

Assimilation and Activism: An Analysis of Native Boarding School Curriculum and Native
Student Activism in the 20th Century

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Introduction:

On the first morning of our class trip to the Warm Springs Reservation, home to the Northern Paiutes and others of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, a few friends and I hiked to the top of the hill behind the Warm Springs Resort to watch the sunrise. The barren high-desert landscape in Central Oregon had always struck me as particularly stark and inaccessible, given that my feet are more accustomed to the damp earth and tall trees of the Willamette Valley floor. I thought to myself, “How can life survive here?” as I trekked to the top of the gravel mountain before me. To my surprise, as the Sun climbed atop the mountains on the horizon and lit up the seemingly barren hills in shades of yellow and gold that you have to see to believe, I could feel life permeate my surroundings. The Northern Paiute elders with whom we had spoken the day before talked to our class about the power of their connection to the land, capable of sustaining and conveying cultural and historic knowledge through generations. I would like to think I got a glimpse of that that morning. My impression of the Northern Paiutes, and of the people of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs that I gleaned from our class trip is of a people of immense tenacity. Knowledge is valued as a means of survival in an environment where a deep understanding of ones’ surroundings is necessary for the literal and figurative survival of a people and their culture.

The Euro-American legacy of education in Native America is one that has dirtied the very essence of knowledge, in its misguided attempt to deconstruct Indian identities and replace it with a Christian American one. From the creation of the Warm Springs Reservation, boarding

schools have been used as “agents of a superior civilization to an inferior one,”¹ as white settlers encroached on historic Paiute territory, discarded the traditional knowledge of the Paiute, Wasco, and Warm Springs peoples, and attempted to replace it with their own. However, the fact remains that in the face of the seemingly immovable obstacle of white colonialism and an oppressive new form of government, Native American students and communities were forced to learn and to adapt. Succeeding in the school system became a necessary aspect of survival in the eyes of many Native people, while student activism and the move toward Indian self-determination typified the tenacity and resolve with which the people of the Warm Springs Reservation interact with the world around them. This paper will examine Native American student retaliation and activism in the face of assimilationist educational policies and curriculum at both the Warm Springs Boarding School on the Warm Springs Reservation, and at Chemawa Boarding School in Salem Oregon, from the 1930s to the 1970s. I will attempt to analyze the intent of curriculum at both boarding schools, and the response to this curriculum by Native students and Native community members, which included students and community members of The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (made up of the Paiute, Wasco, and Warm Springs peoples). My thesis is in two parts, where first I will argue that through the use of vocational education, Christian ethics and citizenship training, and cultural safety zones,² Oregon Native American boarding school curriculum attempted to assimilate Native American students by instilling a sense of indebtedness on their part towards the goodwill of the U.S. government, while fostering belief in the ideals of American citizenship, Christian morality, and work ethic. Second, I will demonstrate that over the course of the 20th century, student and community activism against these assimilationist policies took the forms of retaliation against school authorities, community legal activism on behalf of the

1 David Adams. "A Case Study: Self-Determination and Indian Education." *Journal of American Indian Education* 13, no. 2 (1974): 21-7.

2 Melissa Ruhl. "Forward You Must Go": Chemawa Indian Boarding School and Student Activism in the 1960s and 1970s." PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2011: 41.

Native American students, student political activism through the Red Power Movement of the 1970s, student cultural activism through literary publications such as *The Chemawa American*, and finally through student legal activism in the form of the Indian Student Bill of Rights in 1972. Although this paper will not contain much direct reference to the Paiute people, the intent of my paper is to provide some semblance of a history and analysis of 20th century Native education as it directly pertains to the Paiute people, and to The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs as a whole.

Background:

During the later half of the 19th century, as the belief in Manifest Destiny was quickly moving white America westward, the United States government endowed itself with full federal responsibility for Native education,³ primarily for the sake of integrating Native people into mainstream America. The belief in the necessity of removing Native students from their home and families for the sake of total assimilation was acted upon fervently. According to an Indian agent in 1878, “to place these wild children under a teacher’s care but four or five hours a day, and permit them to spend the other nineteen in the filth and degradation of the village, makes the attempt to educate and civilize them a mere farce.”⁴ In the late 1880s, “an intensified education system was introduced...to assimilate Indians. The different types of Indian schools included day schools, boarding schools...on-reservation and off-reservation schools.”⁵ The Superintendent of Indian Education at the time implemented school curriculum policies that not only intended to forward assimilationist goals, but were also designed to increase Native “employability” by focusing on vocational training in fields such as agriculture, crafts trades, and homemaking.⁶ At their core, the curriculum was prejudiced and limiting, by assuming that Native students could not

3 Patrick Michael McKeenan. "The History of Chemawa Indian School." PhD diss., University of Washington, 1981.

4 Bonnell, Sonciray. *Chemawa Indian Boarding School: The first one hundred years, 1880 to 1980*. Universal-Publishers, 1997: 21.

5 Bonnell, Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 21.

6 Ibid, 31.

look forward to a future in any other career besides a vocational one. Students' school days consisted of:

One half day of academic instruction and one half day of vocational instruction. The academic curriculum consisted mainly of elementary subjects. The vocational curriculum entailed having the students maintain the school. This included growing and cooking their own food, making and mending their clothes and shoes, and cleaning and maintaining school buildings.⁷

When students began their years in boarding schools, they were promptly “re clothed, regroomed, and renamed.”⁸ Native languages, dress, and expressions of culture were forbidden, and many students were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to off-reservation boarding schools without parental consent, as the United States government worked to eradicate Native culture through schooling, one student at a time. However, “after 1893 superintendents and Indian agents could not send an Indian child to an off-reservation school without the “full consent” of the parents,”⁹ and by the 1920's, “assimilation policy had tempered its force...possibly because the United States government realized the cost and futility of the policy.”¹⁰ Despite this fact, white ethnocentrism and assimilationist policies continued to be the norm throughout much of the 20th century.

The Meriam Report:

In 1926, the Secretary of the Interior, Hubert Work, asked the Brookings Institute at Johns Hopkins University to conduct a nonpolitical investigation of Indian affairs,¹¹ culminating with the 1928 Meriam Report, officially published under the name, *The Problem of Indian Administration*.¹² The report heavily criticized the Department of the Interior's Indian Office (which would later become the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)), questioning their competency when handling Indian affairs and services. The report called for more Indian self-determination

⁷ Jon Allan Reyhner, and Jeanne M. Oyawin Eder. *American Indian Education: A History*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2006: 132.

⁸ Reyhner, *American Indian Education*, 168.

⁹ Bonnell, *Chemawa Indian Boarding School*, 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 51.

¹¹ Reyhner, *American Indian Education*, 207-208.

¹² *Ibid*.

on all fronts, especially in Indian education, where there was a “lack of correlation between the curriculum of Indian schools and the realities of reservation life. In addition, the care of Indian children in boarding schools was found shockingly inadequate.”¹³ On the topic of vocational labor as a central facet of boarding school curriculum, the report questioned “whether much of the work of Indian children in boarding schools would not be prohibited in many states by child labor laws.”¹⁴ Other criticisms of the BIA-orchestrated Indian education system included “low pupil achievement, high attrition rates, irrelevant programs, and inadequate facilities.”¹⁵ In a broader sense, the Meriam Report reflected growing dissatisfaction with drastic assimilationist policies, which were increasingly viewed as ineffective and inhumane. The reform-minded report called for the integration of Native culture and Native people into the Native education system at federal BIA-operated schools, such as the Warm Springs and Chemawa boarding schools,¹⁶ although in actuality, Indian people were still not consulted about the planning and orchestrating of said changes, and were not consulted about what specific changes they wanted to see take place.¹⁷

The Meriam Report was also highly critical of the off-reservation boarding school system as a whole. It reads:

Whatever may have been the official government attitude, education for the Indian in the past has proceeded largely on the theory that it is necessary to remove the Indian child as far as possible from his home environment; whereas the modern point of view in education and social work stresses on upbringing in the natural setting of home and family life.¹⁸

With the publishing of the Meriam Report came a movement to gradually abolish the boarding school practice of moving students hundreds of miles from their homes on reservations with the

¹³ Reyhner, *American Indian Education*, 207-208.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁵ Carolyn Croft. "The First American: Last in Education." *Journal of American Indian Education* 16, no. 2 (1977): 15.

¹⁶ Reyhner, *American Indian Education*, 209.

¹⁷ Michael Baughman, and Charlotte Hadella. *Warm Springs Millennium: Voices from the Reservation*. University of Texas Press, 2010: 141.

¹⁸ Lewis Meriam. "The Problem of Indian Administration. Report of a Survey Made at the Request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and Submitted to Him, February 21, 1928." (1928): 32.

intent of isolating them from Native culture. Day school and reservation boarding schools, such as the Warm Springs Boarding School, that would eventually be run by Native people were preferred as a more humane alternative.¹⁹ Chemawa Indian School faced threats of closing following the Meriam Report, as its position as one of the oldest off-reservation boarding schools in the country caused it to undergo heavy scrutiny. However, the community rallied together to keep Chemawa open for the simple fact that most Native students and families preferred boarding schools to public schools because Native students often felt marginalized and neglected ever more so in the public school system. In order for Chemawa and other off-reservation boarding schools to remain open, “extensive reform was ordered: inclusion of Indian culture into the curriculum, improved salary and standards for staff, admittance of older children only and improved vocational training.”²⁰

Warm Springs Reservation Boarding School:

The Warm Springs Reservation Boarding School was founded in 1890, in part because of the fact that “the 1855 Treaty with the Tribes of Middle Oregon stipulated that the U.S. government provide the Warm Springs Reservation with a school house, teacher, and books.”²¹ From its founding through the early 20th century, the Warm Springs Boarding School was the epitome of an assimilationist Indian school. Later primary literature from school administrators at the Warm Springs boarding school in the 1930s and 1940s is characterized by stark juxtaposition between various perceptions of Native students.

On one hand, school administrators mirror assimilationist school policies in their condemnation of the Warm Springs Indians as lazy, dirty, backward, and incapable. Various BIA administrators working at Warm Springs in the 1930s express these sentiments, such as in the Annual Report of the Warm Springs Agency in 1936, which says “There is no more pathetic

19 Bonnell, Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 56.

20 Ibid.

21 Melinda Jette. "Warm Springs Agency Boarding School, 1890." *Oregon History Project*. Oregon Historical Society, 2004.

picture to be seen than the small Indian child that has been dragged from place to place- dirty, filthy, ragged, and neglected”²², and then goes on to say that “the Warm Springs Indian feels that it is the government’s responsibility, by virtue of treaty, to educate his children, and that he has no responsibility and should remain free to go whither the Spirit moves him”²³. In the “Section IV: Education” section of the 1936 Warm Springs Agency Annual Report, a summary of the Warm Springs boarding school’s educational goals are as follows:

Inculcation of ideas and principles upon which to build character has been one of our aims in the vocational departments. The ability to take responsibility, the development of initiative and the will to work and like it, have been emphasized throughout the entire school system. To make the students see objectively what life has in store for the Indians; to develop pride, self-respect, the will for self-respecting financial independence, and the realization that conditions on their reservation should be improved, make up largely the basis of our school program.²⁴

School administrators at Warm Springs, under the impression that the Native students and community were devoid of personal character, pride, self-respect, or work ethic, took it upon themselves to instill their version of these qualities in their students at the Warm Springs boarding school. Their depictions of the students and families are patronizing and condescending. In the same report, the goals set for Native female student education follows the same prejudiced line of thought:

“The aim in our school has been to develop our girls into ideal Indian women, to teach them to be good housekeepers, and to develop in them a liking for cleanliness, physically and morally as well as in their surroundings, so that they too, will make their own reservation homes more home-like, livable, and inspiring”²⁵

Many of the Warm Springs BIA administrators in the 1930s coupled their desire to encourage Native students’ embrace of their Indian culture, with criticism of their culture and character as inherently lacking certain qualities; qualities they attributed to white, Christian America. The notion that Native Americans were leaching off of the government also impacted school

22 U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Superintendents Annual Narratives and Reports*, Portland, O.R.: Warm Springs Agency, 1936-1937: 30.

23 Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Superintendents Annual Reports*, 30.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid, 36.

curriculum, as school administrators attempted to instill the notion of indebtedness towards the government into their students, for the sake of creating an even more productive, hard-working class of graduates. This is evident, again, in the 1936 Warm Springs Agency Annual Report, in the following excerpt:

We wish to educate our folks as Indians, to be Indians and proud of it, but at the same time encourage them to raise their standard of living and improve the general health conditions of their respective homes; to be good workers and feel that it is honorable to work and make an honest living instead of continually relying on their government as a prop against economic annihilation- to get them weaned away from the idea that government owes them a living without an effort on their part.²⁶

On the other hand, echoing the sentiment of the Meriam Report, school administrators at times seemed to express sincere concern for the health and well-being of their students, for their poor living conditions at the school, for students' leisure time, and for students' cultural education. The Superintendent of Indian Education in 1939, Mr. J. Elliot, had this criticism for the Principal of the Warm Springs boarding school at the time:

He has no parent-teacher organization, and apparently gives no thought to the importance of maintaining close relationship between the Indian parents and the school staff, or of the importance of the school staff familiarizing themselves with the past and present traditional customs and living conditions of these people.²⁷

In order to preserve what white America believed to be a dead or dying heritage, the Warm Springs boarding school began Arts and Crafts courses in the 1930s because, in their words, "it has been the policy of every department during the entire year to stress Warm Springs Indian culture, to revive old Indian arts, crafts, and lore through school activities"²⁸. These classes offered "bead work, leatherwork, weaving, cornhusk weaving, earth painting, designs on wooden plaques, and painting over glass"²⁹, and the goal of the courses was "to help preserve the native

²⁶ Bureau of Indian Affairs, Superintendents Annual Reports, 36.

²⁷ Record Group 75, Box 96, "800-1939-8979", Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Warm Springs, 1939, National Archives and Records Administration. Washington, DC: 13.

²⁸ Bureau of Indian Affairs, Superintendents Annual Reports, 41.

²⁹ Ibid, 38.

heritage, to show the Indian student the beauty of the traditions, customs and beliefs of his people, and to revive these arts and the pride of heritage that they represent”³⁰.

While the 1936 Warm Springs Annual Report document does indicate the administration’s desire to incorporate Native culture into the boarding school, this goal was rooted in two misguided assumptions: one, that the people on the reservation were somehow responsible for the destruction of their culture; and two, that Indian was an over arching cultural category that could be applied to all Warm Springs students, who came from different tribes, with different traditions and cultures, who spoke different languages, and who had yet to be impacted by the Pan-Indian identity of the mid to late 20th century. One section of the report reads:

It is a sad fact that two or three generations of neglect will wholly or partially destroy a culture or at least the most beautiful part of it. The crafts of the local Indians are known to the older women, but the girls have never taken enough interest to learn any of them thoroughly.³¹

In this instance, the speaker directly faults the Native female students with the loss of certain cultural knowledge and practices, which is an insinuation that at best can be described as short-sighted, and at worst as grossly ignorant and destructive. Another excerpt from the report describes an event held at the boarding school:

One of the most interesting parties of the year was the one given by the Home Economics club where everyone came dressed as an Indian, talked Indian (or made signs), sang Indian songs, did Indian dances, and played Indian games, and were served Indian refreshments Indian fashion.³²

In this excerpt, Adam’s argument is very evident that “most viewed all Indians as being the same, failing to see both the subtle and not so subtle differences in tribal traditions.”³³ Not only was Native culture viewed as a dying heritage, it was also taught within safety zones. Safety zones, as used by Melissa Ruhl, refer to the practice of confining Native cultural education to

30 Bureau of Indian Affairs, Superintendents Annual Reports, 30.

31 Ibid, 38.

32 Ibid, 42.

33 David Wallace Adams. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. University Press of Kansas, 2501 W. 15th St., Lawrence, KS 66049, 1995.

generalizations about Native culture, and the portrayal of culture as a mask of songs, dances, and art, that could be taken on and off with ease.³⁴ Because of the innate contradictions present in the perceptions of Native students at the Warm Springs boarding school, it is not difficult or surprising to understand why, according to Bonnell, “the history of federal Indian schools seems paradoxical, in that education by definition proposes to enable and encourage, while the laws that controlled Indian lives constrained and suppressed.”³⁵ One could easily extend the assertion made in the previous quote, and say that both formal institutions, such as laws, and informal ones, such as racism and subconscious prejudices, consistently oppressed Native people at the time.

Regardless of school administrators’ attitudes towards students, curriculum at Warm Springs and other boarding schools in the 1930s and 1940s objectively intended to teach students to communicate in English, and to make them productive members of the off-reservation, capitalist mainstream. While the Meriam Report had proposed a hopeful, if not naïve, given the severity of prejudices against Native peoples, alternative to assimilationist education through the integration of Native culture and people into the school system, “America’s involvement in World War II and postwar reorganization shifted Indian education efforts away from cross-cultural curriculum and native language programs back to the development of work habits and training for industrial jobs.”³⁶ School curriculum perpetuated rhetoric of the time about Native indebtedness to the United States government for the government’s goodwill in caring for Native tribes. Because of this, “Indians were taught to be economically self-sufficient in order to relieve the United States government of its obligations to Indian tribes.”³⁷ In the face of BIA pressure to enroll children in boarding schools, many Native parents refused to send their children to school

34 Ruhl, *Forward You Must Go*, 41.

35 Bonnell, *Chemawa Indian Boarding School*, 130.

36 Baughman, *Warm Springs Millennium*, 142.

37 Bonnell, *Chemawa Indian Boarding School*, 22.

at all, out of legitimate fears that their children would be abused, go unfed, or not be allowed to return home at the parent's request.³⁸

Warm Springs Community Activism:

There were instances of formal community activism in Warm Springs in the early 20th century, long before national movements towards Native self-determination and educational reform took storm. In 1910, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs met to file a formal complaint with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, due to grievances with various policies implemented on the reservation that infringed upon the rights of tribe members. The beginning of the complaint read as follows:

We understand that this reservation was given to us by treaty with the United States, and therefore we have a right to feel that it belongs to us and we may call it ours. Now if this be true, and we think no one can dispute that it is, we feel we have just cause for complaint against many things that are being done.³⁹

The complaint went on to outline issues concerning tribal members' right to fish the Columbia River, disputes over the Northern boundary of the reservation, timber taken from the reservation without consent from the tribes, and a proposition to build a railroad through Warm Springs.⁴⁰

Whether or not this complaint yielded any actual results, the complaint in itself indicates the beginning of the organization and self-determination of the people of Warm Springs.

In 1917, the Tribe of Warm Springs filed a request to worship traditionally. The request read:

Have we not got the same rights to our believes as the citizens of the United States has. We are not trying to be contrary, we will go to the white men church, as we have always have attended and also we want to have our church to Thank God, for all he has done for us...Thanking you for what you have done for us Indians, we are your loyal people, fore we all have one creator in heaven.⁴¹

In response, the Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs had this to say:

38 Ibid, 24.

39 RG 75, Box 3, "051-1910-43219", Bureau of Indian Affairs, NARA: 2.

40 Ibid.

41 RG 75, Box 7, "060-1917-48058", Bureau of Indian Affairs, NARA: 17.

I have your petition of May 12 wherein you ask for the right to have your Indian worship...One may improve himself through his form of worship as well as in the schools and I should not want to see you leave a church that was being conducted for your welfare and return to old customs that would not be in keeping with the advancement which you have made.⁴²

While the Tribe's request is lacking in strong wording or forceful conviction, given the circumstances it is not hard to understand why. The deeply ingrained prejudices held by BIA officials at the time, coupled with the power and influence these officials had over tribal members' lives and livelihoods, made Native activism and disregard of authority difficult and dangerous. However, the conviction to conserve a part of the Warm Springs peoples' culture is expressed through this request, as well as the continued unification of tribal members for the sake of heightened self-advocacy and self-representation. By the late 1930's, "the tribes of Warm Springs had developed a strong enough sense of collective identity to form their confederation and move toward self-governance,"⁴³ which is most evident in the 1937 renaming of the reservation as The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon. At the same time, a constitution was created that began the use of the Tribal Council as the reservation's central form of government. The Tribal Council "consists of eleven members, eight of whom are elected to three-year terms, and three of who are tribal chiefs- one from each of the tribes- who serve life terms."⁴⁴ This move towards self-determination and self-governance as a means of gaining rights for themselves would only strengthen over the course of the next few decades, and would become a trend nationally. With the onset of WWII, and with the return to more intense assimilationist educational policies, "resistance among white reformers and Indian leadership groups strengthened. In 1944 the National Congress of American Indians was organized,"⁴⁵ which was the first Indian-run advocacy group in the country, and served as a testament to the new reality that "through education, federal programs, and a deeper involvement with mainstream

42 Ibid, 1.

43 Baughman, Warm Springs Millennium, 19.

44 Ibid, 16.

45 Ibid, 143.

America, Indian tribes developed a core of leadership capable of telling the federal government what they wanted.”⁴⁶ Native American people nationally had begun to realize that an important factor in achieving sovereignty was to work within the system that for decades had actively worked to imprison and eradicate them, culturally and physically.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the people of Warm Springs began to actively pursue cultural education in the public sphere. In Mike Baughman’s book, Warm Springs Millenium, Paiute Tribal Elder and Spiritual Leader Wilson Wewa had this to say about cultural education on the Warm Springs Reservation at the time:

Back in the late sixties and early seventies, they had a culture camp here in Warm Springs, where some of the elders participated. It was run out of this office. They taught dances and songs and some of the language in a camp up in the mountains. At that time, I was just a teenager- fourteen, fifteen years old- and that had a big impact on my life.⁴⁷

Wilson Wewa later became the director of Warm Spring’s Culture and Heritage Office, and helped bring back the culture camp. He remembers the kids’ response to the camp:

I took my drum, and I taught them how to dance. The little kids, the third- and fourth-grade kids, ate it up. I taught them how to do the dance, and I sang the song. We did that one night, and then the next night, and before we even had our campfire, the kids were already all around asking me if I was going to bring my drum out again. When I told them yes, they got excited about it.⁴⁸

In the face of the legacy of cultural destruction for the sake of assimilationist education, programs such as the culture camp at Warm Springs can be described as nothing less than the ultimate form of Native activism.

Chemawa Boarding School:

The Chemawa Boarding School, previously known as the Forest Grove Indian School founded in 1880, was the second Indian boarding school in the country, and the first in the Western United States⁴⁹. Originally the school was located in Forest Grove, Oregon, but was later

⁴⁶ Reyhner, American Indian Education, 251.

⁴⁷ “Interview with Wilson Wewa,” Baughman, Warm Springs Millennium, 84.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ruhl., Forward You Must Go, 3.

moved to Salem, Oregon.⁵⁰ Historically, Chemawa embodied all, if not more, of the assimilationist policies and notions that were present at the Warm Springs Boarding School, and many Paiute and other Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs students were sent to the school, both forcibly and voluntarily, over the course of the 20th century. However, because Chemawa was an off-reservation boarding school, and had students from Native groups spanning the entire West Coast of the United States, the school faced its own unique array of challenges. While Warm Springs displayed the juxtaposition between school administrators' contradictory perceptions of Native students, Chemawa embodies the juxtaposition between some student perceptions of boarding schools as places of Native community and home, and other student perceptions of boarding schools as oppressive actors in the movement for full assimilation.

For much of the first half of the 20th century, students at Chemawa were required to attend Ethics and Christian Doctrine class every week. The Principal of Chemawa in 1945 describes the class as follows:

All students are required to attend [Ethics and Christian Doctrine class] and for this reason the ministers have been asked not to stress a particular creed but to present moral and Christian doctrine such that it will be accepted by any student regardless of his chosen faith.⁵¹

In 1948, the Supreme Court banned religious instruction in schools⁵², however even “during the 1960s, Chemawa continued to encourage Christianity, relegate heritage to safety zones, and rely on student labor to sustain the school.”⁵³ Although the 1928 Meriam Report caused the restructuring of Chemawa to offer a broader array of job training,⁵⁴ the school's continued use of student manual labor to maintain school grounds throughout the 20th century in order to teach

⁵⁰ Reyhner, *American Indian Education*, 150.

⁵¹ “Letter from Principal Nell Bannon to Superintendent Evans, September 4, 1945, 1,” McKeehan, *The History of Chemawa Indian School*, 185.

⁵² Reyhner, *American Indian Education*, 232.

⁵³ Ruhl., *Forward You Must Go*, iv.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

“vocational skills” can easily be described as child labor. A Coos/Siletz student at Chemawa in the 1920s describes her impression of the half-academic, half-vocational curriculum:

That’s the only complaint I can say with the government boarding schools, we went to school half day and worked half day. So that a full year of schooling, actually we only had a half year of schooling if we were to go out of an Indian school. When I first went there in 1927 I was ahead of the same kids of that age, but when I left there in 1932 I would have been behind kids in public schools because having gone to just half day of school.⁵⁵

Another student who attended Chemawa in the 1950s had this to say about his vocational education:

I didn’t like the boarding schools just for the fact that basically I didn’t learn to read. To me, the education was inadequate, for me. You only went to school three and half hours and the rest of the day you were out doing labor.⁵⁶

While many students mirrored this sentiment, some felt that the vocational education they received at Chemawa was useful and valuable. A student at Chemawa in the 1950s said:

They taught printing, electrical, shoe making, carpentry, cabinetry, auto mechanics, and cooks and bakers. Those to me were adequate because you got hands-on training. Farming was good if you came from a part of the country where there was a lot of farming. They taught you how to operate equipment. Vocational was good, I thought.⁵⁷

However, the reality of vocational training at Chemawa and other boarding schools was that “Indian school industrial education did not mean training for urban, mass-production, factory-style industry, but small-scale, individual craftsmanship...The conception of industrial education for Indians ran counter to developments in mainstream society.”⁵⁸

Chemawa, like Warm Springs, relegated much of the culture of its students to cultural safety zones, where non-Native school administrator and staff presumed to be capable of instructing their Native students in Indian culture. Despite this oversimplification of Native American cultures, students at Chemawa expressed interest in Native culture early on. One

⁵⁵ “Interview with Teresa (Coos/Siletz) 1927-32/ age: 9” Bonnell, Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 46.

⁵⁶ “Interview with Clarence (Blackfeet) 1952-56/ age: 17” Bonnell, Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 91.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 92.

⁵⁸ Bonnell, Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 47.

student who attended Chemawa in the 1930s and 40s remembers a yearly celebration put on at the school:

Then we had, what we called an annual pageant... We all did, I think the from the Southwest, the Corn Dance. Oh, I thought that was the most beautiful thing I ever saw. Then we were a part of something. That was always an honor, we were all proud. Then they had the white people all [come and they] sat in the bleachers, ooed and ahned.⁵⁹

Many students seemed to express a desire to foster a connection to Native culture and history, even those that were not technically their own. Although Chemawa's curriculum attempted to wedge a divide between skills needed in order to live a practical, successful life, and knowledge to be learned from one's culture and history, the school's students displayed immense interest in learning about their own history, culture, traditions, and beliefs. The argument could be made that perhaps cultural safety zones had the opposite effect intended, and sparked further interest and inquiry into Native culture.

Chemawa and the Cold War Era:

With the onset of the Cold War, and America's growing fear of communism, Indian reservations nationwide came under attack as conservative groups equated the reservation system with a collectivized system of societal organization. Congress sold termination bills to the public as a way of freeing the Indians from their inferior status, by riding them of governmental regulations in the form of the reservation system, and thereby solving the "Indian problem."⁶⁰ In 1953, Congress began passing bills to terminate reservations, and fully integrate Native Americans into American society.⁶¹ While the 1954 Western Termination Act failed to erase the Confederated Tribe of Warm Springs' federal recognition, the effects of the national shift in thinking about Native peoples' place in American society impacted educational policies at both Warm Springs and Chemawa. Most notably, there was an overwhelming shift back towards the support of off-reservation boarding schools as a means of removing Native students from their

⁵⁹ "Interview with Harriet (Grand Ronde/Aleut) 1939-42/ age: 14" Bonnell, *Chemawa Indian Boarding School*, 80.

⁶⁰ Reyhner, *American Indian Education*, 235.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

homes so they could be more quickly assimilated, a viewpoint that had not had popular support since before the Meriam Report was published.⁶² Once again, full-fledged assimilationist notions took hold of Chemawa's curriculum. Luckily, "with the help of Indian opposition, Congress judged the termination policy of the 1950s a failure much faster than the old allotment policy it resembled."⁶³ However, the backlash created by the swing towards assimilation that occurred in the 1950s catapulted students at Chemawa, Warm Springs, and Native boarding schools nationwide into the tumultuous, civil-rights-minded activism of the 1960s and 70s.

Student Activism:

Student activism against prejudiced and assimilationist educational policies manifested in all of the following ways: retaliation against authority; voicing of student opinions through literary publications such as the Chemawa American; student political activism through outlets such as the Pan-Indian movement; student legal activism, culminating in the Indian Student Bill of Rights becoming official BIA policy in 1974; and student cultural activism, as students consciously came together to reject assimilation through knowledge. Native student activism was prevalent nationwide, and was also evident at both the Warm Springs and Chemawa boarding schools.

Retaliation Against Authority:

Students at both Warm Springs Boarding School and Chemawa Boarding School retaliated against school authorities when they felt treatment to be unjust, oppressive, and unnecessary. Students would run away, refuse to do vocational labor, and refuse to adhere to punishments. Dennis Banks, the leader of the American Indian Movement in the 1990's, had this to say about runaways:

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 236.

We all ran away from those schools from time to time, not really knowing where we were running to. In a way it was our own survival instinct telling us to go, and so we went...But we all survived, though at times the Indianness was almost beaten out of us.⁶⁴

Myra Johnson-Orange, a tribal elder of the Northern Paiute on the Warm Springs Reservation, and former Director of the Warm Springs Culture and Heritage Department, had this to say about running away from the Warm Springs Boarding School in 1957:

I was pretty independent during my youth and kinda did pretty much what I wanted to do. But at one point they tried to put me in boarding school... after I lost my mother they tried to put me in there because my grandmother was taking care of many of us grandkids. So I went to there, and stayed there, and they actually did the de-lousing procedure with me, and shaved my head, cut my hair... I got in trouble there, and I don't even recall what it was, but they told me for my punishment I had to scrub the stairs down with a toothbrush, so I did that, and I got to the bottom of the stairs and I just ran out the door and ran home to my grandmothers and never went back. My grandmother chose for me to be there, but once I got home, she said I didn't have to go back. But because of the way they were disciplining me, I guess as a young person I said "I ain't doing this."⁶⁵

Later, Myra was enrolled in a public high school in Madras, a town outside of the Warm Springs Resevation. Myra had this to say about her experience there:

I think a lot of it was curriculum that was not related to who you were as Native American people. For myself, it's like, "Why am I learning this?" In high school, when I was in high school in Madras, I never could figure out how this is going to be relative to me as an adult? What will I use this education for?...There was nothing relevant in the high school system, so I never did find education to be important from my perspective... I knew I was retaliating, mostly because I just didn't see the- there was no importance in the school system for me. And so my one way was to just not even be there. And a lot of times I would catch the bus and go to town, but I would walk off and not even go to the school...I just couldn't relate to the teachers that were teaching. I just couldn't do it. Why am I learning this history? This has nothing to do with what I need to learn. And I guess in a way, that would be a sort of activism.⁶⁶

Myra's story typifies the strong, independent will that characterized much of the stories of Native student retaliation against boarding school administrators. A female student at Chemawa in the late 1940s and early-50s had this to say about her reaction to punishment she received as a child attending the school:

64 "Dennis Banks (1994), American Indian Movement leader"Reyhner, American Indian Education, 235.

65 Johnson-Orange, Myra. Interview by Ayantu Megerssa. Phone Interview. Eugene, OR, November 25, 2014.

66 Johnson-Orange, Myra, Interview by Ayantu Megerssa.

I used to wet the bed and my punishment on the weekends was to stand there with a sheet over my head. That makes me cry...I used to try to stay up all night so I wouldn't wet the bed and I did...Until I got in the seventh grade and I was still wetting my bed, then I started rebelling against the punishment. I got mean. I started fighting back with the matrons. I wasn't gonna take it anymore, because I stayed up all night so I wouldn't wet the bed and I did...I'd run away. I'd hide for the whole day, go without eating, because they had this sheet...Then I started rebelling. I didn't care anymore. What could they do, send me home? They couldn't send me anywhere because I didn't have anyplace to go...I think at that time there were so many of us that nobody really had a chance to be an individual. You were in the system. If you were one of the people that wasn't going through the system right, that was me. I just didn't fit in...The matrons were always after me for something. I was always on restriction so I could never go anywhere...I wasn't going through the system like a normal child.⁶⁷

Unlike other forms of organized activism, retaliation against authority that students felt was overbearing, oppressive, and unfair occurred over the course of the 20th century, at Warm Springs, Chemawa, and other BIA schools. While this form of activism had effects on a smaller scale, the tenacity and resolve with which Native students rejected oppressive treatments and punishments would characterize and define organized student activism of the later 20th century.

Student Political Activism:

In the 1960s and 1970s, many Native youth began to actively oppose white ethnocentrism and oppression, as the Pan-Indian and Red Power Movement took hold in Oregon, and around the country. In 1968 “the American Indian Movement (AIM) was formed in Minneapolis to fight civil rights violations.”⁶⁸ Very soon the following year, “a group calling itself “Indians of All Tribes” seized Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay and demanded that the former prison on the island be turned in to an Indian cultural and educational center.”⁶⁹ Groups such as Indians of All Tribes and AIM organized various sit-ins, trashed BIA buildings, and took over entire towns, in order to voice their dissent in regards to the treatment and recognition of Native Americans in the United States. Locally in Oregon, “AIM organized a number of high school sit-ins and walkouts with the purpose of getting more classes in Indian culture and history and more Indian

⁶⁷ “Interview with Wilma (Blackfeet) 1949-54/ age: 9” Bonnell, Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 80.

⁶⁸ Reyhner, American Indian Education, 275.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 257.

involvement in school administration.”⁷⁰ It is easy to understand how the amount of media coverage and attention that these activist groups demanded would have impacted Native students’ impression of their place in society, and their right to voice their opinions. At Chemawa and Warm Springs, expressions of Pan-Indian sentiments and solidarity with the Red Power Movement were quite literally visible on campus. Between 1968 and 1973, one historian writes that “students’ dissent and nonconformist movements have been coming in assorted packages. The most prominent among the male Indian youth on the campus has been the return of their ancestral heritage of sporting long hair.”⁷¹

Student Legal Activism:

National student legal activism of the 1970s served as a turning point in granting Native students’ legal rights as free, equal citizens of the United States. In April of 1971, “Navajo students at Intermountain [Intermountain Indian School] brought a lawsuit against their school and against the Bureau of Indian Affairs... the plaintiffs listed particular policies and practices of Intermountain that they argued violated their basic rights.”⁷² The case was dismissed in 1972, but in response to the dismissal, the students drafted the Indian Student Bill of Rights (ISBR), and presented it to Congress. The Intermountain students

were not timid in denouncing trends of oppression against Native youth, and they proposed rights to protect students against further abuse... First, students had a right to privacy... Second, students had a right to be free from ridicule and punishment, “for speaking their native language, practicing their native religion, wearing their native dress, or in any way maintaining their native culture.”... Third, students had a right to assemble and form, “political, social, or other organizations as they see fit.”... Finally, the ISBR put the burden of proof on school staff if they assumed the First Amendment did not protect a belief or activity.⁷³

The ISBR also included rights to the “freedom from unreasonable search, reasonable privacy, a safe and secure environment...freedom of speech and expression...and to petition the redress of

70 Ibid.

71 Gene Leitka. "Search for Identity Creates Problems for Indian Students." *Journal of American Indian Education* 11, no. 1 (1971): 7.

72 Ruhl, *Forward You Must Go*, 54-55.

73 "Indian Student Code of Conduct" Ibid, 56-58.

grievances and the right to due process and disciplinary actions which could involve suspension or expulsion.”⁷⁴ These rights are just a few among many outlined in the Indian Student Bill of Rights, that became official policy of the BIA in 1974.⁷⁵ Soon after, *The Chemawa American* celebrated this achievement in a long article, in which it quoted the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Morris Thompson. The Commissioner noted that “in this new era, Native children were no longer targets of federal assimilation campaigns...Second, he noted that the schools could be dictatorial and that students, therefore, could be wronged by schools limiting their rights.”⁷⁶

Student Cultural Activism:

Throughout 1960s and 70s, “though students still attended boarding school to learn skills for functioning in White society, they also attended...in order to grow up in an all-Indian environment.”⁷⁷ While Native students in public schools became marginalized and isolated, boarding schools (and other BIA schools where the student population was entirely Native) allowed students to form bonds with each other and with their cultures, and effectively break down walls between Indian tribes. At Chemawa, “students rebelled, [and] consciously decided what cultural aspects to keep and which ones to discard,”⁷⁸ and at Warm Springs, the community banded together to make cultural education available to students on the reservation. Attending schools with an entirely Native student body empowered students to “engage their peer group in learning when their schooling lacked what they desired to know and explain.”⁷⁹ One way students at Chemawa found to do this was through *The Chemawa American*, the school’s regularly published newspaper. Although most of the student-written articles and creative work throughout the 20th century lacked any critique of the Native education system, or the state of Native student and community life in America (most likely due to administrative censorship), the 1970s marked

74 McKeehan, *The History of Chemawa Indian School*, 202.

75 Ruhl, *Forward You Must Go*, 61.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid, 62.

78 Bonnell, *Chemawa Indian Boarding School*, 132.

79 Ruhl, *Forward You Must Go*, 62.

a turning point in Chemawa student's voicing of their opinions about the state of Native America.

In 1970, a student named Victoria Brunette published a poem titled "Broken and Bent" in the newspaper. It reads as follows:

From the great beautiful grassy hill,
 Where there was health, freedom, love and content
 From this peaceful happy life they were sent
 To the reservations, where they are still.
 Where sickness and disease in numbers kill.
 And made to sign treaties, broken and bent,
 Changed and forgotten without sentiment.
 Why this is done is strange unto me still.
 Is it for the Indians' care and love?
 No, it is not, is what I must believe.
 It is like the falcon and the dove,
 Who float and sail in the blue sky above,
 When the dove would die if she did not leave,
 This, I believe, is far from care and love⁸⁰

Victoria's poem is an unashamed critique of the reservation system, a critique that might not have been published in *The Chemawa American* a decade or two previously, under different sociocultural circumstances. A few years later in 1972, a student named Mildred Quaempts wrote an article titled "Save Our Dying Languages," advocating for the implementation of Native language programs at Chemawa. She says:

The use of native languages is dying out. The child is often taught only English and the native language begins to die out...Northwest students speak English all the time because they either weren't taught their native language or they only know a few words, not enough to carry on a conversation...As an Indian student, I then ask if there could be some native Indian language classes here at Chemawa in the near future, so that these languages won't go out of existence.⁸¹

Another student named Phil Taylor wrote about Indian education and self-determination:

What makes the Indian today walk with his head down? It's his knowledge of developing an education for himself...Only self-determination is the framework which will promote development of the Indian people...Only those with wisdom can live in the educated world. Our heritage is dying. Only the wise and educated can bring about our new way of life.⁸²

80 *Chemawa American*. Volume 67. Chemawa, Oregon: Chemawa Indian School, 1970.

81 *Chemawa American*, v.71, 1974.

82 *Ibid*, v. 68, 1972.

Finally, in 1974, *The Chemawa American* published an editorial titled “Students Get Bill of Rights,” celebrating the establishment of the Indian Student Bill of Rights as official BIA policy. The editorial quotes the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Morris Thompson, as saying:

The consideration of students’ rights is a fairly recent phenomenon in the United States... Years ago it was accepted that school officials exercised a rather autocratic authority. Our increased consciousness of the rights of minority groups has changed this- and I think it is for the better. We cannot effectively teach democracy in a dictatorial school setting.⁸³

Along with publishing political and social critiques through *The Chemawa American*, students at Chemawa organized clubs exploring various Native cultures, expressed their solidarity through wearing long-hair and defying dress codes about expressions of Native culture through dress, and used student publications and newspapers such as the *Chemawa American* to express dissatisfaction with their circumstances, and with the state of Native America.⁸⁴ At Warm Springs, Wilson Wewa has this to say about efforts to provide cultural education on the reservation today:

We’re introducing those things into the school, and hopefully it will work. It’s my thought that if we start giving back to our children a sense of identity, we’ll start making them proud of what they are. When you start taking ownership of your identity, start being proud of the legends of your people, proud of the history of the reservation, proud of the songs and dances, all the cultural aspects, then I think its just like with language. There are studies that show that if language is made a part of an indigenous group’s academic learning, the group excels in other areas of study... If we give our young people back their cultural identity, then they can succeed in learning what direction to take their lives.⁸⁵

This advocacy for cultural knowledge on the students’ and community’s part represented the ultimate form of activism in the face of a century of assimilationist educational policies.

Conclusion:

The community and student activism that occurred at both Warm Springs and Chemawa Boarding Schools was done by, and on behalf of, students and families of The Confederated

⁸³ Ibid, v. 71, 1974

⁸⁴ Ruhl, *Forward You Must Go*, 2.

⁸⁵ “Interview with Wilson Wewa,” Baughman, *Warm Springs Millennium*, 88.

Tribes of Warm Springs. In the decades after the Indian Student Bill of Rights becoming official BIA policy in 1974, The Confederated Tribes have grappled with the incredibly daunting project of re-incorporating Native culture directly into the lives of student and youth on the Warm Springs Reservation. In light of the fact that many people on the reservation do not speak their Native languages, or interact with their Native cultures on a daily basis, some might say that Native student activism and cultural movements of the 20th century were in vain. However, I would argue that in spite of the century of assimilation that the people of Warm Springs faced, the fact that their languages, cultures, and resolve to preserve them have survived is a testament to the tenacity and strength of will that I sensed on top of the hill on the morning of our class trip, as well as to the success of student activism of the 20th century.

As my research comes to a close, I find it difficult to make a blanket statement about the affect Native student activism of the 20th century had on affecting BIA curriculum and Native student rights. Was student activism the result of already changing tides, as the BIA and local school administrations lessened their grip on Native life, and opened up to the possibility that Native culture should be respected and preserved? Or did Native students at schools like Warm Springs and Chemawa carve out their own futures through advocating for themselves, speaking publicly about their plight, demanding recognition and respect, and celebrating their social and cultural autonomy? After spending the past ten weeks working on this research, I think I have come to the conclusion that both are true. 20th century America produced millions of oppressed, under-represented peoples who rose up in unity to demand an equal place on American soil; it also produced legions of otherwise privileged individuals who worked on behalf of the oppressed to change the system from within. In this sense, the seeds of Native student activism grew from a fertile ground of revolt, uprising, and a grassroots support network. While this is true, it is also important to recognize that while assimilationist curriculum did succeed in undermining the strength and pervasiveness of Native culture in Native communities, the mass enrollment of Native students in the white-man's schools created a generation of Native people who on the one

hand were better acquainted with the white-man's world than their parents, and on the other hand were angry that their languages and cultures were being ripped from their fingers. These generations of people, living on the cusp between two very different worlds, confronted the white-man with the brutality and inhumanity of assimilation, through their activism, and through their very existence. Without these students standing up and making noise for their own sake, change might never have occurred. And so in this sense, Native student activism is directly responsible for bringing about student rights, and the end to blatantly racist assimilationist policies.

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