



**Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences, 1868-2000.** Margaret L. Archuleta, Brenda J. Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, eds. Phoenix: Heard Museum, 2000. 144 pp.

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This solid and informative book is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on the boarding schools that were created by the U.S. federal government with the intent to both educate and assimilate American Indian children. The book succeeds on a number of levels in conveying the history and goals of these schools, in exploring the range of pedagogical approaches, and most impressively, in creating contexts through which the personal experiences of Native people of many tribes are heard. It goes beyond a one-dimensional critique of government policy and institutions, and ultimately gives a lucid vision of the complex and varied impact, both positive and negative, on the students and their families. The material is presented through oral history, photographs, poetry, documents, biographical vignettes, and analytical essays. The words of young students from the 19th century, and of contemporary scholars, are presented in such a way as to acknowledge their equally valuable contributions.

An added strength of the book is the engaging design and format. The photographs, such as the chilling one of students' gravestones at Carlisle Indian School, are particularly well chosen and compelling. *Away from Home* will serve well both as an introduction to the topic for the general reader, and for classroom use, particularly in tandem with earlier work by Lomawaima and Child. In addition to the essays by editors Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima, the volume includes essays by Rayna Green and John Troutman, by John Bloom, and by W. Roger Buffalohead and Paulette Fairbanks Molin.

The first portion of the book outlines the background, philosophy, and history of the establishment of the schools, including both educational philosophies and those driven by assimilationist assumptions aimed at ethnocide. The authors discuss the variety of reasons that led students to attend, both coerced and by choice, and student responses to this often-traumatic transition from home to educational institutions. After the arrival of the students, the schools bent to their "task of creating a new kind of individual" (p. 24). Until reforms in the 1930s, this included strict military discipline and frequently harsh physical punishment. Academically, the schools stressed vocational and domestic instruction, with only a few hours per day in the classroom. "Clearly, curriculum was not concerned with academic or intellectual development among Indian children. The goal was to produce subservient, docile, and physically regimented Indians who would follow federal directions" (p. 34). The essay by Buffalohead and Molin describes a short-lived experiment to house and train entire families



at Hampton Institute, and "transform them likewise into pure sweet Christian homes" (p. 122).

In many instances documents effectively personalize the experiences of students and the effects on their families. These include the fascinating official student records that note information on the students' prior schooling and parents' occupations, and the series of letters between a mother and school authorities regarding her son's health. Other documents and the accompanying essays indicate the physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse that some of the students endured.

One of the recurring themes woven throughout the book is that in spite of the hardships, "Students took federal goals and made something different of them" (p. 58). There are ample examples of the various strategies for survival that the students employed, "resistance, accommodation, faith in oneself and one's heritage, the ability to learn from hard times and create something beautiful and meaningful from scraps and fragments" (p. 19). In the editors' words, "Ultimately, the story of Indian boarding schools is one of personal survival and cultural triumph" (p.10).

For example, in the arts, music, pageantry, and sports, students often subverted the school policies intended to eliminate Indianness. The students disguised their dances and cultural traditions as American patriotic displays for the 4th of July or holidays such as Thanksgiving. In addition, students often returned to their tribal communities after leaving school, and utilized their school skills to revitalize their cultural traditions. "Debaters, orators, student council leaders, and princesses often became political leaders of their tribes and pueblos" (p. 83). Biographical vignettes of Gertrude Bonnin, Tsianina Redfeather, Angel de Cora, Lewis Tewanima, and Jim Thorpe are used effectively to illustrate the role of boarding schools in the lives of these well-known individuals. "In so many ways, Native students turned attempts to repress and replace Native tradition into something viable and vital, for themselves as individuals and for their Native communities, local and national" (p. 83). "Indianness challenged the assimilationists' assumption that Indian identity was antithetical to full participation in the American market economy" (p. 74). Some of the skills in oratory, music, and dance were lucrative ways to earn a living.

It is difficult to find fault with this thorough and thoughtful book. One small quibble is that a map would have been useful to show the location of the various schools, both to orient the reader, and to demonstrate the great distances most of the schools were located from the tribal homelands of the students who boarded there.

Useful end materials include an extensive reference list, recommended readings for younger readers, an index, and short informative biographical notes regarding the contributing authors.