

# CHAPTER FOUR

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## INDIAN SCHOOLS

*Some sent their kids to Indians school, but others, they would come and pick you up and take you, whether you wanted to go to school or not. It was the time to educate the Indian, and get them away from being heathens ... living the old way of living off the land. They wanted you to become farmers, you know, to wear wool pants and shirts and live in a house, learn to eat with a knife, fork, and spoon. – Jack Thorpe*

## EUROPEAN STYLE EDUCATION OF INDIANS

In 1887, the year of Jim Thorpe's birth, American Indians did not enjoy the rights of U.S. citizenship. In the eyes of the law they were minors, unable to make decisions on their own. The United States was also now taking away Indian children and sending them to distant government boarding schools.

European-style education was not new to Native Americans. Both white and Indian teachers, many of them *missionaries*, had long been providing Western education to numerous tribes. For example, in early eighteenth century New England, *Reverend Eleazar Wheelock*, the founder of Dartmouth College, taught theology to such American Indian converts. Some of them went on to be missionaries themselves, like *Samson Occum* of the Mohegan tribe, who studied under Wheelock from 1743 to 1748. Such prestigious American universities as Harvard had Indian education as a part of their original purpose. Although conversion to Christianity was often the primary motive behind missionary efforts, Indians sometimes used such education to benefit their people. Numerous tribal leaders had a similar philosophy as Hiram Thorpe. They believed that if their children gained a white education, they could use that knowledge to help protect Indian interests. But in the late nineteenth century, education became a weapon against Indian cultural survival, with the creation of the Indian boarding schools.



*Primary Class, Carlisle Indian School*

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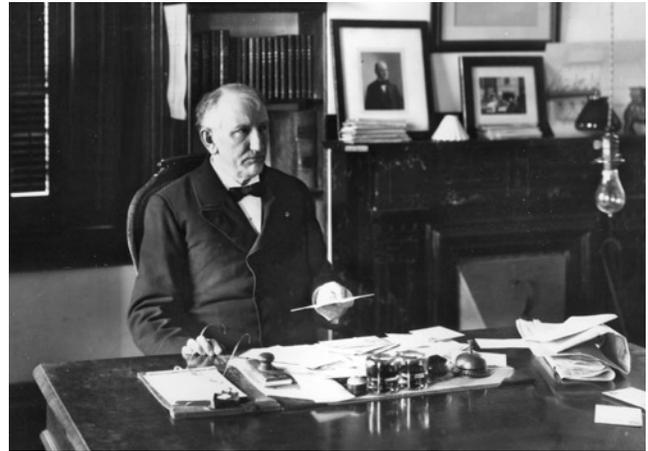
## RICHARD HENRY PRATT

The best known of these institutions was the Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, headed by **Richard Henry Pratt**, a decorated veteran of the Civil War. Pratt's first experiences with Indians came in 1867, when he was serving as a lieutenant in the Tenth Cavalry, a new unit composed of African American enlisted men and white officers and based in Indian Territory. Pratt not only respected his "colored" troops, he also discovered that he could work well with Indian scouts. He gradually came to the conclusion that color and race were artificial barriers between people. Any man, Pratt realized, could better himself. "The rights of citizenship," he wrote, "include equal fraternity and equal privilege for development." It was a radical idea for his time, and he would pursue it with nearly religious fervor for the remainder of his life.

After the **Red River War** of 1875, Pratt was given the job of escorting seventy-two Indian prisoners, largely Kiowas, Comanches, and Cheyennes, to imprisonment at Fort Marion, an **old Spanish fort** in St. Augustine, Florida. As their jailer, Pratt saw an opportunity to try out some of his radical ideas. Even though the prisoners included men labeled as renegades and murderers, he was sure they could be redeemed. He gave his charges considerable freedom, **dressed them in military uniforms**, and treated them as new recruits. He also began offering classes in reading, writing, and Bible study.

The results, Pratt would later claim in his 1923 memoir, *Battlefield and Classroom*, were that his men "set an example to civilization in good behavior." Not only did they learn to read and write, several began to study for the ministry. A number of the younger men went on to **Hampton Institute**, in Hampton, Virginia, also founded by a former military officer, in 1869, to provide education for African Americans, and to other schools of higher learning. His successes were not without some setbacks, but Pratt was now convinced he had found the way to solve the nation's so-called "Indian Problem." The Indian needed to be raised to the level of white culture – an idea that would now be called patronizing and ethnocentric. But while Pratt

respected native intelligence and potential, he felt that the native cultures held back his charges. He followed the Hampton model and developed a plan for "civilizing" those Indians who were most malleable: the children. Their parents might be set in uncivilized ways, but native children taken far away from their homes and placed in a regimented setting could more readily be forced to leave behind the traditional lifestyle of their relatives on the reservations.



*Richard Henry Pratt, Carlisle Indian School*  
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## THE CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

Pratt succeeded in procuring the abandoned military barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, for his experiment. Some of his "Florida Boys" came with him to build the fence around the new school and to help the incoming students adjust to their strange new surroundings. **The Carlisle Indian Industrial School**, the largest and most influential of all the government Indian boarding schools, was opened in 1879. Carlisle was ultimately the model for two dozen other similar paramilitary institutions around the nation. **Haskell Institute** in Kansas, where Jim Thorpe went to school for a short time, was one of the more successful. (Haskell still exists today – with a radically different philosophy – as an American Indian college.) There were also less prestigious boarding and day schools near most of the reservations, such as the Sac and Fox school where Jim would first experience being cooped up in a classroom.



*Students in 1874, Carlisle Indian Industrial School*  
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Carlisle, as it was popularly known, remained the model for Indian education for decades to come. During the thirty-nine years of its existence, more than 10,000 children from dozens of tribes attended *Carlisle*. Many of them started when they were very young. Under strict military discipline, they were separated from their families for at least five years. On arrival at Carlisle, the boys had their long hair cut and were dressed in military uniforms. The girls were outfitted in long drab dresses and taught to wear their hair in the modest fashion of the day. All students at Carlisle – and the other Indian boarding schools that followed – were forbidden to speak their own language or engage in any traditional practices. Strict penalties, including incarceration and beatings, were meted out to offenders. They were required to go to church on Sunday and trained in such useful skills as sewing and carpentry, leatherwork, farming, and baking, in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic. Vocational training and manual labor were highly stressed at all the Indian boarding schools. It was strongly believed that training in such useful trades would give these young Indians the best chance to earn a living after leaving school and entering the workforce. Many

educators also wrongly believed that Indians lacked the intellectual ability to excel in any vocational training other than menial labor. Carlisle and the other Indian schools also relied heavily on the unpaid labor of their students, who did the cooking, the laundry, the grounds-keeping, and all the other jobs needed to keep a school running smoothly and in good repair. For example, when steam heat was introduced to the campus buildings, it was Indian students who dug the trenches and did the pipefitting.

The Outing System at Carlisle was an important adjunct to the academic and vocational training. In order to give the students a sense of the working world and to place them in white families who were supposed to accept them into their households, many Carlisle students were sent out to labor in outlying farms and shops at very low wages during the summers, or for even longer periods. Pratt called his *Outing System* “The Supreme Americanizer,” since he felt it would make the students self-reliant and impress upon them the worth of time and work. Some were also sent to work in factories, including the *Ford plant* in Detroit, Michigan, in the 1910s. Many of the outing students were treated well, but others suffered neglect and abuse at the hands

of their host families. Jim Thorpe's own school record at Carlisle indicates that he was sent off to a farm only four months after his arrival, but that he ran away and came back to Carlisle. He was sent out to yet another farm not long after. During his first three years at the Indian School, Jim spent twenty-one months on farms and only about fourteen months on campus.

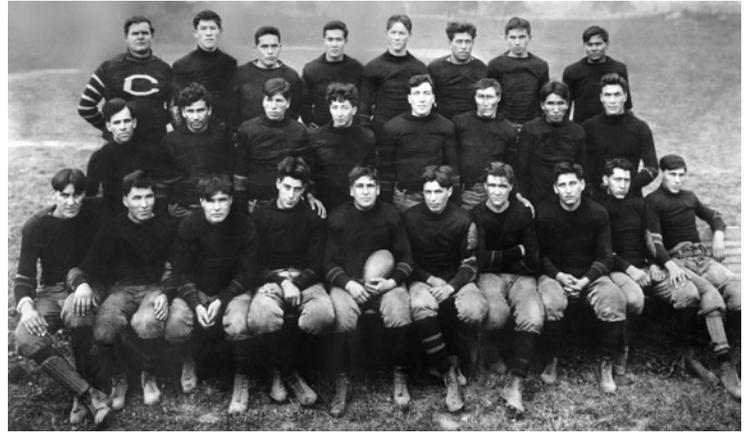
It should be noted that Carlisle, more than any other Indian school, stressed academic training. Painting, debating, poetry, and the plays of Shakespeare were considered important components of a well-rounded education and were included in the curriculum. The famous American poet *Marianne Moore* first taught at Carlisle, where Jim Thorpe became one of her favorite students.



*Student String Quintet, Carlisle Indian School*  
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Carlisle's reputation was built on its sports program, which was second to none. Although the education of its older students was only at the high school level, and thus the number of Indian athletes old enough and talented enough to engage in college-level sports was quite small, Carlisle's teams began competing with great success against some of the largest and most prestigious colleges and universities, including the Ivy League teams of Harvard, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania. It helped, of course, that Carlisle employees recruited talented and promising American Indian athletes from all over the United States. But when Carlisle went up against such football powerhouses as

Harvard, its opponents had three or four times as many varsity players.



*1907 Carlisle Football Team*  
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Carlisle's sports programs brought a lot of attention to the school. Initially opposed to football because of its violence, Pratt later accepted and celebrated it because it enhanced the image of his school. A tireless propagandist, Pratt kept up a steady stream of letters to influential people and Congressmen, brought out *posters* and pamphlets extolling the school, and saw to the publication and wide distribution of booster publications (sometimes with articles written by white teachers pretending to be Indian students), such as those found in the weekly *Indian Helper*.

Publicizing Carlisle's success in sports was the job of another man – Carlisle's charismatic athletic director and football coach, *Glenn Scobey Warner*. Known familiarly as "Pop," Warner was a Cornell graduate whose tenure at Carlisle lasted twelve years. Known for his constant attempts to "beat the rules," Warner was one of the game's greatest innovators. His sports program also brought huge revenues to Carlisle through ticket sales. Interestingly, the money was not controlled by the United States government or by Superintendent Pratt. It is a measure of Pop Warner's power at Carlisle that he maintained absolute control of the income from Carlisle sports activities.



*Glenn Scobey ("Pop") Warner, Carlisle Football Field*  
CUMBERLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Despite the glamour of its sports programs and all Pratt's publicity efforts, Carlisle's overall record was far from perfect. Fewer than 1,000 Indian students actually graduated. More than 1,000 ran away. Many Indian families opposed the boarding school system, but their children were still taken from them – often by force. Children suffered from homesickness, disease, and abuse at the school. The Carlisle cemetery is full of the graves of Indian children who died there. Others, sent home suffering from one epidemic disease or another, not only died at home but also passed their sickness on to others in their communities. Communities and families were also affected in another way. The harsh military discipline of Carlisle (and most other Indian schools) stood in sharp contrast to the nurturing family atmosphere Indian children usually enjoyed at home.

After being raised in these regimented institutions, many Indian boarding school students found it hard to become loving and nurturing parents when they returned to their tribal nations. They had been cut off from the training so critical to their traditional identity, relative to family, extended family, and nation.

There were other problems as well, even for Carlisle's success stories. Those who "assimilated" still found little opportunity to succeed in white society, where they were often viewed as "savages." They also found it hard to fit in when they eventually returned home – strangers in their own lands, caught between two worlds. One way or another, every American Indian family in the United States was affected by the boarding schools, which persisted well into the second half of the twentieth century.



# INDIAN SCHOOLS

## Concepts and Discussion

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students learn about the creation of American Indian boarding schools, their history and goals, and their effect on American Indians.

### TEACHER'S QUICK REFERENCE

#### *European-Style Education of Indians*

- Begun by missionaries.
- Early mandates of Harvard and Dartmouth included Indian education.
- Education was seen by some tribal leaders as useful.
- Boarding schools were used as a means to destroy native culture.

#### *Richard Henry Pratt*

- A Civil War veteran and a commander of troops in the West, where he grew to respect Indian scouts.
- In charge of Indian prisoners at Fort Marion, Florida, he gave them military training and education.
- The success of Pratt's Indian prisoners led to his idea for solving the "Indian Problem."
- Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

#### *Carlisle Industrial Indian School*

- Founded in 1879, the school existed for 39 years.
- The school employed strict military discipline and emphasized both vocational and liberal arts.
- Carlisle's Outing System was designed to teach Indians the white work ethic.
- Carlisle became a model for other government boarding schools.
- Carlisle sports teams successfully competed against much larger non-Indian schools.
- Sports came to play an important role in Carlisle's reputation around the United States.
- Athletic Director Pop Warner controlled all the money earned from ticket sales at sports events.
- Over 10,000 Indian students were enrolled in Carlisle, but fewer than 1,000 graduated. Many ran away or died of disease.
- Some students were forcibly brought to Carlisle, against the wishes of their families.
- Carlisle students suffered abuse and disease, and the harsh military discipline they were subjected to disrupted their family relationships later.
- In general, Carlisle graduates ultimately found it hard to fit in, whether in white or Indian culture.

## KEY CONTENT

- Indian Boarding School system
- Richard Henry Pratt's background and role
- "College" sports at Carlisle
- Negative effects of the Indian boarding schools

## CONTENT REVIEW

- Why did Hiram P. Thorpe and some American Indian leaders consider Western-style education could be useful to their people?
- How were the goals of the government boarding schools different from these goals?
- What experiences led Richard Henry Pratt to appreciate the qualities of the Native Americans?
- How did he put his ideas of racial equality into practice?
- What did he do at Fort Marion, and how did this affect his educational philosophy?
- Why did he choose Indian children rather than adults?
- When and where was Pratt's school opened?
- How long did the Carlisle Indian School exist?
- What was life like for a Carlisle student?
- How did Pratt publicize the success of his school?
- Who was Pop Warner, and why was he important to Carlisle?
- What benefits did sports bring to Carlisle?
- What were some of the negative aspects of Carlisle and other Indian boarding schools?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Divide into two groups, one of which represents Indian parents or leaders who feel that education is good for Native children and one that represents Indian parents or leaders who oppose such education. Engage in a debate.
- Some described Richard Henry Pratt as a messiah for the Indians, while others called him a madman. Can either or both of these two opposing points of view be justified?
- Imagine yourself as a young Indian child who has never been away from home and has just been sent to Carlisle. Describe what your experience might be like.
- Imagine yourself as a nineteenth-century teacher at Carlisle in your first day of classes with a group of new Indian students. What problems do you think you would encounter? How would you solve them?

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*Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, by David Wallace Adams, University Press of Kansas, 1995. Recently released in paperback. Adams treats the history thoroughly, with respect and honesty, yet avoids the trap of over-sentimentalizing the assimilation story. Includes interesting accounts of the personnel associated with the boarding schools of the period and lays out the events that led to the final demise of Carlisle. This book is a good basic primer on Indian education, with strong emphasis on Carlisle.

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*Telling Stories Out of School: Remembering the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, 1879-1918*, by Genevieve Bell. Dissertation Ordering Service, #9908713. Bell's work is unparalleled in interpreting the National Archives and Records Administration data from the Carlisle student folders. Examines trends, statistics, and ferrets out stories heretofore undocumented.

