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### Native America's Pastime: How Football at an Indian Boarding School Empowered Native American Men and Revitalized their Culture, 1880-1920

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# **Native America's Pastime**

**How Football at an Indian Boarding School Empowered Native American Men and Revitalized their Culture, 1880-1920**

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Spring 2019**

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## Introduction

Dennison Wheelock walked up to the stage at the annual Carlisle Indian Industrial School football banquet in December of 1897. The institution's bandmaster and a current student from the Oneida tribe, Wheelock had prepared a few words regarding the importance of football to Carlisle and its students, whose program had entered its fourth year of existence. In his speech, the young man invoked the "eternal war" between the Indian and white man over centuries of Euro-American colonization and seizure of Native territory. "The only way I see how [indigenous people] may reoccupy the lands that were once his," he claimed, "Is through football, and as football takes brains, takes energy, proves whether civilization can be understood by the Indian or not... we are willing to perpetuate [the eternal war]."<sup>1</sup>

In just a few sentences, Wheelock revealed an important representation that football carried for Indian student-athletes. The speech summarized a significance that would remain at the forefront of players' minds throughout the game's existence at Carlisle. Their struggle on the playing field was understood as a continuation of their ancestors' fight on the battlefield. To Indian athletes, football was a form of redemption.

These cultural understandings of football ran so deep among Carlisle students that they sometimes wore off on the school's white personnel. In 1912, fifteen years after Wheelock's speech, the Carlisle, Pennsylvania boarding school traveled north to West Point, New York. For the second time in history, the Army football team would host the Indian squad in a pivotal mid-season matchup. Led by star halfback Dwight D. Eisenhower and his teammate Omar Bradley, the Cadets hoped to avoid their second loss

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<sup>1</sup> Dennison Wheelock, "Annual Banquet," *The Red Man*, Cumberland Country Historical Society (hereafter, CCHS), January 1898, 5.

in a season filled with high expectations. Carlisle was undefeated on the year, guided by head coach Glenn “Pop” Warner and the versatile Sac and Fox Native Jim Thorpe. The game’s result had major implications for both teams: the winner would catapult to the top of the collegiate rankings while the loser would solidify a champion-less season.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the years that had passed, Wheelock’s words still resonated with the Carlisle Indians, who knew the matchup represented something more than their respective national football standing. The game embodied a story centuries old, filled with persistent struggle and relentless violence. Pop Warner, a veteran of the American armed forces, attempted to draw from this reservoir of Indian sentiment as a way to motivate his players. “These men playing against you today are soldiers... You are Indians,” he told his



The 1911- 1912 Carlisle Indians offense. Quarterback Gus Welsh crouches over in the back row, second to the left with fullback Jim Thorpe to his immediate left.

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<sup>2</sup> Sally Jenkins, *The Real All Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 282.

players before the game. “Tonight, we will know if you are warriors.”<sup>3</sup> The New York Times would write that tackling Thorpe was “like trying to clutch a shadow” as the star player scored two touchdowns and led the Indians’ new offense in a 27-6 rout of the Cadets.<sup>4</sup>

The Indians saw the gridiron as a battlefield. Similar to Wheelock’s sentiment, Carlisle quarterback Gus Welch recalled that the meeting with Army was emblematic of “the real war out in the West.”<sup>5</sup> His squad had dominated their previous competition through means of nontraditional football, which had become a team trademark under Warner, one of the sport’s revolutionary minds.<sup>6</sup> He knew that Army not only posed a significant challenge, but carried an important weight in the spirit of his players. Conscious of this, the head coach devised a game plan that accommodated Natives’ cultural understanding of football and embraced unconventional play. Carlisle was regularly outsized by their competition - this was especially true against West Point - but reliably faster and more agile.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the playbook was flooded with trick plays, end-arounds, and forward passes; successful execution required a degree of sophistication seldom seen in that era.<sup>8</sup>

Carlisle’s exploitation of speed and deception bore striking parallels to the war tactics of Plains Indians in conflict on the frontier a generation earlier. According to historian and Lieutenant Colonel Clyde R. Simmons, Native military prowess depended

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander M. Weyand, *The Saga of American Football* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 101. Weyand played for the 1912 Army Cadets football team and personally corresponded with Warner, Thorpe, and other Carlisle Indians players, per Jenkins.

<sup>4</sup> Unknown, “Jim Thorpe Beats the Army,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 1912, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 283. Quoted from an unmarked newspaper clipping in the Welch Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Pope, *Football’s Greatest Coaches* (Atlanta: Tupper and Love, 1955), 293. Fellow coach Amos Alonzo Stagg called Pratt, “[O]ne of the excellent creators,” in reference to his innovation of the game.

<sup>7</sup> Glenn S. Warner, “The Indian Massacres,” *Collier’s Weekly*, October 17, 1931, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 5.

on “mobile hit-and-runs.”<sup>9</sup> Their guerilla strategies were frequently employed in Plains warfare, as surprise attacks were considered a military virtue.<sup>10</sup> American forces failed to find innovative counters to Native battle plans in the Great Plains because, as historian Robert Utley argues, “[T]he Army as an institution never evolved a doctrine of Indian warfare... lacking a formal doctrine of unconventional war, the Army waged conventional war.”<sup>11</sup>

It was the decision of the Carlisle players to implement Warner’s plan. Like their ancestors’ quick-hitting strikes in battle, the players believed the game strategy would exploit West Point’s orthodox style of football, and unanimously voted to unveil its genius that day. Warner later reflected on their decision, writing, “[N]othing delighted [my team] more than to outsmart the pale faces. There was never a time when they wouldn’t rather have won by an eyelash with some wily stratagem than by a large score with straight football.”<sup>12</sup> His crass descriptions of the players’ deceptive and belligerent instincts belied the important truth that Wheelock revealed fifteen years before. By forging a connection to their ancestral past with an innovative game plan, the Carlisle Indians turned a sport of acculturation into a tool of preservation.

As the crowd of three thousand strong learned that day, the gridiron was a true equalizer.<sup>13</sup> Since it was first introduced to the Indian boarding school in 1890, football represented something more to members of the Carlisle program. Richard Henry Pratt,

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<sup>9</sup> Clyde R. Simmons, “The Indian Wars and American Military Thought, 1865-1890,” *U.S. Army War College* (1986): 1.

<sup>10</sup> Marian W. Smith, “The War Complex of the Plains Indians,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 78, no. 3 (January 31, 1938): 429.

<sup>11</sup> Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 166-167.

<sup>12</sup> Warner, “The Indian Massacres,” 7.

<sup>13</sup> Unknown, “Jim Thorpe Beats Army,” 1.

the school's founder and a veteran of the Civil War and Indian wars, opened the school over a decade prior with the goal of assimilating Native youth into American society. The period coincided with a time when athletics emerged as an important facet of education in the United States. Pratt considered competitive games as a creative avenue to expose students at Carlisle to the American way of life, and began incorporating sports into the institution's curriculum as another acculturation tactic. His one exception to this was football, a sport he considered too brutal by nature for his students to play. Many other educators of the era shared his sentiment. Yet, despite the controversy surrounding the game, its popularity continued to rise in the collegiate ranks. Under pressure from his Indian students, Pratt was forced to reluctantly accept the creation of a permanent Carlisle football program.

What followed was nearly two decades of dominance achieved by the Carlisle football program. The team earned national recognition as they ascended to a college sports dynasty, elevating indigenous achievement far beyond the playing field. Pratt interpreted the team's rise to prominence as tangible evidence that the student-athletes were taking to a Western identity. He asserted that the Native men who played the game were successfully assimilated into American society by competing on the gridiron. The Indians, on the other hand, demonstrated the exact opposite. Instead of adopting Euro-American culture through the game, football helped them subvert attempts of acculturation. By strengthening their ties to an indigenous past, the Carlisle Indians claimed the game as their own.

This thesis analyzes the impact of football on student-athlete identity at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It explores the origins of Pratt's racial ideology toward Indians and evaluates his

motivations for opening Carlisle as well as his inconsistent attitude toward the game of football. The thesis asserts that the members of the Carlisle football team maintained a form of cultural continuity through the game by making it something of their own.

The thesis is broken into two parts, each containing its own predominant voice and distinct perspective, one from the Euro-American angle of Pratt and the other from the Indian viewpoint of Carlisle's football players. This structure aims to highlight the divergent understandings and manipulations of the same cultural opportunity among Native and white Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. Part I begins by providing context to circumstances of the United States in the nineteenth century relative to American expansion and its impact on the government's Indian policy. It then shifts to Pratt, discussing how his past experiences shaped his attitude toward Native people and prompted him to open Carlisle. Finally, it details the superintendent's paternalistic methods that shaped the school curriculum, concluding with his temporary suppression of football.

Part II opens with Indian student-athletes reclaiming football by negotiating new terms with Pratt to allow its return. Although Pratt would see the future success of the program as an indication that the students were adopting Western culture, the latter half of the thesis seeks to show that this thinking was misguided. Carlisle athletes begin to conceptualize the game as a continuation of frontier violence. They then see it as an opportunity to connect to traditional masculine virtues of courage, strength, fortitude, and honor. Finally, the students embark on a Pan-Indian partnership in the process of bringing football back to campus and working as a team. The gridiron became a theatre to perform the values Native people were being denied with the development of the

reservation system. Football served as a crucible for the revitalization of a threatened indigenous culture.

Although Pratt associated the players' achievements on the playing field with their successful assimilation into American society, student-athletes at Carlisle understood their feats in very different terms. Football reinforced Native male identity as Indian men time and again related features of the game to their ancestral past. Instead of suppressing customs of previous generations, members of the Carlisle program revived ancient practices in order to create a sense of cultural continuity.

## **Historiography**

The past forty years have seen a steady uptick in historians studying the impact of the Indian boarding school system. Their work often highlights themes of oppression, despair, and a genocide of indigenous identity and culture in Native youth.<sup>14</sup> While this thesis does not deny that these shaped boarding school experiences and had long-lasting effects on Indian culture, it aims to recover a broader range of experiences for young Indian people. This paper contributes to growing scholarly interest in boarding schools by specifically analyzing the idea of cultural preservation and its connection to the Carlisle football team. Moreover, the juxtaposition between the distinct perspectives of Pratt and the Indian athletes offers a new consideration of the discrepancies between the United States' acculturation program and Indian responses to it. It demonstrates how Pratt and the rest of the country mistakenly understood the success of Carlisle's football team as

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<sup>14</sup> John Bloom, *To Show What the Indian Can Do* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), vii-xxi.

evidence of their integration into American society, and how reading between the lines of the historical record forms a counter-narrative.

While there is an abundance of secondary sources that consider indigenous identity at assimilation institutions, only a handful frame Indians as subjects rather than objects of their identity formation. David Wallace Adams' *Education for Extinction*, for example, argues that although the government-sponsored schools left a profoundly negative impact on the students that attended them, they failed in their assimilation efforts because of Indian resistance. This assertion positions Native youth as more empowered agents of their fate, which is an important concept that this thesis intends to demonstrate. It looks at a broad range of methods that students took up to fight against acculturation, such as arson and running away from the school, but does not go into depth in its discussion of athletics and, more specifically, football.

An extension of Indian boarding school scholarship is the incorporation of athletics at these institutions. Sally Jenkins' *The Real All Americans*, perhaps the most popular narrative regarding the Carlisle Indians football program, primarily studies the team and its impact on the game, but also cites concepts of cultural continuity in their playing style without explicitly addressing the impact or meaning of it. For example, she describes scenes from Carlisle's 1912 game against Army in terrific detail and even mentions that players likened the game to war. Yet, her goal is not to shed light on the team identifying with an ancestral past through the connection of football and Plains battles, so it is not a focal point of the book. It primarily addresses the impact Carlisle players had on the game, not the other way around.

Adams' "More Than a Game: The Carlisle Indians Take to the Gridiron, 1893-1917" explores the "complex meanings of Indian-white football, including its connection to the

history of frontier conflict.”<sup>15</sup> It suggests that Pratt was unable to control the meaning of football to both Indians and American athletes, showing that while many in the country viewed the game as a symbol of national values, the players, coaches, and sportswriters understood it as a ritualization of war in the Plains. By acknowledging a revival of past encounters on the American landscape, there is an element of identity that Adams pushes for in his work. This is most apparent when the historian discusses Native actions as incidents of a “not-so-distant Indian past,” bringing early developments of cultural continuity into the fold.<sup>16</sup> These descriptions, however, are not related to reinforcing indigenous identity as a way of resisting assimilation efforts. Instead, it hopes to show how different perspectives influenced the meaning of football to an individual or group. This thesis builds off of Adams’ work by adding new notions of cultural identity to the conversation and then linking Native perceptions of football to their resistance against acculturation. Rather than seeing how coaches, the media, and American and Indian players impacted football in Adams’ article, this paper examines how the game influenced Native identity to connect with an ancestral past.

Works such as John Bloom’s *To Show What an Indian Can Do* also made important contributions to this paper’s argument. The work navigates sports of all kinds at Indian boarding schools and how athletics were associated with assimilationist curriculums. Its focus, however, is predominantly based on Indian experience through competition. While experience exhibits identity-related ideas, the notion of cultural continuity and how it resisted Pratt’s perception of Native assimilation is not featured.

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<sup>15</sup> David Wallace Adams, “More than a Game: The Carlisle Indians Take to the Gridiron, 1893-1917,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

Primary sources were starkly different based on the section of the thesis being written. Part I heavily consisted of accounts from Pratt, particularly his biography *Battlefield and Classroom*, in an effort to capture Euro-American voice during the period. In order to create the juxtaposition of white and Indian perspective, Pratt's words are the most essential component of Part I. Written pieces from Native Americans of the era were more difficult to find, but Carlisle attendees were meticulous in capturing their sentiments by the week or month in student-run publications such as *The Carlisle Arrow* and *The Indian Helper*. The Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, run by Dickinson College, contains almost all of these publications' issues, along with a comprehensive database on student photos, files, and notes. Along with player quotes and letters published in either Indian or white news outlets, these first-hand accounts made Native voice stand out in Part II, contrasting the misguided views of Pratt.

## **Part I**

This section intends to first inform the reader about how current circumstances in the United States opened up an opportunity for Pratt to bring his ideology on Native people to life through the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, and then details the goals, curriculum, and emergence of football at the institution. It builds the framework for Part II, providing the important background information that formed the Euro-American perspective on Indians and football, which is discussed at the beginning of the second section as a way to build an argument against this perspective for the remainder of the thesis.

### **The United States in the Nineteenth Century**

Natives communities that responded to United States' removal strategies with physical retaliation put the country in a difficult strategic position, especially in the post-Civil War era. Despite Union victory, the country was devastated by the effects of war and Congress struggled with determining the next steps. The nation faced a "parallel struggle": what would be the fate of the four million newly-freed African Americans in the South and the three hundred thousand Native Americans resisting relocation in the West?<sup>17</sup> The federal solution was defunctive, merely bestowing greater authority to the Bureau for Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands and the Office of Indian Affairs Indian in the respective regions while awarding home rule for states regarding further policy measures. Frontier settlers responded with their vote: the few politicians in the Great Plains who advocated for assimilation were subsequently replaced by proponents

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<sup>17</sup> Gretchen Cassel Eick, "U.S. Indian Policy, 1865-1890: As Illuminated Through the Lives of Charles A. Eastman and Elaine Goodale Eastman," *Great Plains Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 27.

of relocation. Just as the state governments did with black Americans, policymakers in the West relegated Native American citizenship to the inferior, unprotected status.<sup>18</sup> A more permanent solution was required, however, as further United States expansion was imminent and the encroachment on Native communities, whether they were already on reservation or still fighting for their land, would only cause the violence to persist.

Assimilation efforts gained traction once more in the 1870s from Christian evangelical reformers operating in the Indian Bureau of the Department of Interior.<sup>19</sup> Their efforts coincided with Ulysses S. Grant's presidential election in 1869, who declared in his inaugural address, "I will favor any course toward [Indians] which tends to their civilization and ultimate citizenship."<sup>20</sup> Attempts for military pacification in the region had generally failed and Grant needed to find a peaceful, long-term solution. It was neither a smooth nor consistent transition, but the United States shifted its approach in addressing Indians and would largely steer this course of direction for the remainder of the century. It was now the responsibility of reformers and Congress to propose creative solutions to assimilate Native people into American society, and ideas were plentiful throughout the last quarter of the century.

In reservation life, the United States military established an Indian police force that emulated an American one, implementing government policy on reservations by acting and appearing "white." For the justice system, civilization programs created an Indian court that was enforced by indigenous communities, but decisions could be overruled by the United States government.<sup>21</sup> In 1879, an Army veteran of the Civil War

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<sup>18</sup> Eick, "U.S. Indian Policy, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Ulysses S. Grant "First Inaugural Address" (speech), March 4, 1869.

<sup>21</sup> Eick, "U.S. Indian Policy," 32.

and Indian wars named Richard Henry Pratt launched the first assimilation school for Native American youth in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, creating an environment “for lifting Indian children out of the depths of savagism.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Richard Henry Pratt**

There was palpable tension in the smoke-filled council room.<sup>23</sup> Pratt, now a United States Indian agent, was prepared to deliver significant news to the Brule Lakota, a branch of the Sioux Nation situated in Rosebud, South Dakota. It was September of 1879, and the Lakota and United States were only two years removed from their war. Prompting the past violence were prospectors, who had flooded the region and encroached on the area’s reservation boundaries with the hope of discovering gold in the Black Hills.<sup>24</sup> The ensuing conflict would eventually be regarded as the final large-scale struggle of the Indian wars fought in the Great Plains, and the hostility that lingered in its aftermath meant that Pratt’s message was unlikely to please the Brule elders he stood before that day.<sup>25</sup>

Pratt informed the Indian council that Congress had realized that reservations made it difficult to integrate indigenous communities into American society. Moreover, the United States government now considered Native youth capable of acquiring the same education as American children. Pratt explained that, “[I]f [Indian children] were brought

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<sup>22</sup> Meghan O’Donnell, “Negotiating Identity: Indian Assimilation and Athletics in the late 19th and early 20th Century,” *American International Journal of Social Science* 1, no. 2 (December 2012): 12-13. This quote was in direct reference to Pratt’s idea that education itself was the “battlefield of the classroom,” hinting at his emphasis on military-styled discipline, marches, and behavioral policies.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 220-222. According to Pratt, the elders made him and the interpreter stand in front of their circle and wait while a ceremonial pipe was passed discussion were held amongst themselves “in an undertone” that Pratt’s interpreter could not understand.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 222.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 221. According to Pratt, the previous agent, Cicero Newell, had already attempted to convince the Brule to turn over thirty-six boys and girls to Carlisle and was rejected outright. Pratt described Newell’s administration as one “characterized by weakness and incompetence.”

among our [white] people, placed in good schools, and taught our language and our industries by going out among our people, in a little while [they] could be made just as competent as the white children,” thereby becoming, “a very part of the people of the country.”<sup>26</sup> The proposal was a recruiting tool of sorts for Pratt’s new institution, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, and was initially met with silence from the Brule council. Both sides understood the importance of the government’s strategic shift and the boldness of the offer. For Pratt, however, it was a necessary risk to take. The policy was designed under his direction and embodied years of personally accumulated ideology on race, culture, and human potential. Pratt desired to add to his distinguished legacy by proving his theories to be correct and, in turn, bringing Indians to a new age of enlightenment.

Pratt sincerely hoped to provide a better life for Native people amidst American territorial expansion, but why? On the surface, it seemed like a drastic change of heart for a man who voluntarily enlisted for service in the Indian wars after his time fighting with the Union Army in the Civil War. Understanding his past experiences on the battlefield provides greater context as to why Pratt asserted himself as the paternalistic figurehead to guide an Indian transformation.

Born in 1840 in Rushford, New York, Pratt was twenty-one when he enlisted with the Ninth Indiana volunteers, just eight days after the first shots were fired on Fort Sumter. His motivation largely stemmed from his interpretation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Pratt considered them to contain truths of biblical proportions, and believed the Confederate States betrayed the nation and God’s will by

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<sup>26</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 221-22.

directly violating its laws, namely the assertion that all men are created equal.<sup>27</sup> He considered his viewpoint validated with Union victory and after the Civil War, Pratt



Colonel Richard Henry Pratt, on horseback, in 1901. The 61-year-old superintendent would retire from his role at Carlisle three years after this photograph was taken, but maintained his racial ideology until his death in 1924.

returned to civilian life to run a hardware store. He grew restless with everyday life and in 1867, Pratt re-enlisted as a second lieutenant for the Tenth United States Cavalry in the Indian wars.<sup>28</sup> It was not the same structure Pratt remembered, however: the American militia had reorganized and now had six African American regiments under white officers, one of which was the Tenth Cavalry, known by another name, the “Buffalo Soldiers.”<sup>29</sup> Pratt’s regiment also worked with Cherokee scouts, which allowed him to intimately converse with indigenous people for the first time in his life.

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<sup>27</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Lindsay Peterson, “‘Kill the Indian, Save the Man,’ Americanization through Education: Richard Henry Pratt’s Legacy,” *Colby College Honors Theses* 696, no. 3 (May, 2013): 3.

<sup>29</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 2.

The utilization of the scouts was a surprise to Pratt, who developed a negative view toward the general Indian population by grouping all tribes together as the common enemy. But after fighting alongside them, Pratt realized that his preconceived notions toward Natives had been wrong: “Their intelligence, civilization and common sense was a revelation, because I had concluded that as an army officer I was there to deal with atrocious aborigines.”<sup>30</sup> Pratt was exposed to many other indigenous communities throughout his time in the Indian wars. He served with allied tribesmen in combat and conducted peace negotiations with the enemy, gaining respect and admiration from both sides involved in the conflict.

Pratt grew increasingly sympathetic toward the Indian struggle while fighting in the war. He understood the wrongdoings of the American government and the effects westward expansion had on indigenous people. He even recognized Congress’ inconsistent approach when handling Indian policy and how it led to Native retaliation, remarking, “The dual system of civil and military control over the Indians was full of vexatious complications and lack of harmony... The white man did not keep his promises. Why should [the Indians] keep theirs?”<sup>31</sup> These historical understandings of United States-Indian relations shaped the way Pratt interacted with defeated Indians in April of 1875, when he received orders to lead the Fort Marion prisoner of war camp in St. Augustine, Florida.<sup>32</sup> The Southern Plains Indian wars had all but ended, and Pratt was designated to oversee seventy-two of the most prominent warrior-leaders from the conflict. A newspaper account described the prisoners as, “[T]he hardest lot of red faces

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<sup>30</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Diane Glancy, “Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education,” *Sample Books and Chapters from the University of Nebraska Press* 283 no. 1 (Summer 2014): 1-10.

that have ever plundered and murdered Western settlers on the frontier.”<sup>33</sup> Pratt, with his strong reputation among a number of Indian Nations and a track record for conducting diplomatic negotiations, was a safe decision for the position. He chose to run his prison in a unique fashion, however, and would initiate a nuanced technique for integrating Indians into American society for the foreseeable future.

At Fort Marion, Pratt launched a systematic movement to educate Native Americans through a process of Western acculturation. It was a radical experiment influenced by the combination of his experience as a soldier in the Tenth Cavalry and his inherent beliefs extracted from the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Pratt personally witnessed the capabilities of the Cherokee scouts under an American military regiment. He also knew the Declaration of Independence explicitly expressed that all men are created equal. To Pratt, then, it was only logical that the “Indian Problem” was not a racial issue, but a cultural one. And so, he concluded, if Natives could be Americanized through means of education, they could realize their potential – a potential as equally promising as whites.<sup>34</sup> He explained his thinking in an 1892 speech delivered at George Mason University:

“It is a great mistake to think that the Indian is born an inevitable savage. He is born a blank, like all the rest of us. Left in the surroundings of savagery, he grows to possess a savage language, superstition, and life. We, left in the surroundings of civilization, grow to possess a civilized language, life and purpose. Transfer the infant white to the savage surroundings, he will grow to possess a savage language, superstition, and habit. Transfer the savage-born infant to the surroundings of civilization, and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit. Carlisle fills young Indians with the spirit of loyalty to the stars and stripes... to show by their conduct and ability that the Indian is not different from the white or the colored... when we recognize fully that he is capable in all respect as we are, and that he only

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<sup>33</sup> Brad D. Lookingbill, *War Dance at Fort Marion: Plains Indian War Prisoners* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 51.

<sup>34</sup> Peterson, “‘Kill the Indian, Save the Man,’” 107.

need the opportunities and privileges which we possess to enable him to assert his humanity and manhood.”<sup>35</sup>

Pratt determined that because Indians had not yet been exposed to a Western way of life, it was his paternalistic duty to introduce it to them. Since the beginning of the United States’ reservation policies, however, Indians were denied the opportunity “to develop, become equal, and able to compete as citizens in all opportunities of our American life,” and Pratt wanted to avoid replicating the strategic failures of the government.<sup>36</sup> He developed his own paternalistic methodology for the prisoners at Fort Marion, undoing the leg irons they arrived in, cutting their hair, and dressing them in American Army uniforms.<sup>37</sup> Instead of forcing them to abide by a strict detainment routine, Pratt had his staff teach the prisoners how to read and write in English.<sup>38</sup> He also provided ledgers for them to draw in and would purchase their artwork to put on display, providing evidence for the American public that even Indian warriors were capable of learning new skills.<sup>39</sup> The effectiveness of the methodology was so convincing that just three years after their arrival, the Indian prisoners’ request for release was granted by the United States government. Pratt championed his approach and was promoted in 1878,

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<sup>35</sup> Unknown, Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction (1892), 46–59. Reprinted in Richard Henry Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–271.

<sup>36</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Glancy, “Fort Marion Prisoners,” 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Candace S. Greene, “Being Indian at Fort Marion: Revisiting Three Drawings,” *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 289-297.

departing for the Hampton Normal Agricultural Institute in Virginia to refine the acculturating practice.<sup>40</sup>

Pratt left Hampton after a year, certain he had uncovered a proven way to integrate Indians into American society. He set out to Washington to request funding from the



Southern Cheyenne warrior Howling Wolf used the ledger paper provided by Pratt to construct an 1872 battle scene near Fort Wallace, located in Western Kansas. Using colored pencil and watercolor, Howling Wolf depicts himself at the front of the charge, leading his people toward the Fort in an apparent raid. The art demonstrates a longing for the open battlefield and the fight to preserve a way of life. He recorded this incident while imprisoned at Fort Marion in 1874 or 1875.

American government to begin a Native youth acculturation school. After several discussions, Pratt convinced Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz to authorize a grant for Carlisle. The Department of War, however, intervened and included a condition for the access to funds, requiring that Pratt begin the recruiting process with the Sioux, who the United States had recently been at war with. Pratt preferred to deal with tribes he had grown acquainted with in the Indian wars, such as the Kiowa or Cheyenne, but the

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<sup>40</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 238-264.

Department of War was adamant, citing a specific motivation behind their demand.<sup>41</sup> The stipulation to visit the Sioux first was a strategic ploy to have leaders of the tribes' children in American government custody as a way to entice cooperation if conflict arose in the Black Hills once again. Knowing he had no other options, Pratt agreed. A few weeks later, he was in Rosebud, South Dakota, awaiting a response from the Brule Lakota council after delivering his first pitch for the Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

Among the four Brule leaders Pratt presented to that day was Spotted Tail, a legendary chieftain regarded by both sides as a tremendous warrior and as astute diplomat.<sup>42</sup> For years, Spotted Tail had experienced the instability in the Great Plains and the toll the region had taken because of the violence. He wanted peace and a better life for his people, but was suspicious of Pratt's lofty proposal given the recent conflict between the Lakota and United States. The other council members agreed with his dubiousness and after a brief deliberation, Spotted Tail rebuffed Pratt, announcing, "The white people are thieves and liars. We are not going to give any children to learn such ways."<sup>43</sup> This was applauded by the Brule people, who had witnessed broken promises and treaties with the United States time and again. These experiences were especially fresh with the violation of their reservation land boundaries by prospectors. What could an American school offer if promises from American people were always empty?

Pratt expected this sort of response from the Brule. He knew it was unlikely Spotted Tail and the elders would be initially receptive, especially with the discomfiting idea of relinquishing their children to the custody of a government they had just fought for years. So Pratt posed the offer from a different angle, this time trying to relate to the Indian

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, *The Indian No Problem* (Media: Delaware County Institute of Science, 1909), 314.

<sup>42</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> Pratt, *The Indian No Problem*, 9.

viewpoint. He complimented the Brule principal chief, remarking that he had a strong reputation throughout the United States as a great leader of Indian people. Pratt then changed his tone, however, and reminded Spotted Tail of his English illiteracy and how it had hampered his community. He went on to detail the transgressions of the United States against the Brule people and how they might have been prevented, claiming that the government had fooled Spotted Tail into placing their tribe's reservation lines much further inside the territory they claimed they would because the chief was tricked by a white interpreter. He concluded his speech by redirecting his focus to Indian youth, asking, "[D]o you intend to let your children remain in the same condition of ignorance in which you have lived? As your friend, Spotted Tail, I urge you to send your children with me to this Carlisle School, and I will do everything I can to advance them in intelligence and industry in order that they may come back and help you."<sup>44</sup>

The plea did not immediately alter Spotted Tail's view toward the Congressional ruling, nor did it ease his concern in sending Brule children off with a United States Indian agent. He did, however, hesitantly recognize the value of Pratt's offer. Spotted Tail and the elders set off to deliberate once more, returning to Pratt an hour later with terms of agreement. He then pledged six of his children and grandchildren to Pratt's boarding school. Additional families followed suit under their leader's direction.<sup>45</sup> Forty-eight boys and sixteen girls from the Rosebud reservation would ultimately make the journey back to Carlisle with Pratt.<sup>46</sup> The Indian agent proceeded to travel to several other Native

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<sup>44</sup> Pratt, *The Indian No Problem*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, "Report on First Part of Children Brought to Carlisle," RG 75, Series 79, box 571, Miscellaneous-1879-P-#1182, National Archives and Record Administration (hereafter, NARA), 7-11.

communities and, by the end of the calendar year, persuaded the guardians of 156 Indian children to send their youth east, where they comprised Carlisle's first class.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Carlisle Curriculum**

Carlisle's curriculum was structured with an intensive acculturation philosophy in mind. Its twofold strategy intended to inundate Indian students with American culture while suppressing their Native identities. Influenced by a thoroughly paternalistic ideology, Carlisle administrators published a de facto core beliefs statement in an 1898 edition of *The Indian Helper*, the school's student-run newspaper. In it, they acknowledged the duality of the institution's educational goals, writing, "It is [the savage] nature in our red brother that is better dead than alive, and when we agree with the oft-repeated sentiment that the only good Indian is a dead one, we mean this characteristic of the Indian. Carlisle's mission is to kill THIS Indian, as we build up the better man."<sup>48</sup>

Pratt maintained the belief that human nature could be improved. His stance on Indian culture was influenced by a notable movement of the era, Christian reformation. Under this umbrella was the notion of Manifest Destiny, an idea deeply rooted in the minds of reformers and American leaders. The stance of the Western religious reformer was one more or less preserved for centuries: expose and convert nonbelievers to the Christian faith as a means of providing salvation. Manifest Destiny was a considerably newer term coined by journalist John O'Sullivan in 1845. O'Sullivan asserted that Manifest Destiny defined a unique message from God that called Americans to

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<sup>47</sup> Pratt, "Report on First Part of Children," 7-11.

<sup>48</sup> Unknown, "Wants Indian Stories," *The Indian Helper*, CCHS, March 18, 1898, 1. It is often accepted that this quote was spoken by Pratt himself in response to an inquiry about original Indian stories, condemning the idea so that Indian youth could move on from their past.

“overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”<sup>49</sup> Unsurprisingly, assertions regarding race and culture were interwoven within the ideology: the second half of the century witnessed O’Sullivan’s term emphasizing the exceptionalism of Euro-Americans, who were subsequently called upon to spread their superiority to others.<sup>50</sup> Because it fell under the Christian reformation movement, it held the similar value that a failure to acculturate inferior civilizations would confirm their damnation, who were fated for extinction without exposure to Western enlightenment. Carlisle’s core beliefs statement, which had likely been written by Pratt himself, resembled this notion by emphasizing the death of the “characteristic of the Indian” and the birth of “a better man.”<sup>51</sup> Over the course of his life, Pratt adopted components of Christian reformation and, more specifically, Manifest Destiny. Both fell under the umbrella of paternalism, a logical transition for Pratt, who held the impression that his school’s curriculum could accomplish cultural transformation and, in turn, the salvation of Native Americans as a people.

Despite incorporating aspects of an ideology that consisted of benevolence and salvation, there was a unique wrinkle to Pratt’s belief system: he considered every race to be equal, in all facets of human capability. Therefore, he did not view Indians as inherently inferior, but instead saw a civilization that had limited its potential because of cultural shortcomings. Pratt believed this to be a fatal flaw in Indian society and one that Euro-Americans would have been susceptible to had they been placed in a similar environment.

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<sup>49</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), i-xi.

<sup>50</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2-3.

<sup>51</sup> O’Donnell, “Negotiating Identity,” 13.

Mirroring the sentiment of Christian reformers and other progressives of the period, Pratt hoped to provide resources to help Americanize Native communities, thus allowing them to thrive in the expanding United States. He viewed himself as a defender of Indian people and an emblematic father-figure overseeing the development of his children.<sup>52</sup> Consistent with this working ideology, he believed Indian potential could only be realized if indigenous customs were eradicated to make way for Western ones. Consequently, the Carlisle curriculum was designed to do just this.



The before-and-after photos of Tom Torlino, a Navajo Indian admitted to Carlisle in 1882. The first photograph was taken the day he entered the boarding school and the second was captured three years later in 1885. The images reveal how Carlisle physically modified its students so that they resembled Euro-American youth.

The Carlisle schedule was divided in two segments, with the first half the day spent in the classroom and the latter half performing manual labor.<sup>53</sup> New students were immersed in all things American; Carlisle modified names, appearances, and anything

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<sup>52</sup> Bloom, *To Show What the Indian Can Do*, xv.

<sup>53</sup> Diana Meyers Bahr, *The Students of Sherman Indian School: Education and Native Identity since 1892* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 9.

else perceived as “Indian.” There was a strict emphasis on learning and speaking only English, and infractions were treated with military-influenced discipline.<sup>54</sup> The inclusion of manual labor was intended to get Indian youth involved in American job practices that allowed for economic self-sufficiency upon their departure from Carlisle.<sup>55</sup> It often consisted of strenuous physical activity in agricultural roles, such as tending to farmland and livestock.<sup>56</sup>

The concept of “civilization” was intentionally emphasized in all facets of learning, where the goal was to convince Indian youth that they were brought up and maintained a primitive lifestyle, but could emerge from their savage state through Western education. It intended to balance humiliation and hope for the Native American students,<sup>57</sup> subtly pushing toward the destruction of the Indian identity in favor of an American one in a form of cultural transformation. As Pratt bluntly summarized, “[A]ll the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”<sup>58</sup> As a whole, the school schedule was a sound and thorough Americanization effort. It aimed to intellectually and physically refashion students with national culture over long, busy days, leaving little room for introspection.

### **The Beginning of Football at Carlisle**

Students often spent their limited downtime playing recreational sports. This gave the young boarders an opportunity to unwind in a relatively unstructured environment with other students from a variety of tribal and cultural backgrounds. These relationships

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<sup>54</sup> O’Donnell, “Negotiating Identity,” 12-13.

<sup>55</sup> Bahr, *The Students of Sherman Indian School*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 140-149.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 148-149.

<sup>58</sup> Pratt, *Americanizing the American Indian*, 260-271.

fostered early forms of Pan-Indianism among the student body that coexisted alongside individual tribal identities. Pratt acknowledged the impressive athletic capabilities of Native Americans from his days in war, and recognized as much in his students, predicting that “we may eventually rival Cornell, Amherst, or Columbia in athletic prowess.”<sup>59</sup>

Brought by students and administrators with previous exposure to them, American sports trickled into Carlisle’s recreation periods. Most were taken up with great enthusiasm, with organized baseball beginning in 1886.<sup>60</sup> The first recorded account of football being played on Carlisle’s campus came from the December 14, 1888 edition of *The Indian Helper*, which stated that two administrators would “show the boys how to play a regular game” and that “[t]he boys who want to kick [the football] anywhere and everywhere should stand back and give those who want to play right, a chance to learn.”<sup>61</sup> In 1890, the Carlisle Indian football team played their first intercollegiate matchup against Dickinson College.<sup>62</sup> It grew especially popular among the male students and ascended to one of the most popular extracurricular activities at Carlisle, being played in both official and unofficial settings. <sup>63</sup>

Pratt considered most forms of athletics to be transformative tools for his students to develop “abstemious and moral” characteristics, but was disconcerted with Carlisle

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<sup>59</sup> United States Office of Indian Affairs, “Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1881,” (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1881): 247.

<sup>60</sup> O’Donnell, “Negotiating Identity,” 15.

<sup>61</sup> Unknown, “A New Foot-ball!,” *The Indian Helper*, CIS-I-0030, Dickinson College Archives & Special Collection (hereafter, DCASC), December 14, 1888, 3.

<sup>62</sup> O’Donnell, “Negotiating Identity,” 15.

<sup>63</sup> Kate Buford, *Native American Son: The Life and Sporting Legend of Jim Thorpe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010): 45.

students' fixation on football.<sup>64</sup> He was not alone: the sport carried such severe injury risks that there was a torrent of national outcry regarding its violent nature. Early football made its first appearance on college campuses in 1876 as a competitive outlet for Harvard and Yale students, who played a game that blended rules of football, soccer, and rugby. It was noted for its outbreaks of savage fistfights, much to the pleasure of a blood lusting crowd, who would scream pleas to fight, hurt, or even kill the opponent.<sup>65</sup> Debates were held regarding its legality, including one in 1895 between football advocate Woodrow Wilson and a Cornell professor of anatomy.<sup>66</sup>

Official football rule committees met and enforced new safety regulations on at least four separate occasions before the twentieth century, but conditions did not improve.<sup>67</sup> In 1904 alone, twenty-one players were killed and two hundred more were injured on the gridiron.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the professionalization of college athletics was starting to concern university administrators.<sup>69</sup> These factors brought the controversy to a boiling point and, in the fall of the subsequent year, president and Harvard football fanatic Theodore Roosevelt organized a symposium consisting of rule experts with the hope to administer changes that could help save the game from total abandonment.<sup>70</sup> Amidst the large-scale worry throughout the country, Pratt wondered how a wild sport of extreme brutality could possibly project his desired "new Indian" image if it were to become a staple at his school.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Bloom, *To Show What the Indian Can Do*, 1. Richard Henry Pratt wrote these words in a letter to Bishop McCabe in 1897.

<sup>65</sup> John S. Watterson III, "Inventing Modern Football," *American Heritage* 39, no. 6 (Fall 1988): 1.

<sup>66</sup> John S. Watterson III, "Political Football: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and the Gridiron Reform Movement," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 558.

<sup>67</sup> Watterson, "Inventing Modern Football," 1.

<sup>68</sup> Bahr, *The Students of Sherman Indian School*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Watterson, "Political Football," 559.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 555.

<sup>71</sup> Adams, "More than a Game," 27.

Already reluctant to endorse its existence on campus, Pratt was set on making football's first run at Carlisle short-lived.<sup>72</sup> Consistent with the national narrative, he deemed the sport too dangerous to play and ended the school's program after two injuries occurred in consecutive weeks, one in a "fiendish" intramural game,<sup>73</sup> and the other where student Stacy Matlock broke his leg in a contest against Dickinson College.<sup>74</sup> It was Pratt's way of reaffirming his role as the paternalistic leader of Indians; he took the game away from Carlisle because he believed it was in the best interests of his students, who evidently could not make that decision for themselves. For now, the superintendent would have his way.

Although football was removed from Carlisle, it continued to be played at other institutions. With each passing year the sport gained traction among young, educated men at elite universities throughout the United States. Carlisle students took notice, and it would not be long after Pratt's ban until their passion for the game brought football back into campus discussions. There was no suppressing the excitement among the Indian students, and although nobody at Carlisle knew at the time, the status of football and its potential reinstatement into the curriculum would become one of the most impactful decisions in the school's history. There was little Pratt could do to enforce his ban and prevent the game's return. Football reinstatement was not a matter of if, but when.

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<sup>72</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 317.

<sup>73</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 110.

<sup>74</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 181.

## **Part II**

This section first conveys the Euro-American view on Native athletes at Carlisle and the significance of their participation in the game. Using evidence through which a Native perspective is understood, it then shows how players used football as a tool to preserve their indigenous culture, not replace it with a Western one. Drawing from primary sources and almost an entirely Indian voice, the section demonstrates that Carlisle football players strengthened their Native identities and subverted attempts for assimilation.

### **Carlisle's Reclamation of Football**

One morning in 1893, less than a year removed from the injury sustained by Stacy Matlock, forty Carlisle athletes and the champion orator of the school entered their superintendent's office to advocate for the reinstatement of football.<sup>75</sup> The young men refused to allow Pratt's ban to continue and prepared a defense for the game they cherished. They knew the superintendent would be impressed with the content of their argument and its presentation, invoking lessons they had learned in class to win him over.<sup>76</sup> Pratt was disarmed and later reflected, "While [the students] stood around my desk, their black eyes intensely watching me, the orator gave practically all the arguments in favor of our contending in outside football... and ended by requesting the removal of the embargo."<sup>77</sup>

The days of Pratt's football ban had been numbered for quite some time. Despite lingering controversy regarding the game's safety, its popularity continued to grow among

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<sup>75</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 317.

<sup>76</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 122.

<sup>77</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 317-318.

the country's best academic schools, which were accumulating considerable national attention for their play. Students at Carlisle longed for football's return the moment it was taken from them and the constant reminder of its play at other colleges made them that much more hopeful. The young Native men pressed Pratt to reinstate it and, after the orator finished giving their collective reasoning, the superintendent gave in, resigning, "Boys, I begin to realize that I must surrender and give you the opportunity you so earnestly desire."<sup>78</sup> After a brief hiatus, football was coming back to Carlisle.

It was unusual for Pratt to sacrifice his ideals, especially to the will of his students. The concession put him on the defensive, so as a way of maintaining control over the situation, he set two conditions for the football team. The superintendent first required that players never physically retaliate to their opponents' actions, fearing the repercussions for his reputation and the school if they did. Then, he mandated that the team possess the ability to compete with the top opponents in the country within a four-year window as a way to demonstrate Indian potential.<sup>79</sup> In light of his willingness to compromise with the students, Pratt used these stipulations in an attempt to reassert his authority as their paternal figure.

As the Carlisle football program grew from a recreational sport to a nationally-recognized collegiate powerhouse, the conditions Pratt set gave him room to justify the decision for reinstatement. He processed the team's decades of sustained dominance as a gradual but effective acculturation tactic. The superintendent could not help but to feel a great sense of pride as he watched his student-athletes take down elite universities. In doing so, they amassed national support for both the team and the institution, causing

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<sup>78</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 317.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 317.

Pratt to remark, “Nothing we have ever done has so much awakened the attention of the country to the possibilities of the Indian.”<sup>80</sup> Pratt considered Carlisle’s victories as tangible evidence that members of the football team were adopting Western culture. He credited the players’ success on the field with their ability to move on from an Indian past and take up American identities. In the superintendent’s mind, the young Native men put aside their indigenous thoughts, habits, dress, and speech in order to defeat the white man at his own game.<sup>81</sup>

Whether or not he legitimately believed that football effectively assimilated the Indians that played it, Pratt outwardly voiced this perspective. Toward the end of his tenure as the institution’s superintendent, he reflected, “If it was in my power to bring every Indian into the game of football... I would do it, and feel that I was doing them an act of the greatest Christian kindness, and elevating them from the hell of their home life and reservation degradation in paradise.”<sup>82</sup> These words may have been Pratt’s way to save face; Carlisle’s football experiment had gone marvelously and not only could he credit himself for its return to campus, but conveniently regard the game as a key component of his curriculum for Indian assimilation. Pratt may have loathed the brutality of football, but it exposed the United States to Native capabilities and proved that, when given the opportunity, Indians could accomplish anything Americans could. Therefore, the game became Pratt’s most effective way to tangibly prove his racial ideology correct and cement his legacy in American history.

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<sup>80</sup> Wallace, *Education for Extinction*, 184.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 185-86.

<sup>82</sup> Bloom, *To Show What the Indian Can Do*, 1. Richard Henry Pratt wrote these words in the same letter previously cited to Bishop McCabe in 1897.

It was true that the Carlisle Indians' rise to sporting folklore showcased Native intelligence and physical aptitude in ways like never before. Football helped reveal to the rest of the country that indigenous people were equal to all others, rendering Pratt's assertion about the game believable. To many outsiders, players at Carlisle adopted football, heeded their superintendent's conditions, and for two decades demonstrated that they could play with discipline and do so spectacularly. But Pratt's perspective, whether it was intentional or unintentional, failed to recognize that the young men of Carlisle never abandoned their Indian identities while playing. Instead, they considered football from a Native perspective and formed their own original interpretations of the game. These subtle nuances actually combatted attempts for assimilation by employing notions of cultural continuity. Thus, football was a tool for the Carlisle Indians to manipulate as a means of connecting with an ancestral past. It replaced the theatre of the frontier battles in the Indian wars, emphasized the virtue of masculinity in the indigenous warrior, and formed Pan-Indian relationships. Playing the game may have demonstrated Native abilities on the field, but it did not replace Indian identities with Western ones. Instead of killing the Indian and saving the man, football revived the Indian in the men that played it, as they embraced the American game and made it their own.

### **Football and Frontier Violence**

To Native athletes, football was an emblematic continuation of the centuries of Euro-American transgressions toward Indian people. An event that was especially fresh in their minds was the conclusion of the Indian wars on the frontier. From both the Indian and American perspective, relating the emergence of football to conflict in the Great Plains was far from visionary. To many living in this period, the game was a revitalization

of the later battles in the Indian wars, with noticeable resemblances lying in the details of the game.

At its very roots, football was confrontation between two parties in an open field. Its rules required that one side attempt to push forward for positioning while the other tried to stop them through violent means. In order to avoid being halted, offensive strategy was required, which was then met with counteraction from the defense, thus mirroring the back-and-forth struggle of true war. Sport journalist Caspar Whitney embodied the era's mindset when he wrote in 1892 that, "[Football] is a mimic battlefield, on which players must reconnoiter, skirmish, advance, attack, and retreat in good order."<sup>83</sup>

Members of the Carlisle team recognized the similarities between their circumstances and those of the past, constructing their own narrative that related football to Indian warfare. Their interpretation differed from the American viewpoint, whose connection between game and battle lacked a notion of struggle that Native players maintained. The Indians often related their disadvantages on the gridiron to that of their ancestors' on the battlefield. Their smaller stature, for example, was likened to weaponry or number deficits in past frontier conflict. Evidence suggesting this idea appears in letters written by players to their families. In one case, an unknown Carlisle player on the 1914 roster sent a letter to home with direct references to frontier conflict, ultimately detailing how the team overcame a size disadvantage against the University of Pennsylvania:

“We had a hard time playing football last Saturday. We play with Quaker team at Philadelphia. They were pretty good play and heap much bigger but we beat him anyhow us Indian boy side. We too slick for him. Maybe white

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<sup>83</sup> Adams, “More than a Game,” 28.

men better with cannon and guns, but Indian just as good in brains to think with.”<sup>84</sup>

The note invokes direct references to white aggression toward Natives with their skill using “cannon and guns” as a metaphor for Pennsylvania’s physically larger team. The player negates the advantage by asserting that Indians have “just as good in brains to think with,” likely a reference to the “slick” play of Carlisle, which could be inferred involved their trademark trick plays and overall deception. He explains that although the white opponents were “much bigger” than Carlisle, the Indians used their style of play to defeat them, just as Native warriors used their wit to overcome their disadvantage in numbers or artillery.

The unnamed player’s letter is also reminiscent of the Carlisle football team’s mentality heading into their 1912 matchup against Army. There is a shared sentiment between the player and the team two years before that battles between Natives and the American military had not been fought on equal terms. In both cases, the Indians’ lack of size on the field is their disadvantage and they address it by implementing creative plays and strategy. These innovative game plans represented the Native military tactics used by tribes warring with the United States in the Plains during their struggle over territory, making the connection between football and frontier conflict at the forefront of the Indian conscious.

Language that invoked images of battle was not uncommon in messages to loved ones. A Haskell Indian player on Carlisle’s 1914 team confided in a written note to his family back home that:

“Our football men are busy each day putting in hard practice for the coming war. We have been mobilizing our troops since the first of September and

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<sup>84</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 189.

they are now trained and equipped for the coming campaign. They have done considerable skirmishing and I was wounded on the right shoulder.”<sup>85</sup>

Although there is no acknowledgment of enemy forces presented in his letter, it contains similar rhetoric to the former piece of evidence. Without the writer’s inclusion of “football men,” it would be reasonable to assume that the context of the message concerned details of an actual upcoming battle. Published in the student-run newspaper the *Indian Leader*, the note allowed the player to describe the warlike characteristics of football to home, perhaps as a way to help his family understand the brutal nature of the sport he participated in at boarding school. He puts components of the game into relatable terms given his family’s likely familiarity to war and unfamiliarity to football. Rather than game-prepping, the team was “mobilizing” for their “campaign,” while the “troop” was dealing with a shoulder that was “wounded” instead of injured.

By equating football to violence in the frontier, the player conjures memories of the Indian wars. He relates himself and his teammates to warriors of the past, as they deal with the training, strategy, and battle wounds that come with being an Indian soldier. In doing so, the Carlisle student-athlete uncovers a relationship between himself and previous generations. This assertion appeared a frequent amount among Indian men and their discussions of football. With events of the Indian wars still fresh in their minds and football’s comparison to the battles, it seemed only logical that they would make the connection. It is again evident that Indian players took football and used it to make connections to their past.

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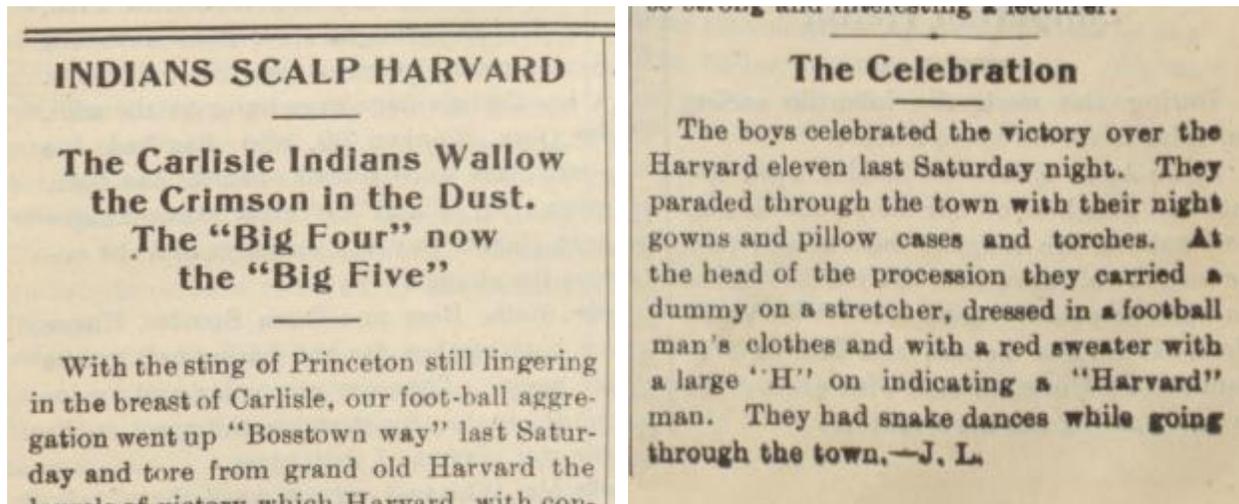
<sup>85</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 188-189. The letter from the unknown Carlisle player was published in the October 9, 1913 issue of the *Indian Leader*.

The letters make it clear that male students identified with football's representation of frontier violence. They reveal that the disadvantages presented by the warlike notion of football were the same ones faced by the generations of Native warriors that came before Carlisle's players, not the United States soldiers. If the Indians were adopting American identities by participating in college football, they would be finding ways to relate to the game the way Americans did. Instead, the young men compared their struggles on the football field with their ancestors' fight on the battlefield. The notes written by the members of the football team to their families, then, offer tremendously valuable insight into the minds of these Indian athletes. Their documented thoughts demonstrate that players were creating a connection to an ancestral past rather than replacing it with a new one. It was not the birth of the "new Indian" that Pratt had insisted; if anything, it was a strengthened tie to an older, cultural past.

The connection the Indians made between their sport and the battles fought by their fathers and uncles was not limited to private discussions with family. Both the team and students showed no reservations in relating the game to war. They displayed Native pride in these demonstrations without concern for consequences or appearing as if they were not adopting a Western identity. The players' ceremonial displays and student publishers' bold reports in school papers revealed that the young Indians were fearlessly playing up their indigenous heritage.

The Carlisle football team's success allowed Native student-writers of institution's news outlets to find creative taglines to describe the achievements of their classmates. Depicting images of battle, there were often descriptions of players raiding or invading opponents' fields when they were on the road. Perhaps the most famous incident came from a headline following Carlisle's defeat of Harvard University in 1907 that was printed

in *The Arrow*, the boarding school's student-run paper running in the early twentieth century. It boldly proclaimed, "INDIANS SCALP HARVARD," a reference to the practice of Native warriors taking trophies from enemies they defeated in battle.<sup>86</sup> The headline made the front page of the November issue that year, demonstrating the audacity of *The Arrow* writers who determined it to be a provocative opening to the student newspaper of an Indian boarding school meant to "civilize" the youth that attended by integrating them into American society. Although it is unknown if administrators approved the headline before its publishing - it is hard to imagine they did - the implementation of this warlike rhetoric is quite remarkable.



The headline was as rebellious as it was sensationalist. Football and battle might have been a commonly accepted comparison, but not in this context. For Carlisle to defeat one of the nation's best academic and athletic universities and relate their victory to an act as culturally "Indian" as scalping was a direct violation of their acculturating education. No records exist depicting outrage among the institution's administrators, nor was their documentation of repercussions for the writers, who remain anonymous to this

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<sup>86</sup> Unknown, "Indians Scalp Harvard," *The Arrow*, CCHS, November 15, 1907, 1.

day. In a way, however, no discipline or opposition to the headline made sense. Everyone in the country saw football as a continuation of the frontier - it was wild, brutal, and there were no rules. Perhaps the Carlisle students reveled in their triumph the way they should have. Even if it was determined to be unbecoming behavior from administrators, the students used football and its connection to battle so that a sense of cultural continuity was formed. This was made abundantly clear to all of *The Arrow's* readers, demonstrating the strong ties Indians were making with their ancestral past through football.

If school officials thought the students' headline was unbecoming, they likely hated the football team's rambunctious celebration after the victory over Harvard. The players reportedly "paraded through the town with their night gowns and pillow cases and torches," and at the front of their procession, "carried a dummy on a stretcher, dressed in a football man's clothes and with a red sweater with a large "H" on indicating a "Harvard" man."<sup>87</sup> This ritualization of achievement on the gridiron was reminiscent of Indian ceremonies following triumphs in battle, such as war dances. The entry, which was also a part of the November 1912 issue of *The Arrow*, claimed the team conducted "snake dances" while they headed throughout town, a Hopi Indian tradition.<sup>88</sup> Once again, Native youth willingly demonstrated their attachment to traditions of their cultural past. In doing so, they resisted Pratt's design for the school, reconnecting with Indian customs rather than adopting new Western ones.

It was not the first symbolic demonstration for Carlisle's football team, whose players were familiar with such displays and made apparent their lack of interest for taking up an identity other than the one they already had. Two year prior to the

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<sup>87</sup> Unknown, "Indians Scalp Harvard," 1.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 1.

celebration following victory against Harvard, the Indians squared off against Dickinson. Prior to the game, the opponent set up a pregame festivity where a cowboy scalped a Native American in an attempt to mock Carlisle. The Indians responded by shooting arrows into a dummy dressed in Dickinson attire each time they scored during the game. Carlisle ended up using more arrows than they probably anticipated, as Dickinson's pregame display backfired tremendously in a 36 to 0 route in favor of the Indians.<sup>89</sup>

The team's decision to side with their Native past instead of identifying with American culture, combined with their stout play, raised caution for white college teams. University of Chicago coach Amos Stagg embodied the collective sentiment of the schools, admitting that a game against the Carlisle football team, "jeopardize[d] the chances for [a] western championship."<sup>90</sup> By drawing a distinction between "western" institutions from Carlisle, Stagg made it clear that the Indians' resistance to assimilation efforts was working. They were winning, but had become no more American than the day football arrived to the school's campus. The relation between the game and war, with the Carlisle players siding with their ancestors' past experiences in battles on the frontier, made it evident that they aligned with the idea of reviving and maintaining their culture. The aforementioned speech made by Dennison Wheelock's at the 1897 football banquet explained the significance of this connection in his address to the team:

"At this school, we are trying to bring the Indian up to the position that the white men occupy. Long ago, it was said that Indian could not understand civilization. It is repeated even at the present time. I deny it. I assert that what the Indian could not understand was the greed, the grasping selfishness of the white man in this country, and when the Indian learned that his habitation and the hills he so dearly loved were being invaded, he justly cried, "There is eternal war between me and thee." And when he resisted, who will say that he did not do right?... He resisted with a thousand

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<sup>89</sup> Gerald R. Gems, *For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy: Football and the Incorporation of American Cultural Values* (Baltimore: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 120-121.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

warriors, but he had to retreat westward like a hunted fox... The only way I see how he may reoccupy the lands that once were his, is through football, and as football takes brains, takes energy, proves whether civilization can be understood by the Indian or not, we are willing to perpetuate it.”<sup>91</sup>

Wheelock’s words demonstrated that Carlisle football players believed that the foundation of their resistance efforts toward assimilation was built on the memories of generational conflict in the Indian wars. The Western perception of “civilization” was flawed with “greed” and “selfishness,” as the violation of Native rights made the war “eternal” and was still being fought by the Carlisle Indians. This was a scathing indictment of the boarding school agenda, and Indians were making these institutions their mouthpiece for criticizing the goals of administrators. Although the battle was not won on the theatre of the frontier, it could be in the subsequent decades on the gridiron. This is the “it” Wheelock refers to at the end of his speech: football symbolized to the violence on the Plains, making it the fight that Indians were “willing to perpetuate” so that they could one day “reoccupy the lands that were once his.” The game was the players’ conduit to create a form of cultural continuity that resisted white imposition, from one form of violence in the past to a newer, modern one.

Through Wheelock’s words, it is understood that the team was not forced to choose an Indian identity when taking up football. The young men were offered the opportunity - through Pratt, through Carlisle, and through football - to see the game the way the rest of the nation did: as a continuation of frontier conflict with an American understanding. But they refused by rejecting the way whites defined civilization and instead viewing it through the lens of the Indians before them, taking it upon themselves to pick up the previous generation’s fight and making it their own. The period determined that Carlisle’s

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<sup>91</sup> Dennison Wheelock, “Annual Banquet,” 5.

players had to resist in a different manner, of course, but the symbolism of football conveyed that the battle in the Great Plains was reignited on the gridiron. Instead of opting for the new identity that their institution pushed them toward, members of the Carlisle football team reinforced their identities as indigenous people by connecting their struggles playing football to their ancestors' battles on the frontier.

### **Masculinity in Football**

Deeply rooted in the nature of football was the concept of masculinity, an association of two characteristics that had been intertwined since the origins of the game. It was a logical transition from the gridiron's warlike connection, where the brutality of its play required virtues of strength and toughness. Native tradition celebrated these manly virtues in the hunt and in battle, and the Carlisle Indians were especially fond of extending those arenas to the football field. As was the case with their connection between football and battles of previous generations, the Indians strengthened their ties to a cultural past through the concept of masculinity in the game. The young Native men found the game to be an outlet to demonstrate their manliness in a variety of forms, ranging from the physical and mental rigorousness in their play to the reinforcement of gender roles that heightened the notion of masculinity. In doing so, they forged another relationship between their identity and football to refine their sense of cultural continuity.

While most Americans considered the industrial mechanization and bureaucratization of the United States as a sign of positive development, a concern among proponents of football was that years of refinement had softened Western society and

produced men lacking in attributes of strength, fortitude, and stamina.<sup>92</sup> The Carlisle curriculum, designed to acculturate Indians into this very society through the means of education, intended to bring Native youth from a lifestyle of “physical labor” and “wilderness adventure,” and into a world “in danger of becoming over-civilized.”<sup>93</sup> Indigenous culture across North America saw men as hunters and warriors in their communities. By identifying with this image, then, members of the Carlisle football team resisted efforts toward assimilation. The game was a tangible demonstration of their manliness, showcasing that amidst the violent nature of the game, Indians revitalized characteristics valued in previous generations through physical and mental fortitude.

Toughness of body was the most obvious display of masculinity on the gridiron. Indians took pride in not only putting their resistance to pain to the test, but distinguishing that fortitude and resilience from weaker white players. An 1897 edition of *Leslie's Weekly Illustrated*, a magazine devoted to depicting American life at the turn of the century, wrote in their story covering the Carlisle Indians that “[t]heir condition is so amazing that they play from beginning to end without appreciable loss of strength,” and while “the university men call time, so as to patch up wounds, take refreshments, and catch breath,” Native players never needed these rest periods. This excerpt offers a glimpse into how the Carlisle’s student-athletes displayed superior athleticism and toughness. It must have been disheartening – even intimidating – for white players to require these timeouts when their Indian counterparts had no use for them.

Indeed, the Carlisle team took injury tolerance to new levels. It was important that they did not show weakness to their opponent or their teammates, sometimes going to

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<sup>92</sup> David Wallace Adams, “More than a Game,” 29.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

extreme measures to avoid being taken out of games. In the case of Louis Godfrey, demonstrating physical strength went too far. In an away game against the University of Pennsylvania on November 24, 1917, Godfrey suffered a fractured nose and a severe knee sprain on a tackle, but remained on the field. According to a letter from then-superintendent John Francis to the Department of the Interior, Godfrey stayed in the game until it ended, traveling back with the team that night and walking to the hospital the next day.<sup>94</sup> Believing his injuries to be minor, the young man left the hospital on his own intuition, only to return after a day downtown in even more pain. A little over a week later, Godfrey died from an embolism in his brain caused by clotting in his injured leg. His tragic death stemmed from complications of surgery conducted because of his injuries on the gridiron, so while football was not the direct cause of his passing, it was directly related. Even if he had not died, the severity of his fractured nose and sprained leg should have been enough to remove him from play, but Godfrey insisted on staying in the game. The Carlisle squad's culture of toughness is demonstrated by his decision to continue playing, regardless of the injury or consequences.

Carlisle football players also displayed toughness by invoking a martial strategy of cunning deception in the hunt and in raids. In a 1911 matchup against Syracuse, an Indian guard's nose was broken at the line in the first half. Carlisle's opponents were amazed to see the same guard emerge to play in the second half, covered in a mask of tape. After the game, however, they realized the face of the player in the second half was not the same from the first. Instead, the injured guard traded places with his assistant coach, Emil Hauser. Hauser suited up the Carlisle crimson and played under the identity of the athlete

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<sup>94</sup> John Francis, "Notice of Death of Louis Godfrey," RG 75, CCF Entry 121, #111868-1917-Carlisle-736, NARA, December 6-11, 1917.

that had been hurt earlier.<sup>95</sup> Posing as the original guard was likely the team's way of striking fear into Syracuse, showing that despite the gruesome injury, they would remain resilient. It was not the same player that was hurt, of course, but it shows the importance of conveying an image of physical fortitude to opposing white teams. Demonstrating their manliness on the football field was a way of reinforcing gendered virtues of toughness and perseverance.

Carlisle's performance of resilience included displays of mental fortitude as well. People of the era assumed white players were masculine simply by playing football. The fact that these athletes attended white universities made them, by default, strong American men.<sup>96</sup> Excessive behavior, such as throwing punches, was perceived as a part of the game and an expectation, not an exception. The Indians received no such slack from outsiders, and responded to the double standard by understanding their extreme discipline as a form of manliness; it was more impressive to not give in to aggression and instead channel those emotions so that they could be converted to exceptional performance on the gridiron. Juxtaposed with the brutish behavior of white players, Carlisle's restraint became a point of pride for Indian men and a way for them to differentiate themselves from the opposition. To the Native players, football was not just a demonstration of athletic prowess, but one of internal discipline and maturity.

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<sup>95</sup> Gems, *For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy*, 120-121.

<sup>96</sup> Matthew Bentley, "Playing White Men: American Football and Manhood at the Carlisle Indian School, 1893-1904," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no. 2 (2010): 196-197.

The Carlisle players' standard of conduct was established early in the team's existence. A photograph of the 1894 roster, the second year of the officially-recognized Indians team, appeared in a souvenir pamphlet about the school with the caption, "THE FOOT BALL TEAM has played games with the teams of the Naval Academy, Lehigh University, Bucknell, Dickinson and other colleges with credit to themselves both for their playing and gentlemanly conduct."<sup>97</sup> The Native student-athletes made it a priority to have their "gentlemanly conduct" recognized in the team image, revealing the emphasis



they placed on their maturity to contrast to their white opponents. The Indians not only wanted this put into writing, but demonstrated genuine restraint in their actions amidst frequent cases of adversity. When fullback Pete Hauser was unfairly kneed by an opponent, he did not retaliate not through violence but faced his assailant and quipped,

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<sup>97</sup> Unknown, "THE FOOT BALL TEAM," CIS-I-0037, DCASC, appears in *United States Indian School Carlisle, Penna* (Carlisle, PA: The School, 1895), 33.

“Who’s the savage now?”<sup>98</sup> Their 1896 game against Yale saw the Bulldog’s captain take a post-whistle punch at one of the Carlisle players, but to no response from Indians. Accounts of games are littered with moments like these, and eventually the rest of the country caught on. A dichotomy of Native versus white antics on the football field was recognized, where Carlisle play was deemed civilized and their opposing teams’ behavior was perceived as unruly. The Indians did not, however, behave in the manner they did for outsiders to construct comparisons between them and American players. Instead, members of the Carlisle team acted with restraint to demonstrate that the Indian brand of football was different from the white one, strengthening the assertion that Native players were taking the game and making it a form their own.

The notion of masculinity among the Carlisle Indians was reinforced by the promotion of familiar gender roles. While warfare was held exclusively for men, Native women often held more significant duties in their communities than Euro-American women did in Western ones, even possessing forms of authority that rivaled their male counterparts.<sup>99</sup> The Algonquin, for example, promoted women to the status of formal leaders and sachems.<sup>100</sup> The Carlisle curriculum, meanwhile, pushed Western patriarchal gender norms, where men were taught labor and agriculture while women learned and conducted domestic tasks.<sup>101</sup> The presence of football at the institution challenged this standard, emulating past Native culture by elevating the status of women and their

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<sup>98</sup> Glenn Warner, "The Difference between Red and White Football Material," *Literary Digest* 65 (11 May 1920), 78-79.

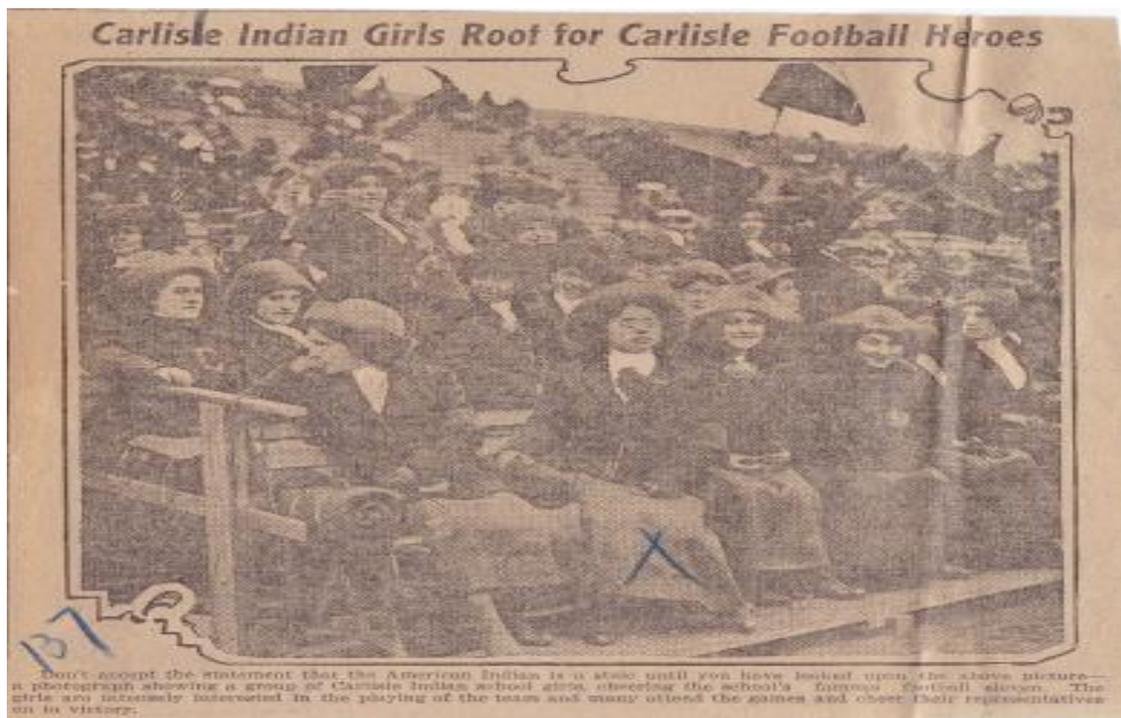
<sup>99</sup> Carl Robert Keyes, "Masculinity, Power, and Political Activity in Early America," *Early American Literature* 48, no. 1 (2013): 228.

<sup>100</sup> Peter L. Bayers, "William Apess's Manhood and Native Resistance in Jacksonian America," *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 124-125.

<sup>101</sup> Peter L. Bayers, "From Father to Son: Affirming Lakota Manhood in Luther Standing Bear's *My People the Sioux*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26, no. 4 (December 2014): 21.

contributions while still separating them from a warrior-status that the players were likened to. Thus, this form of cultural continuity emphasized two components: the masculine expectation that men would fight, and the importance of women in Indian societies that differentiated them from the traditional practices of Euro-American women.

A photograph of an all-female cheering section at a Carlisle football game demonstrates the distinction between men and women in Native communities that was revived through the game of football, but also how white perception influences the meaning of the image. Appearing in the *Wichita Beacon* at some period in the 1910s, the



headline reads, “Carlisle Indian Girls Root for Carlisle Football Heroes,” and warns readers not to “accept the statement that the American Indian is a stoic” until they witness “a group of Carlisle Indian school girls, cheering the school’s famous football eleven.”<sup>102</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Unknown, “Carlisle Indian Girls Root for Carlisle Football Heroes,” RG 75, Series 1327, box 141, folder 5541, NARA, appears in the *Wichita Beacon* (Wichita, KS, 1910-1919), page unknown.

Likening the “famous” Carlisle football players to “[h]eroes” reveals their masculine importance to the young women. And while the distinction between the female and the male warrior is made clear, the paper seems to push a narrative of passivity in the women. A non-Indians newspaper, the *Wichita Beacon* was likely projecting Euro-American gender stereotypes in their captioning of the image. The girls “are intensely interested in the playing of the team” and “cheer their representatives on to victory,” showing that they supported their emblematic warriors while taking a backseat role, not a complementary one frequently observed in the ancestral past of Native people.

The passive role projected on the all-women cheering section was not the case, however. In fact, the reality was just the opposite. At the 1902 Carlisle football banquet, left guard and Cherokee Native James M. Phillips delivered a speech entitled, “Our Football Girls.” The transcript was recorded in *The Red Man and Helper*, a weekly paper printed each week by Indian apprentices at Carlisle. In it, Phillips details his appreciation for the women that cheered on their games and the impact it had, explaining:

“The football girls to whom fortune itself yields! That subject is too much for me. It would take the wit and eloquence of a Chauncey M. Depew to do the subject justice. Any way the football girls are here. By right divine they manage the football. They are monarchs of all they survey. It will be long before time will erase from our minds the eventful day when Pennsylvania was whipped and the football girls helped to do it. “Now then Pennsy we will scalp you,” the words of our song were too much for Pennsy.”<sup>103</sup>

Phillips and the rest of the roster’s gratitude toward the women is evident, crediting their “fortunes” on the gridiron to the “football girls” who “manage the football... [and] are monarchs of all they survey.” The language he uses depicts the authority of women in Native society, relating their roles on the team to that of leadership. He then

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<sup>103</sup> James M. Phillips, “The Football Banquet,” *The Red Man and Helper*, CCHS, December 12, 1902, 1.

uses a specific instance from the season where, in a game against the University of Pennsylvania, the girls' chant intimidated the opposition so much that it helped lead Carlisle to victory that day. Therefore, while the distinction between the male warrior and female non-warrior is made clear on the gridiron, so is the significance of the female role, just as it was in Indian culture. The promotion of indigenous gender roles enforced the notion of the masculine warrior while revitalizing a custom of the past.

Logically transitioning from the assertion that football was like frontier conflict, the masculinity of the Indian football player was another method for members of the Carlisle football team to resist assimilation efforts and strengthen ties to an ancestral past. As the United States shifted to methods of industrialized mechanization and bureaucratization, the institution's curriculum followed suit, training young Native men in the ways of the evolving nation. Instead of adopting these practices, Indians used football as a tool to preserve their culture's celebration of manliness. By demonstrating their physical and mental toughness amidst the rigorousness of the game and stabilizing older, pre-reservation era gender roles, the Native men discovered creative ways to identify with their ancestry while simultaneously resisting a push toward acculturation.

### **Football and Pan-Indian Identity**

Even the cooperation of Indian students to successfully reinstate football exhibited characteristics of Pan-Indian identities similar to those formed by previous generations of indigenous groups. History shows that Pan-Indian relationships were attempted at various times in the past, but were often challenged from within. This was especially true when Indians exploited or resisted Euro-Americans in matters of trade and war. Sometimes these relationships failed to materialize or last, but cases such as Tecumseh's

Confederacy, which headed a intertribal rebellion against the United States before and during the War of 1812, demonstrated that Native Americans made concerted efforts to unite under an identity as indigenous people.<sup>104</sup> It is not difficult, then, to make a connection between past intertribal alliances and the diverse group of Carlisle student-athletes reclaiming football from Pratt. Their decision to work together in order to take back the game they loved may seem inconsequential on the surface, but demonstrated a foundation of Pan-Indianism that their very ancestors participated in. Football was the new common denominator in forming such relationships, harkening to a practice of the past.

It can be confidently inferred that the young men who petitioned for football's return came from a variety of tribal identities. Although no information exists regarding the names or backgrounds of those who negotiated for the reinstatement of football, alternative evidence can be applied to make the assumption that the roughly forty student-athletes were not all from the same communities or even areas of the country. The strongest supporting evidence comes from Pratt, who kept meticulous logbooks of the Indians he recruited, which revealed that Carlisle enrolled students from different tribes throughout the United States.<sup>105</sup> The football team's roster construction is another, which saw a wide variety of different Native groups represented on the team. Consider a handful of players that comprised the 1912 Indians: Jim Thorpe was a Sac & Fox from Oklahoma, Gus Welch was a Chippewa from Wisconsin, and Elmer Busch was a Pomo from California.<sup>106</sup> These examples of tribal diversity support the idea that a Pan-Indian

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<sup>104</sup> John Sugden, "Early Pan-Indianism; Tecumseh's Tour of the Indian Country, 1811-1812," *American Indian Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 273-274.

<sup>105</sup> Pratt, "Report on First Part of Children," 1-5.

<sup>106</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 54.

identity was in fact formed by the young men who pressured Pratt into allowing football back on Carlisle's campus.

Evidence of Pan-Indianism among Carlisle's athletes is an important consideration for a few reasons. By forming intertribal alliances similar to those of their ancestors, players resisted the narrative that Indians had replaced their Native identities with Western ones. In fact, they demonstrated that ties to their Native past were actually strengthened. Additionally, the students banded together to resist Pratt - an embodiment of paternalist Euro-America. The reclamation of football was the perfect introduction for members of the Carlisle team to show that to them, the game was a tool of preservation, not acculturation. Pan-Indianism reinforced Native identity among players, who actively chose to unite as Indians rather than by tribal affiliations or, as Pratt would have hoped, as Americans.

The intertribal relationships formed by the Carlisle football team existed well after the sport's return to the boarding school. The young Indian men needed to work together to achieve success as a program, a notion best exemplified by their cooperation as teammates. Although many instances exist where the team joined together to reach a greater goal, such as unanimously agreeing to implement Warner's game plan against Army in the aforementioned 1912 matchup, the players even stuck with one another when times were tough and required to be met head-on.

Adversity in consecutive weeks of the 1896 season challenged Carlisle and hinged on their relationships as teammates to persevere. It began with their October 14 meeting with Princeton, where the officiating was so one-sided it prompted commentary in

newspapers.<sup>107</sup> The Indians had had close to enough by the beginning of the second half, and after yet another call against them, they called a timeout. Following a brief team conference, captain Bemus Pierce emerged from the huddle to approach the referee. He calmly reminded the official that it was his duty to umpire for both sides, and the Indians played on.<sup>108</sup> Coming together under these adverse circumstances and making a decision as a team demonstrated an advanced notion of Pan-Indian identity, and was seen time and again throughout the history of the program.

Many at Princeton were surprised by the level-headedness displayed by members of Carlisle's football team, but everyone was utterly shocked to witness their discipline on October 24, when Carlisle met Yale at the Polo Grounds. Already dealing with unfair officiating and a punch at one of their players, the Indians had a game-tying touchdown called back because a referee claimed he had called the play dead just before the score. Carlisle was so furious that the players prepared to walk off the field in protest. Just as they had during the Princeton game, however, the young men convened and debated whether or not they should return. They eventually decided to continue playing as a team and, despite losing 12-6, were carried off the field by supporters who had attended the game. National outrage appeared in the newspapers the next day, and *The Red Man* reprinted several of the articles for Carlisle students to read, including the *New York Sun's* description of the call, writing that it was "characteristic... of nearly all the crimes committed against the Indians by the whites."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 142.

<sup>108</sup> Steve Sheinkin, *Undeclared: Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indian School Football Team* (New York: Roaring Book Press, 2017): 54.

<sup>109</sup> Roger L. Nichols, *The American Indian: Past and Present* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008): 254.

Other than the apparent favoritism towards opposing teams, what should be recognized from these two games is that Native men responded to adversity by banding together. The strength of the players' relationship with one another is evident in both cases presented, as they mediated together in conference before making decisions regarding the team. This demonstrated notions of Pan-Indianism and even shared similar characteristics to the private discussions held between Spotted Tail and the council of Brule elders when Pratt met them on the Lakota Reservation. The bond shared by the athletes transcended their tribal identities and was a far cry from Americanization. When faced with difficult decisions, the Carlisle Indians found strength in their Pan-Indian relationships, combatting narratives of Native integration through each other and their cultural past.

## **Conclusion**

Today, the Carlisle football program is best remembered for revolutionizing the way the game was played. Their innovative playbook, filled with speed, trickery, and forward passes, made run-heavy offenses more dynamic. While that contribution certainly deserves its recognition, what is often ignored in contemporary scholarship is how Indians used football to make an impact on their own lives. Both Americans and Native people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were concerned with the sport's influence on Carlisle athletes' identities. The white opinion, largely conveyed by Pratt, considered the success of the program as an indication that players were assuming Western identities. The Indians demonstrated that this belief was misguided, and instead subverted efforts for assimilation by connecting to their ancestral past through football, thus strengthening their indigenous identities. This thesis hopes to have captured the differing viewpoints and position them against one another in order to provide a unique understanding of one component of the Indian boarding school system and its effect on those that attended.

In the late 1800s, United States realized they would need to address their "Indian Problem" after years of conflict on the frontier. The government's inconsistent policy direction made it difficult to find a solution and Congress became willing to adopt new strategies. Pratt, with his years of experience as a veteran of the Indian wars and director of the Fort Marion prison, had developed an ideology on indigenous people that was unique for a figure of his time. Believing Indians to be racially equal to Euro-Americans but maintaining an inferior culture, Pratt set out to build a school that taught Native youth Western practices. Although he loathed football, the game made its way into Carlisle as a popular sport among top academic institutions. After its full-time arrival, the Indian team

achieved incredible success on the gridiron that allowed Pratt to portray the game as evidence that his school's teachings were effective and his ideology was correct. To Americans, Indian achievement on the field was credited to their integration into Western society.

What Pratt and others ignored or missed in their understanding was that the Carlisle players were not taking up a white identity by playing the game. Football may have been an American game, but the young Indian men perceived it in their own way and used the sport as a tool of cultural preservation. From the very beginning, football was the foundation for the creation of Pan-Indian relationships. History shows that intertribal alliances had been formed by previous generations of Native people, motivated by economic or social gains. The game was the new common denominator for these relationships, from reclaiming football at Carlisle to sticking together as a team in the face of adversity. Just as most football players and fans did, members of the Carlisle team saw the game as a continuation of war in the Plains. The Indians identified with their ancestors in the struggle, seeing parallels between themselves on the playing field and past generations on the battlefield. They adopted the mental and physical virtues of the Native warrior, combatting a time when industrialization and mechanization dominated the era. The promotion of indigenous gender roles further strengthened the notion of masculinity for the athletes. These actions showed that Indians used football to continue and revitalized their culture in a time when it was threatened, demonstrating that the young men active agents of their own history amidst the oppressive forces at work.

This thesis examines only one sport at a specific Indian boarding school, a limitation that leaves many more components of assimilation curriculums at other institutions unexplored. It would be interesting to see if other students or student-athletes

used their respective activities to grow closer to an ancestral past. Moreover, the incorporation of women or both sexes in another study would be a valuable inclusion. Studying football at Carlisle limited most of the research to men, but the experience and perception of identity would likely be affected by the inclusion of more factors. The lasting impact of the Carlisle football team from an identity standpoint would also be a tremendous contribution to this field of study. This thesis only focuses on the in-school experience, but seeing how the game influenced the lives of the athletes and others after Carlisle would be fascinating. It may discover new understandings of Indian empowerment in the twentieth century and beyond.

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