psychological and historical significance of stories like that of Nanabush.

This possibility seems further evidenced by Dewey’s correspondence with Scudder Klyce. Klyce, a self-styled philosopher, romantic, and mystic, was a frequent correspondent with Dewey through much of the early decades of the twentieth century. Though Dewey tolerated this correspondence, Klyce could express such bitterness toward Dewey that it seemed downright antagonistic. Klyce’s letter regarding Radin’s book was no exception. “It happens that I have just been reading Radin’s Primitive Man as Philosopher—a sort of intuition guided me to it, although I got it home before I was aware that you had written an introduction to it,” Klyce wrote to Dewey. Klyce further informed Dewey that Radin’s book offered “a sort of general history of the two types of psychology, with the solution a unification of the two, and also a sort of embryonic recapitulation in the young child.” Confident that he himself had read Radin right, Klyce ripped Dewey’s foreword. “The substantial gist of your remark I have quoted is that you personally don’t like the old theological terms, and hence you assert that primitive thinkers rejected them—

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<sup>50</sup> Dewey, “Experience, Knowledge, and Value: A Rejoinder” (1939), *Later Works*, 14: 17-18.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

which is precisely what they didn't do and what Radin says they didn't do. You let your emotions quite blind you to the existing facts."<sup>52</sup>

In his rejoinder to Klyce, Dewey once again revealed his investment in Nanabush. While he admitted that the foreword might be argumentatively deficient, he had no choice but to defend himself from a number of Scudder's mischaracterizations. Dewey responded, "I don't stand up for the form in which I made my statements." But he immediately riposted, insisting that he was addressing a live issue in cultural anthropology: "But it is true that primitive thinkers as compared with later philosophers were as judged by his specimens had a more dynamic view and emotional view of the world than most of the latter. Like children they were still more unsophisticated."<sup>53</sup> He went on: "Incidentally in your reference to saying that Radin says nothing comparable with what I say about the origin of philosophy. There I expressly say that in the light of his material a certain view needs reconsideration. Since the view rejected exists and has influence, and since his material is inconsistent with it."

What "certain view" was Dewey referring to? As late as 1927, Dewey was still concerned that many racial recapitulation theorists, eugenicists, or other racial essentialists regarded savage psychology as qualitatively fundamentally different from civilized mind. Here Dewey reveals that his real investment in Radin's work is continuing his thirty-year effort to disprove the essentialist version of racial recapitulation. What he had attempted to argue (and now Radin had shown) was that "myths" produced by Indians-as-savages were not the fanciful products of psychologies wholly different from those of Euro-Americans, but simply reflected an earlier form of a universal human psychology. By endorsing Radin's research, Dewey seemed primed to carry his universalism in psychology into philosophy.

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<sup>52</sup> Scudder Klyce to John Dewey, October 19, 1927, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

<sup>53</sup> John Dewey to Scudder Klyce, October 21, 1927, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, vol. 2.

Despite his new potential willingness to fold Indian thought into the category of philosophy, Dewey's attitudes about Indigenous people were still constrained by the frontier discourse. His habit of instrumentalizing Indians seemed to make it impossible for Dewey to interpret his Indigenous contemporaries as philosophers. Even after he read Radin's book and wrote its foreword, Dewey continued to write about Indians for much of the 1920s and 1930s in ultimately dismissive ways that were far more consistent with his depiction of Indians as early as the 1890s. According to Dewey, Radin's findings enjoined "the student of moral and social philosophy [to] give serious attention to the weighty mass of evidence which is adduced to show that early man instead of being enslaved to the group to the point of absorption in it was in fact highly individualistic, within certain limits more so than modern civilized man."<sup>54</sup> Dewey continued in this vein: "The extent to which early ethical judgments in the way of social condemnation were limited to special occasions instead of being generalized into judgments of character at large raise the question whether their moral standpoint was not in so far sounder than that which civilized 'progress' has developed."<sup>55</sup> Such accounts, while made in approving fashion, still associated Indian people's supposedly superior ethical dispositions beyond, or outside of, civilization and modernity.

While Radin heaped praise and gratitude on him for writing the foreword, for his part, Dewey noted his somewhat awkward fit to pen the introduction in the first place. "To my preface to Radin—I don't think much of my Introduction," Dewey wrote to Klyce. "There are circumstances beyond my control which he knew of and still wanted me to write one which made it a poor piece of work." While it is unclear what circumstances Dewey is referring to (possibly the death of Alice Chipman Dewey in 1927), Dewey felt that he was hardly an obvious

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.



choice to introduce Radin's project. The result was a piece of writing of which he was evidently not proud. While this admission may seem like a strategic concession to the argumentative Klyce, Dewey's hesitancy is evident on the first page of the introduction itself, where Dewey hedges about his expertise. In contrast to those whom he called "students of primitive life," Dewey was quick to establish himself as "a layman."<sup>56</sup> Dewey seemed eager to disclaim any familiarity with Radin's "materials" such as stories of Nanabush.

While he appreciated Radin's work, he never really incorporated its lessons into his own philosophy: that Indigenous people were still using Nanabush to make meaning of their ongoing experience. For this reason, such appreciation did not translate to careful attention to the contemporary political struggles of Indigenous people. In time, this silence would compound, leaving America's foremost philosopher of education and democracy muted on the egregiously anti-democratic schooling of Indian schooling.

### **Nanabush Today**

Scholars interested in the resonances between Dewey's pragmatism and Indigenous thought ought to pay greater heed to Nanabush. Long after Dewey moved on from the story of the Good Spirit, Nanabush remains an important figure among Anishinaabe people. In her 2020 novel, *The Night Watchman*, Louise Erdrich describes what Nanabush means to her protagonist, Thomas Wazhashk ("muskrat" in Anishinaabemowin), a character based on her own grandfather. In her novel, after a run-in with a pair of Mormon missionaries, Thomas reflects on his preference for Turtle Mountain people's stories of

their supernatural figure Nanabozho, who fooled ducks, got angry at his own butt and burnt it off, created a shit mountain to climb down when stuck high in a tree, had a wolf

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<sup>56</sup> Dewey, "Foreword," in *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, xvii.

for his nephew, and no conscience at any time, who painted the kingfisher lovely colors and by trickery fed his children when they starved, who threw his penis over his shoulder and his balls to the west, who changed himself to a stump and made his penis look like a branch where the kingfisher perched, who killed a god by shooting its shadow, and everything useful and much that was essential, like laughter.<sup>57</sup>

In Erdrich's catalog of Nanabush's exploits, we get a sense of the diversity of Nanabush stories across Anishinaabewaki. We hear echoes of Blackbird's prideful 1887 telling of Nanabush's battle against the god of the deep, Crashing Thunder's early twentieth-century story of Nanabush and the tree, and even the trickster's appearance in an award-winning contemporary novel. Authors like Blackbird were dexterous with their tellings, changing the emphasis on Nanabush to fit their audience, meaning, and ends. A cosmogony story, a Christian polemic, a ribald joke: Nanabush was and continues to be a figure fit for the changing dynamics of everyday Indigenous life. Nanabush appears as oral tradition and in Native writing—changing, morphing, and adapting. We also get a sense of the wider variety of stories about Nanabush that Anishinaabe or Ho-Chunk people might not have shared with the likes of Euro-American Michiganders or anthologists such as Paul Radin. Because Nanabush could change his form over time, he represents the root of an Indigenous experimentalism. Unlike Blackbird, Dewey heard Nanabush through the frontier discourse. As a consequence, Dewey clung to an unchanging conception of Nanabush as an Instrumental Indian, typifying the place of all Indigenous people in his philosophy.

This does not mean, however, that there is nothing in Dewey's method from which we might borrow. For those familiar with Dewey's philosophy of experience, there seems to be much that resonates in the encounter between Nanabush and the tree. The way Nanabush heard the noise between the wind and tree sounds a lot like Dewey's 1896 "Reflex Arc." Dewey

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<sup>57</sup> Louise Erdrich, *The Night Watchman* (New York: Harper, 2020), 382.

argued that humans respond to stimuli not by cause and effect, but all at once; noisy trees were a feature of the environment itself, not a mental state in a listener's mind.<sup>58</sup> Nanabush was irritated not because he simply heard the tree, but because the tree had made the environment noisy. Furthermore, Nanabush's climb to discover the wind's effect on the tree does seem a lot like an Anishinaabe version of Dewey's matrix of inquiry. Indeed, Nanabush experiences the tree as talking, whose words are disorienting and undesirable, a problematic situation in need of remedy to restore the placid flow of experience. Nanabush's climb might then be understood as a kind of inquiry intended to resolve the problematic situation. His inquiry yields not experimental intelligence, but rather humiliation. If the situation had been transformed, it would have been changed as Nanabush came to understand that he was being chastised by the wind and the tree. This new understanding would have offered Nanabush—and listeners—greater control over their environment, which suggests further lines of action: in this case, to cease being greedy and to attend to the proper obligations to his relation, *waawaashkehsi*, the deer. Reading Dewey's experimentalism alongside this Nanabush story, rather than as its instrument, suggests how Dewey's experimentalism may yet be of use for the articulation of an anti-colonial praxis in contemporary Indigenous education.<sup>59</sup>

That is because hearing a story about Nanabush is already akin to getting an education.<sup>60</sup> Nanabush fails as often as he succeeds. He plays tricks and suffers mischief. He tries, fails, and tries again. From these exploits, we are offered lessons about doing things in a good way—or not. Either way, Nanabush teaches. Nanabush is a figure appropriate to culturally relevant

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<sup>58</sup> On Dewey's concept of immanent and referential meaning and its potential compatibility with Indigenous thought, see Pratt, *Native Pragmatism*, 71-77.

<sup>59</sup> On resonances between experimentalism and pedagogy with Native epistemology and teaching, see Gregory A. Cajete, "Where There Is No Name for Science," in *Red Pedagogy*, 121-28.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Peacock, "Teaching as Story," in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, ed. Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 103-18; see also "Storytelling," in Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 144.

curriculum because he speaks to Indigenous experience and Indigenous ways of knowing. And such culturally relevant curriculum is best secured by self-determination in schooling. In this way, an Indigenous insistence on teaching Nanabush is one valence removed from an insistence on self-determination in education.<sup>61</sup> Today, Nanabush has pulled off the ultimate pedagogical trick: he is both the object of the learning itself and a means by which to teach it. “As Nanaboozhoo walked the Earth he grew in wisdom,” writes Anishinaabe author Linda LeGarde Grover: “Today, as our ancestors did, we learn about the world, and the good ways to be, by hearing the stories about his life and adventures.”<sup>62</sup> Listening to Indigenous storytellers who have kept Nanabush alive all these years, I hear not an experimentalism defined through Indigenous stories, but rather the embodiment of an Indigenous experimentalism himself.<sup>63</sup> To hear him, one must listen, as Grover suggests, “the Ojibwe way,” which requires one to “listen quietly, attentively, and with your heart as well as your ears.”<sup>64</sup>

Why all the fuss about Nanabush? In one sense, I am just making up for lost time. Growing up, I did not have an opportunity to learn from such stories of Nanabush and the tree. After his traumatic experience at the Morris Industrial Indian School in Minnesota, Joseph and Mary Villeneuve struck out for Oregon, pulled by the prospects of a life for their children unfettered by such impositions. My aunty Dottie, Joseph’s youngest child, told me that a life in Oregon seemed to offer a measure of relief from the hardship they had experienced in North Dakota. In the eyes of their non-Native neighbors in Neche, “Being Indian was like being a

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<sup>61</sup> On the conjoined nature of intellectual and pedagogical sovereignty, see Grande, *Red Pedagogy*, 73-75.

<sup>62</sup> Linda LeGarde Grover, *Onigamiising: Seasons of an Ojibwe Year* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 149.

<sup>63</sup> Lana Ray and Paul N. Cormier, “Killing the Weendigo with Maple Syrup: Anishnaabe pedagogy and post-secondary research,” *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 35, no. 1 (2012): 221, 224; Nicole Bell, “Anishinaabe Research Theory and Methodology as Informed by Nanaboozhoo, the Bundle Bag, and the Medicine Wheel,” in *Indigenous Research: Theories, Practices, and Relationships*, ed. Deborah McGregor and Jean-Paul Restoule (Ontario, CA: Canadian Scholars, 2018), 175-86.

<sup>64</sup> Grover, *Onigamiising*, 150.

dog,” Dottie said. “In Oregon, you could be whoever you were.”<sup>65</sup> Seeking to unburden themselves and begin a new life on the West Coast, my family left many things behind in Turtle Mountain, including what knowledge they had of Anishinaabemowin—and of Nanabush. Perhaps things might have been different if Corbett had been able to choose where his son Joseph went to school; perhaps not. I’ll never know. But I do know this: rather than passing down stories of Nanabush as the bounty of the Villeneuve’s Anishinaabe roots, I instead had an altogether different kind of fruit in the form of a letter from a steadfast father telling the federal government a very different story: “We want to have our children sent back at once.” To me, stories of Nanabush and the tree, then, are not just the seeds of an Indigenous experimentalism, but they are perhaps the forest itself, the growth of which evidences a true realization of democracy in Indigenous education.

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<sup>65</sup> Dottie Edy, interview by author, December 12, 2019.

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