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**Title**

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**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/039383fm>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 46(3)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

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**Publication Date**

2023-11-06

**DOI**

10.17953/A3.1344

**Supplemental Material**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/039383fm#supplemental>

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# Wash Away Your Sins: Indigenous and Irish Women in Magdalene Laundries and the Poetics of Errant Histories

*Sarah A. Whitt*

I grew up listening to stories of the Choctaw people's generosity toward the people of Ireland, when, in 1847, right after a forced march west to Indian territory from our ancestral homelands in the Southeastern part of what is now the United States, a beleaguered Choctaw Nation sent \$170.00 to the Irish, whose potato crops had just been decimated. Newly removed from the protection of Nvnih Waiya to an alien environment, Choctaws felt a powerful connection with the Irish, who were also enduring unthinkable calamity as they confronted the destruction of their primary source of sustenance—the potato—by blight. This transnational connection, symbolized by immense generosity during a period of unfathomable hardship, continues to be acknowledged each year by both the Choctaw and Irish. It is an enduring bond between two peoples indelibly connected by shared experiences of adversity, even while physically separated by thousands of miles and a saltwater sea.<sup>1</sup>

I am reminded of this relationship between the Choctaw and Irish when I think of another palpable connection across the boundaries of time and circumstance: that of Indigenous and Irish women forcibly confined to Good Shepherd homes—Magdalene laundries—in the United States and Ireland, respectively, in a history that spans continents and centuries. The existence of Magdalene laundries in Ireland and the role they played in forcibly confining women regarded as “fallen” is well known; in 2013, Taoiseach Enda Kenny offered a formal apology, on behalf of the Irish state, to the women, children, and families affected by Ireland's history of institutionalization, which lasted from the mid-eighteenth century until 1996, when the last facility was closed.

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By comparison, Magdalene laundries in the United States are rarely discussed or acknowledged in national discourse; when they are described contemporaneously or in academic works, they are often subsumed under histories of religious education or social reform.<sup>2</sup> Despite the relative silence about this history in the United States, however, US Magdalene laundries were contemporaneous to those in Ireland; the first Good Shepherd home in the United States was founded in 1842 in Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>3</sup> Over the next several decades, fifty-nine Good Shepherd homes would take charge of “wayward” girls and women of varying cultural, educational, and social backgrounds until 2001, when the last facility was closed.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the general public remains mostly unaware that Good Shepherd homes in the United States resembled the Magdalene laundries of Ireland, and few people know that American Indian women were forcibly confined to this kind of place in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

In 1914, at least three Indigenous women were sent from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to the House of the Good Shepherd in Reading, Pennsylvania, as punishment for various perceived behavioral infractions. Carlisle was founded in 1879 by Captain Richard Henry Pratt and is famously regarded as the first federally funded off-reservation boarding school intended for the ostensible “civilization” of American Indian people. The House of the Good Shepherd is a lesser-known facility—characterized in Carlisle correspondence as a convent or a reform school—in operation under Catholic sisters from 1900 until the early 1970s, when the building was razed.<sup>6</sup> At first glance, the relationship between these two ostensibly distinct “schools” is seemingly straightforward: Indigenous girls and women who breached the boundaries of “acceptable” conduct were transferred from Carlisle to the Good Shepherd home to be subjected to individualized “care” under the tutelage of Catholic sisters. Upon closer examination of archival records relating to the Indigenous women sent to Reading and who remained there involuntarily for months on end, however, it is evident that the Good Shepherd home was more than an institution of “re-education”: it was a carceral place of Indigenous disappearance, and its existence directly benefited the settler society.

This article follows Ojibwe historian Brenda Child’s pathbreaking essay in which she asks, “Is the boarding school experience overly remembered? Is it remembered at the expense of other significant events, tragedies, and practices of settler colonialism that also dramatically shaped American Indian people’s lives?”<sup>7</sup> In so doing, it examines the little-known relationship between Carlisle and the Good Shepherd home while making the case for expanding discourses about the federal “boarding school system” in the United States to encompass and accommodate settler institutions that do not neatly fit the definition of a “school.”

What might the Indigenous women’s experiences in the Reading facility illuminate about the shifting objectives of settler colonialism at the turn of the twentieth century? In exploring this question, I argue that the Good Shepherd home and other “reform” institutions played an important but overlooked role in the apparatus of the US settler state, akin to the role of Magdalene laundries in what Irish historian James Smith refers to as Ireland’s “architecture of containment.”<sup>8</sup> These parallels offer critical insight into the global impact of Magdalene laundries, while highlighting the ways in which

the Indigenous women sent to Reading uniquely experienced confinement as a tool of US settler colonialism. At stake is a better understanding of the relationship between Carlisle and the Reading home and the significance of this relationship for survivors of the US federal boarding school system and their descendants. According to a 2022 US Department of the Interior report that issued from the ongoing federal investigation into Native American boarding schools, the Good Shepherds also administered at least two federally contracted “industrial schools” in Denver, Colorado, and Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>9</sup> In light of this ongoing federal investigation into the legacy of the boarding school system, it is critical that all institutions that intervened into the lives of Indian people be identified and come under scrutiny.

Indian people who attended off-reservation boarding schools are often regarded, and regarded themselves, as being “away from home”—located in a place far away from and opposed to the condition of being within and among their families and tribal nations. Yet, in addition to recalling experiences “away from home,” enrollees’ letters of correspondence and remembrances of their time “at school” are frequently marked by experiences of moving from place to place—a phenomenon that disability studies scholars refer to as *transinstitutionalization*, or the transfer from one institutional context to another, oftentimes involuntarily.<sup>10</sup> A secondary goal of this article is thus to describe the significance of this pattern of institutional transfer within the context of US settler colonialism. As I explore below, enrollment at Carlisle was often an entrance into a rhizomatic network of noneducational settler institutions—a fact further illuminated by the Indigenous women’s forced transfer from Carlisle to the Good Shepherd home.

The Good Shepherd sisters administered several Magdalene laundries in Ireland, the purpose of which are well established; Good Shepherd homes served similar objectives in the United States, targeting “wayward” or “erring” girls and women who were often committed by the courts, or sent from other institutions, as punishment for various crimes of morality.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this shared goal between the Irish and American facilities, women who were confined to Irish laundries describe experiences of transinstitutionalization that bear a marked resemblance to the pattern of Indigenous experiences of the same, described above. What shall we make of these similarities of experience that run parallel to one another in more ways than one? Michelle Jones and Lori Record, two women incarcerated (or formerly incarcerated) at the Indiana Women’s Prison, argue in a 2014 article that Good Shepherd homes were Magdalene laundries—and were also the first women’s prisons in the United States.<sup>12</sup> They explain:

To answer the question of whether these Magdalene Laundries were the first prisons for women in the United States, we need to ask first what constitutes a prison. . . . If a prison is defined as a place of confinement for crimes and of forcible restraint, and if the persons committed to these places cannot leave when they want to, and are, in fact, confined against their will, it becomes irrelevant whether the place is called a prison—or, instead, a refuge, correctional facility, house, penitentiary, or even laundry—if it operates as a prison.<sup>13</sup>

As Jones and Record explain, Good Shepherd homes were “prisons in all but name.” Yet, the authors do not explicate the facilities’ first designation as Magdalene laundries,

which is the primary objective of this article. Good Shepherd homes, including the one in Reading, housed “penitents” referred to as “Sisters Magdalene,” and these institutions sustained themselves through the unremunerated domestic labor of confined women.<sup>14</sup> This article thus emphasizes the Reading home’s characteristics as a Magdalene laundry—a carceral place of coerced labor to which young Indigenous women were sent from Carlisle to wash away their “sins.”

The Indigenous and Irish women confined to laundries in the United States and in Ireland did not know one another, nor would they be considered contemporaries. In a similar manner, the circumstances of their confinement—the protocols of place—do not neatly overlap, just as the circumstances of their lives depart radically from one another as well. Some methodological quandaries are at play here: this research draws upon the oral testimonies, recorded as recently as 2013, of Irish survivors, as well as archival documents about Indigenous women who were sent to Good Shepherd homes in the second decade of the twentieth century. As is plain, the availability and type of sources examined in this article are not equal in kind. Despite significant distinctions, however, in the sociopolitical status, cultures, languages, and geographic location of the Indigenous and Irish women, all share the common condition of institutionalization as women who were targeted within their respective societies—even as the meaning of their confinement is received and understood today in dramatically different ways.

The first section of the article provides an overview of Magdalene laundries (or asylums) and the purpose they served in Ireland. Drawing upon Irish survivors’ testimonies about their experiences in laundries in the mid-twentieth century, this section treats survivor accounts as invaluable historical evidence of the impacts of institutionalization in Good Shepherd homes. Building on this discussion, the second section shifts to an examination of archival records relating to the Indigenous women sent from Carlisle to the Good Shepherd home in Reading, Pennsylvania, in the second decade of the twentieth century. These records reveal that US officials used the Good Shepherd home as an alternative to the prison—a pattern that benefited the settler society by removing “troublesome” Indigenous women from white Americans’ claimed territory, and a process that was challenged by the women and their families. The final section discusses gendered distinctions in the punishment of Indigenous women and men who were enrolled at Carlisle and regarded as behaviorally “incorrigible,” which further illustrates the use of carceral auxiliary institutions, such as “reform schools,” as tools of US settler colonialism. Together, these contested patterns of Indigenous institutionalization reveal punitive connections between Carlisle and the Good Shepherd home—a relationship that furthered settler objectives, and one that holds contemporary relevance for understanding the extent of the federal “boarding school system” and its impact upon tribal sovereignty in the United States.

## MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES AND IRELAND’S “ARCHITECTURE OF CONTAINMENT”

The history of Magdalene laundries in Ireland stretches back to the middle of the eighteenth century, when Lady Arabella Denny founded the first facility in Dublin in

1767.<sup>15</sup> Nearly a century later, in 1848, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, a French Catholic order, were invited to Ireland to administer asylums.<sup>16</sup> Over the next several decades, Protestants and Catholics were extensively involved in the “salvation” of Ireland’s “problem women”—unwed mothers, prostitutes, women with intellectual or physical disabilities, victims of abuse. Within these ostensibly charitable institutions, the “fallen” were subjected to grueling physical labor scrubbing, folding, and ironing garments in order to “wash away their sins.” Entry into the laundries was on a supposedly voluntary basis; “women religious” did not have the legal authority to keep Irish women forcibly confined, but as historians of these institutions have amply demonstrated, institutionalization was coerced and thus often indefinite.<sup>17</sup> Many women entered the laundries and stayed for life.

According to James Smith, by the 1920s Magdalene laundries were part of an elaborate institutional network that was supported by the Catholic church and the nascent Irish Free State, both of which acted as the “self-appointed guardians of [Ireland’s] moral climate.”<sup>18</sup> Prior to 1900, under British colonialism, the laundries announced themselves as philanthropic enterprises created to respond to and curb prostitution. Protestant-run institutions mostly ceased operation by the early twentieth century, allowing Catholic facilities to predominate; but after 1900, as Smith argues, industrial schools, mother and baby homes, reformatories, and hospitals functioned in concert with one another as a carceral network that punished a heterogenous group of Irish women by removing them from society [Fig. 1].<sup>19</sup> Together, hegemonic discourses about female morality and brick-and-mortar structures comprised Ireland’s “architecture of containment”—one that “helped to engineer widespread public consent



**FIG. 1.** Irish women perform in a play at the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge Convent and Magdalene Laundry, Gloucester Street (now Seán McDermott Street), Dublin, Ireland, c. 1930s. Footage shot by Father Jack Delany. Father Jack Delany Collection: Communion Processions, Irish Film Institute. Image courtesy of the IFI Irish Film Archive. Reproduced with permission of Irene Devitt.

... while [keeping] the ... institutional response to sexual practice ... shrouded in secrecy.”<sup>20</sup>

According to the Irish scholars behind the Justice for Magdalenes political campaign and research initiative, by 1922, ten laundries continued to operate under the Catholic Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, Sisters of Charity, and Sisters of the Good Shepherd in disparate parts of Ireland. Many of these facilities remained in operation throughout the next several decades, when, in 1996, the last of the laundries—an institution located on Seán McDermott Street in Dublin—was shuttered. The Justice for Magdalenes scholars also note that the Good Shepherd sisters operated an industrial school in Limerick that regularly recruited “wayward” girls for confinement and religious conversion in their four facilities, which were located in Cork City, Waterford, Limerick, and New Ross, Ireland.<sup>21</sup>

Intake processes at the laundries strongly resembled those of American Indian boarding schools, a fact that highlights commonalities between institutional objectives and national attitudes toward devalued populations at the turn of the century. Upon arrival to the laundries, Irish girls and women had their hair shorn; their clothing was replaced with stiff work uniforms, and they were assigned new names and a number in a process of deindividuation intended to erase their identities. Survivor testimonies reveal that the women experienced these facilities like prisoners would a prison: they were punitive institutions in which “penitents” were subjected to physical abuse and unrelenting isolation from friends, family, and even children for years on end—often-times, indefinitely. According to Claire McGettrick et al., “Figures relating to the three Dublin Magdalene convents at the end of 1983 reveal that nearly a quarter of the women confined had not seen their siblings since entering the institution; most had not seen other relatives or friends, and while just over half of the women had children, approximately 6 percent of those Magdalene women who were mothers saw their children after incarceration.”<sup>22</sup> Other details illustrate the extreme austerity of these environments: “The girls and women rose very early in the morning and went to Mass and then worked without pay, usually six full days a week at laundry or needlework. . . . All the survivors describe how the work was endless, repetitive, compulsory, forced, and unpaid.”<sup>23</sup>

Irish women who survived the laundries testify that their experiences were often marked by revictimization. Some women explain that on the outside, they were subjected to sexual abuse committed by fathers, brothers, or religious officials—“sins of the flesh” of which girls and women were adjudged by society to be guilty, and infractions that required repentance.<sup>24</sup> As a seventy-three-year-old survivor named Nora Lynch explained in response to interviewer Dr. Sinéad Pembroke’s question about whether she ever told others what happened to her,

NL: Oh, there was a stigma, you wouldn’t *dare* . . .

SP: Hmm. And why . . . why did you have this stigma?

NL: Because people who went in there, most of them were people who had children . . . out of wedlock.<sup>25</sup>



Children born out of wedlock were removed from their mothers and confined in similar facilities as well, as the woman's failure in morality was viewed in terms of heritable contagion.<sup>26</sup>

Occasionally, survivors testify that their families believed that they were sending them off to receive an "education" in facilities that characterized themselves as industrial schools.<sup>27</sup> In other instances, school officials themselves were responsible for the confinement of girls deemed likely to "fall." Those sent to the laundries from school were typically uninformed about why they were being sent and whether they would ever be released—a pattern also reflected in archival records relating to the Indigenous women sent to the Good Shepherd home from Carlisle, examined below.<sup>28</sup> Reflecting upon these experiences, Irish women often cite the loss of educational opportunity as one of the most significant impacts of their time spent in the laundry—even greater, in some instances, than the isolation and abuse they endured and survived. As seventy-year-old survivor Bernadette recalled in a 2013 interview with Dr. Pembroke, "We talk about physical, psychological, or even sexual abuse but we never talk about the educational abuse."<sup>29</sup> In many ways, as historian Michael Coleman has pointed out, this profound loss of opportunity echoes the early history of Indigenous "education" in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

In recent decades, Irish Magdalene laundries have received increased attention in part as a result of the Justice for Magdalenes campaign, comprising Irish survivors like Bernadette and their families, along with activists, allies, and scholars.<sup>31</sup> Thanks to their tireless work, in 1996 a memorial honoring the Magdalenes was established at St. Stephen's Green in Dublin, and in 2013 Taoiseach Enda Kenny offered a formal apology, on behalf of the Irish state, to the women, children, and families who were damaged by this history.

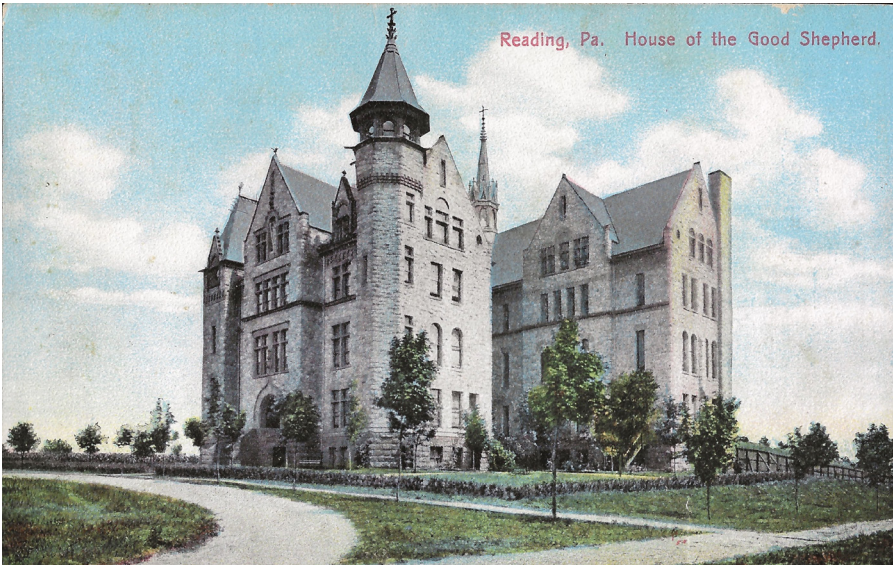
This is just one small step toward justice.

Nonetheless, survivors who were interviewed shortly after this historic event often described how significant it was to receive a formal apology from Ireland's Prime Minister.<sup>32</sup> As Bernadette explained in reference to Kenny's apology, "We were elated! We couldn't believe. No, I just could not believe, because we were looking for this day and, to be honest, we never thought it would come. And the things he said were nice things . . . and now all we hope is . . . [that] it's going to be a happy ending."<sup>33</sup>

\* \* \*

In 1914, a century before the taoiseach's apology and nearly 3,000 miles across the globe, four Indigenous girls and women were cleared for transfer from the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to the House of the Good Shepherd in Reading, Pennsylvania [Fig. 2]. Ranging in age from fourteen to twenty, Agnes (Menominee), Carrie (Red Cliff Chippewa), and Gertrude (Standing Rock Sioux) were sent from one alien environment to another, reinstitutionalized as punishment at the direction of Carlisle superintendent Moses Friedman; Myrtle (Omaha) was given a physical examination and cleared for removal along with the young women named above. Other letters of correspondence reflect that in 1914 and 1915 respectively, Friedman and his successor, Oscar Lipps, were making arrangements to send





**FIG. 2.** Postcard of the House of the Good Shepherd in Reading, Pennsylvania, sent to Miss Florence Schalpig, Reinholds, Pennsylvania. Postmarked September 1909, 8:00 PM, Reinholds Station. Verso reads, “How about that goods? Did you get it? If so don’t fail to send it to creamery. Will come to make settlement. Your friend Edna.” Author’s personal collection.

two other Carlisle enrollees, Charlotte (Chippewa) and Lillian (Pine Ridge Sioux), to the Good Shepherd home as well; at the time of this writing, the archival record is unclear as to whether Myrtle, Charlotte, and Lillian were sent to the Reading home or whether for unknown reasons they remained at Carlisle until the expiration of their terms of enrollment. In addition, a seventh woman named Edna (tribal affiliation, if any, is unknown), who claimed to be a Carlisle affiliate, was sentenced to the Reading facility by the Cumberland County court for the crime of prostitution in 1927, nearly a decade after the Carlisle barracks were repossessed by the US Department of War and the institution had ceased operation. It is possible that other Indigenous girls and women not named here were sent from Carlisle to the Good Shepherd home, as well.

Carlisle was the first federally funded, off-reservation residential facility intended solely for the indoctrination of American Indian people in the so-called Allotment and Assimilation Era (1879–1934). In addition to erasing Indigenous lifeways and replacing them with Euro-American practices, Carlisle’s curriculum was meant to transform “idle” Indian people into productive menial laborers. As I have documented elsewhere, Carlisle’s shifting vocational offerings—coupled with an enrollment policy change—brought about significant changes in the institution’s demographics. After 1900, the population had aged considerably: Indian women and men increasingly sought enrollment at Carlisle to learn a trade, and from 1912 to 1918, when the institution was closed, adults eighteen years of age and older—all the way up to forty-five, in one case—comprised Carlisle’s

demographic majority. This demographic shift also resulted in shifting power dynamics, as Indian women and men did not easily submit to subordination under white authority figures—a fact further underscored by disciplinary documents relating to adults who were punished for myriad perceived infractions, including refusing to adhere to inapplicable and infantilizing “school rules.”<sup>34</sup> Taken together, the noneducational experiences of older enrollees further nuance our understanding of Carlisle’s legacy, and suggest that Carlisle was a place where labor was performed continuously, and where punishment was routine.<sup>35</sup> That some young Indigenous women were sent from Carlisle to the Good Shepherd home as punishment for various perceived behavioral infractions adds another layer of complexity to the institution’s primary designation as a place of learning, while underscoring how labor took on explicitly punitive connotations at Carlisle after the turn of the twentieth century.

It is unclear how the relationship between Carlisle and the Good Shepherd home was established, but it is evident that the Reading facility appealed to Carlisle officials who believed that heightened oversight and hard manual labor would have a curative effect upon Indian women deemed “undesirable.” As a letter from Carlisle superintendent Oscar Lipps to the superintendent of the Pine Ridge agency, John Brennan, explains of the ostensible benefits of the “convent”: “Our experience in dealing with incorrigible girls here is that it is not best for many reasons to place them in regular reform schools. . . . Last summer we had three wayward girls with whom we could do almost nothing. It was suggested to me that I place them in a convent. This I did with remarkably good results.” He continued,

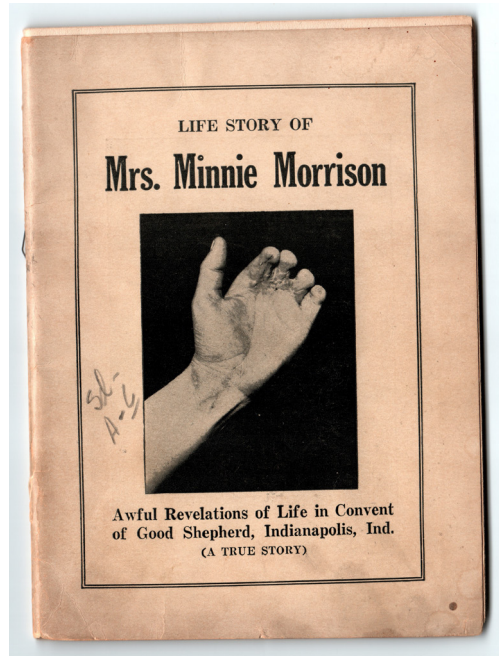
The girls are carried on our rolls as Outing pupils and we furnish them with clothing and other necessities supplied by the government, and keep in close touch with them. The Sisters in charge are very kind but firm. The girls attend school part of the time and work a part of the time, as they do here. They are taught music and have their own little Orchestra and Chorus . . . if placed in this Home. . . . [The girls are] under constant observation and training and only [their] good traits and characteristics encouraged to predominate.<sup>36</sup>

Lipps characterized the environment at the Reading home as an innocuous extension of Carlisle’s disciplinary regime, but one survivor’s account of her experience in a Good Shepherd home in Indiana contradicts this benign description.

Minnie Morrison was ten years old in 1907 when she was transferred from an orphanage to a Good Shepherd home in Indianapolis, and her testimony, published in 1925, provides invaluable insight into the conditions of American laundries [Fig. 3]. She writes,

I only got one clean dress a month, and underwear every two weeks. . . . One morning when I looked at my dress . . . it was torn in the neck. . . . At noon when we got through dinner, and were marching out, Mother Priscilla jerked me out of line, and turned me around and tore my dress completely off of me. . . . She made me walk in front of the other girls, and had them laugh at me and shame me. I did not want to go back to work that afternoon, so I hid in the upper laundry.<sup>37</sup>

**FIG. 3.** *Minnie Morrison was ten years old when she was sent to a Good Shepherd home in Indianapolis, Indiana. She escaped from the convent in 1921 at the age of twenty-four, and four years later published her life story. At the age of eighteen, Minnie suffered a catastrophic injury to her left hand when she caught it in a laundry mangle. The preface to her testimony states, “[Minnie] trusts that this book will soon be in every American home, and may be the means of saving many other girls from the cruelties which Mrs. Morrison has suffered.”* *Life Story of Mrs. Minnie Morrison: Awful Revelations of Life in Convent of Good Shepherd, Indianapolis, Ind. (A True Story)* (Toledo, Ohio, 1925). *University of Hawaii, Manoa, Social Movements Collection, Archives & Manuscripts. Image courtesy of University of Hawaii, Manoa.*



Other details about the labor regime are shared in Minnie’s account as well, including information about the “education” she would be receiving: “After breakfast Mother . . . told Regina to take me up in the ironing room. I asked her if I was not going to school, and she said, ‘Yes, this is an industrial school.’”<sup>38</sup> Minnie continued,

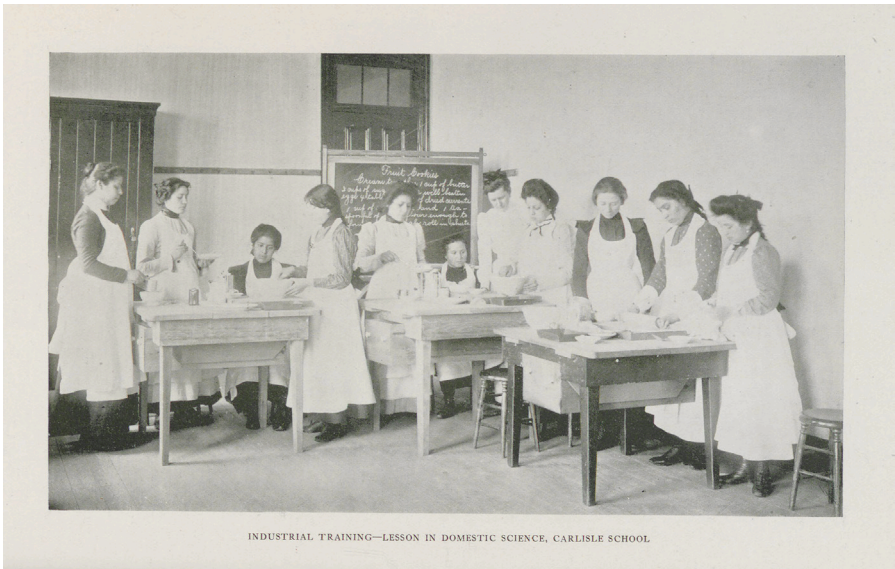
She took me upstairs and over to the ironing room. There were about thirty girls [there]. All were older than myself, and each one was standing behind an ironing board. Each girl had two irons and a small stove for heating them. . . . Mother took me over to an ironing board, and said, “Why does Sister send me these small girls?” I could just see over the top of the board, so Mother gave me a wooden box to stand on.<sup>39</sup>

The Carlisle women likely performed similar work at the Reading facility, as Good Shepherd homes in the United States supported the maintenance of their institutions by forcing “inmates” to do commercial laundry and embroidery as part of their “re-education.”<sup>40</sup> The nature of the domestic labor performed at the laundries enabled Good Shepherd homes to bill themselves as educational institutions that offered “wayward” girls and women a chance at redemption and future employment.<sup>41</sup>

For Indigenous women, however, domestic labor carried explicitly racial overtones. Domestic settings were contested sites of Indigenous struggle at the turn of the twentieth century, as American reformers—especially white women—sought to remake Indigenous lifeways in the image of Euro-American standards [Fig. 4].<sup>42</sup>

Simultaneously, US officials promoted the adoption of Euro-American forms of domesticity as key to the “uplift” of Indigenous communities, and targeted Indigenous women’s practices of homemaking as inadequate, uncivilized, or unsanitary. At Carlisle and other boarding institutions, such as the Hampton Institute in Virginia, much of this “improvement” was to take place in “model homes” in which students lived and received domestic instruction, or through the Outing Program, which was an exploitative system of student labor devised by Captain Richard Henry Pratt in 1879. The philosophical foundations of “outing” were simple: Pratt believed that by placing Indigenous people in the homes of white, prosperous, Protestant American families to perform domestic work and farm labor, that “civilization” would be rapidly accomplished—it would simply rub off.

Prior to their confinement at the Good Shepherd home, Agnes, Carrie, and Gertrude had been domestic workers in Carlisle’s “outing” system, where they performed unremunerated labor in the homes of white Americans under the auspices of racial “uplift.” As members of Carlisle’s Outing Program, these young women would have been expected to conform very closely to their patrons’ expectations of “proper” feminine conduct, which often meant acting with total deference and obeisance to the citizens in whose homes they lived and labored.



**FIG. 4.** Carlisle women receive a lesson in domestic science at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, c. 1911. Indian girls and women would put this training to use in the homes of Outing patrons, where they would be evaluated according to Euro-American standards of “proper” feminine conduct and domesticity. Caption reads: “Industrial Training—Lesson in Domestic Science, Carlisle School.” *The Red Man* vol. 4, no. 3., November 1911. Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections. SC-Indian 973.0497 R312 v.4. Photo courtesy of the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.



Archival records indicate that these households could be extremely dangerous; they exposed Indigenous women to physical and sexual abuse at the hands of “outing” patrons, which included male heads-of-households and their sons—as was the case with an eighteen-year-old Cherokee woman named Lucina R., who in 1915 became pregnant while was working “out” in the home of Alexander Holcombe in Bala, Pennsylvania.<sup>43</sup> In addition to being vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, Indigenous women placed in these precarious domestic scenarios were accused of wide-ranging behavioral infractions—from generalized “disobedience” and petty theft at one end of the extreme to alleged “attempted murder” at the other end of the spectrum of perceived transgressions. “Outing” households were thus characterized by radical power disparities that could result in Indigenous women’s removal from the Outing Program and return to Carlisle, or outright expulsion. In some cases, these fraught circumstances could also result in Indigenous women’s removal from Carlisle’s jurisdiction and incarceration in external facilities, as the women’s confinement at the Good Shepherd home demonstrates.

Similarities between the Good Shepherd home and Carlisle’s regimens of a day split between labor and learning made the laundry appealing from the perspective of Carlisle superintendents who wanted to eliminate young women deemed too “troublesome” to remain at school. Records relating to the Indigenous women being considered for confinement at the Reading home reflect that some of them had previously had trouble with “outing” patrons or Carlisle authorities who were tasked with their “oversight.” In seventeen-year-old Gertrude’s case, her enrollment card reveals that she ran away from her post in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania, at least once; she was returned to Carlisle, and several months later sent to the Reading facility on July 31, 1914.

In fact, it appears that all of the young women were transferred from Carlisle to the Good Shepherd home on the same day: a letter from Carlisle’s physician to Superintendent Friedman reflects that, in addition to Gertrude, Agnes, Carrie, and Myrtle had been given physical examinations and cleared for removal on July 31, 1914, as well.<sup>44</sup> Although Myrtle’s father wrote Carlisle’s superintendent at least twice to demand that Myrtle be sent back home, she was nonetheless subjected to an invasive medical assessment and declared “fit to go.”<sup>45</sup> In each instance, the young women were kept on Carlisle rolls. In addition, as illustrated above in the letter from Lipps to Brennan, Carlisle officials referred to the women sent to Reading in ledgers and correspondence as being “under the Outing,” which suggests that school authorities viewed the Indigenous women’s work in the laundry as a natural—if extreme—extension of the labor they performed at Carlisle. The administrative designation of being “under the Outing” thus disguised the young women’s true location at the laundry in Reading, while obscuring the punitive nature of their confinement.

As mentioned at the outset of this article, Michelle Jones and Lori Record—two women incarcerated, or formerly incarcerated, at the Indiana Women’s Prison—argue in a 2014 article that Good Shepherd homes were the first women’s prisons in the United States.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the government-sponsored report on “Benevolent Institutions” for 1910 refers to the women confined at the Reading home as “inmates,” which further underscores the explicitly carceral nature of this facility.<sup>47</sup> Yet, as Patrick

Wolfe has famously observed of the logic of settler colonialism, “The primary motive for Indigenous elimination is not race, but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.”<sup>48</sup> Put another way, as historian Kelly Lytle Hernández has powerfully argued, “Mass incarceration is mass elimination” (emphasis mine).<sup>49</sup>

The Indigenous women’s experiences intersect with multiple histories of confinement, incarceration, and “reform” in the United States; but they are also distinctly representative of the settler state’s efforts to eliminate challenges to its sole sovereignty and extralegal attempts at territorial expansion. The partnership between Carlisle and the Good Shepherd home illustrates in stark relief how institutionalization helped to further settler objectives of white ascendancy and territorial dispossession by removing Indigenous women from society and re-institutionalizing them deep within the settler state. As revealed by letters exchanged by US officials and white citizens about the Indigenous women confined in the Reading facility, settler agents worked together to establish profitable punitive relationships between the brick-and-mortar structures used to contain, reform, or punish Indian people in this era.<sup>50</sup> As Thomas Biron (Ojibwe), boarding school survivor and Truth and Reconciliation Commission coordinator at the Native Justice Coalition, pointed out to me in a private conversation, this practice of disappearing Native women may also be understood as an antecedent to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women crisis.<sup>51</sup>

Records relating to a young Sioux woman named Lillian C. illustrate how Superintendent Lipps viewed the Good Shepherd Home as an alternative to the prison—an extralegal means of incarcerating Indigenous women deemed threatening to the hierarchies in which they were situated at the bottom. In 1915, Lillian was accused by her “outing” patrons of nearly causing the “double murder” of their twin infants, and was slated to be sent to Reading as punishment. As one Carlisle official described Lillian’s actions, it was “the most fiendish attempt to commit a crime that has ever been perpetrated . . . [at Carlisle].”<sup>52</sup>

Allegedly, Lillian had placed a tapeworm in one of the infant’s napkins in an attempt to be sent back to Pine Ridge—a powerful strategy of intentional misbehavior that others with similar aims also employed.<sup>53</sup> Historians Brenda Child (Ojibwe) and K. Tsianina Lomawaima (Mvskoke) have also extensively documented subtle and overt acts of Indigenous girls’ and women’s resistance at boarding school, ranging from running away to wearing “home clothes” rather than the schools’ bland uniforms.<sup>54</sup> These facts showcase the ingenuity of Indigenous students in shaping their environments, while highlighting important efforts to exercise and preserve agency over their identities as Indian people. It is possible that Lillian was utilizing similar strategies of rebellion in order to be released from Carlisle’s jurisdiction and sent back home, as well. Her correspondence indicates that she was homesick: as she wrote in a letter to her father Andrew, “I am getting very poor because I am sick. . . . I am very lonesome out in the country. . . . I never to [sic] stop thinking of you.”<sup>55</sup> Rather than releasing her back home to her father, Andrew, however, Lipps wanted to transfer Lillian to the Good Shepherd home, where labor under the Catholic sisters would be prescribed as her “cure.”

Letters of correspondence exchanged between US officials reflect the explicit logic of Indigenous elimination that motivated Lillian's incarceration, and how they conspired with one another in an attempt to keep Lillian from returning to her tribe and community. As Pine Ridge Indian agent John Brennan wrote to Lipps, "It came nearly being a double murder, and I believe the discipline of your school and the hideousness of the crime will justify [her confinement]."<sup>56</sup> In this exchange, Brennan also appealed directly to Lipps' shared sense of power over Indian people. He wrote, "Your civil authority could take the evidence of all concerned and pass sentence, which would seem legal to the parents of Lillian."<sup>57</sup> It is unclear whether this scheme worked; Lillian's father attempted to have his daughter released, but her enrollment card reflects that she remained on Carlisle rolls for another two years before being sent home in 1917, at the age of seventeen.<sup>58</sup>

The prior year, Carlisle superintendent Friedman removed seventeen-year-old Carrie P. A. (Chippewa) from Carlisle in 1914 and incarcerated her at the Reading home as punishment for being a "menace," and "incorrigible."<sup>59</sup> "I don't ever know if I'll go home," reads one of Carrie's letters, "but I hope I'll be a good girl when I get out."<sup>60</sup> In another instance, Friedman committed Gertrude B. P., who was Lakota, to the Good Shepherd home because she was a "bad influence upon others."<sup>61</sup> She was not yet eighteen, and so permission for her transfer should have been obtained from her legal guardian, Thomas Frosted, but it is evident that this was not done. Letters of correspondence reflect that Carlisle officials kept Gertrude "on the rolls" at the school, and thus continued to receive federal funds on her behalf while she was confined at the Good Shepherd home. In each case, these letters reveal that Carlisle authorities exercised tremendous authority over Gertrude's freedom and resources—a fact further demonstrated by the ease with which Carlisle officials successfully arranged for a portion of Gertrude's per capita payment to be sent from Standing Rock to the laundry to pay for her ongoing incarceration until she was released in November 1915.<sup>62</sup>

During Gertrude's confinement, her brother, John, wrote Friedman's successor Oscar Lipps at least once to request an update as to her whereabouts, as did Gertrude's legal guardian, Thomas. In each of these letters, familial concern is palpable. As John wrote to Lipps in correspondence dated February 6, 1915, "I would like to know how my sister Gertrude is making it at school. I haven't heard from her for nearly four months and I am feeling bad over it because she never writes home telling how she is."<sup>63</sup> Another letter sent from Standing Rock agent Claude Covey to Lipps in September 1915 reveals that Gertrude's guardian, Thomas, had demanded that she be sent home immediately: "He has heard that this girl now wishes to become a Catholic sister," Covey reported to Lipps, "and he is very much opposed to this and wants the girl sent home at once."<sup>64</sup> As Thomas and John had clearly not consented to Gertrude's removal from Carlisle, this correspondence documents in heart-wrenching detail how settler agents used the Good Shepherd home as a place to which Indigenous women could be disappeared with impunity.

In another example of profitable confinement, a twenty-year-old Menominee woman named Agnes was sent to Reading and forced to make a monetary contribution



for her “maintenance,” as well. Like Gertrude and Carrie, Carlisle officials kept Agnes on the Carlisle rolls, too—a pattern that illustrates the explicitly remunerative nature of the partnership between the school and the laundry.<sup>65</sup> Although Agnes was nearly twenty-one years old and thus well past being appropriately “school-aged,” both Carlisle and the Good Shepherd home continued to receive payments on her behalf for a total of sixteen months.<sup>66</sup> According to letters of correspondence contained in Agnes’ file, the Good Shepherd sisters characterized Agnes as promiscuous and untrustworthy; I read her actions as bold. She regularly received “letters from boys in Panama,” although she was never allowed to read them, and was allegedly “always planning to ‘get out,’” which is a powerful trace of her resolute defiance.

Records relating to the Indigenous women who were confined at the Reading facility present dilemmas. The archival record is incomplete, and often bears few traces of their perspectives during or after institutionalization at the Good Shepherd home. Writing of Delaware boarding school student Hezekiah Calvin and the one-sidedness of the historical record, historians Chris Finely (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation) and Camilla Townsend remind us that “silence is notoriously hard to read.”<sup>67</sup> The colonial archive is always-already imbalanced; to borrow from Tanana Athabascan feminist theorist Dian Million, we must be cognizant of the conditions under which Indigenous women spoke, when they spoke at all.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the silences that permeate this history of Indigenous women’s confinement underscore what Saidiya Hartman, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and others have theorized as the settler state’s investment in historical amnesia.<sup>69</sup> That this global history of forced confinement in Magdalene laundries intersects with other state-sanctioned efforts to eliminate Indigenous lifeways through the government-funded boarding school system further highlights the importance of intervening in this silencing of the past.

## GENDERED PUNISHMENT AND TRANSINSTITUTIONALIZATION

In a reflection of differing societal expectations of women and men at the turn of the twentieth century, there were significant gendered distinctions in the treatment of “incorrigible” Indian women and men at Carlisle. Indian men who ran afoul of “school rules” were often incarcerated, expelled, or sent back home, as reform institutions typically refused to admit men over the age of eighteen. In one example, in 1914, twenty-one-year-old Grover A. (Kickapoo) was expelled from Carlisle following court-martial and a term of confinement in the institution’s guardhouse. As a letter sent from Carlisle’s acting superintendent to the superintendent of the Kickapoo agency states, “Under date of April 10th the [Indian] Office . . . authorized me to have [Grover] placed in a State Reformatory. As such an arrangement is hardly practicable because of Grover’s age it has been decided best to expel him and to send him to his home.”<sup>70</sup>

By comparison, Indian women deemed “undesirable” were often subjected to heightened surveillance and reinstitutionalization in external facilities as punishment for breaching acceptable modes of conduct, regardless of age. Hannah K. (Mohawk), for example, was seventeen years old when she was committed by the Cumberland County court to the Glen Mills reform school, also known as Sleighton Farm.

According to her “student file,” Hannah had been convicted of the crime of fornication, and around June of 1914 was remanded to Sleighton Farm unbeknownst to her grandmother, Christine S., for a one-year sentence; it is unclear who Hannah’s sexual partner was, and whether that person was also imprisoned. Upon learning of this news, Christine wrote Carlisle’s then superintendent, Moses Friedman, demanding her release. She said, “I would like to have my grand-daughter back home. It seems to me as if they have stolen my child when they sent her to the Reform school without informing me. I am in poor health and I certainly will be glad if I can see her face again before I die. I think it would have been better if they have notified me before sending her there.”<sup>71</sup> Correspondence contained in Hannah’s file reflects that upon expiration of her term, she would be placed on parole “in the charge of Miss Mary T. Scheurman, of Waterbury, Connecticut, Secretary of the Organized Charities,” rather than being sent back home.<sup>72</sup> Her file does not reflect whether or not she was paroled out in this manner, but the suggestion illustrates how forced confinement rippled across Indigenous lives to disrupt kinship networks, as Susan Burch has observed in her community-centered study of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians in Canton, South Dakota.<sup>73</sup> At least one Carlisle enrollee appears to have been sent from Carlisle to Canton, as well.<sup>74</sup>

One of the last documents contained in Hannah’s file is an amazingly restrained letter written in her own hand, evidently after having been released from confinement: “Dear Sir,” she addressed Lipps, “Would it be any bother to you to have the ‘Arrow’ sent to my present address. It has been sent to Sleighton Farm and I never get them unless I go out there—and I never go except once a month.”<sup>75</sup> Hannah’s letter documents the severity with which some Indigenous women were punished for breaching expectations of proper conduct and sexual propriety, while highlighting her determination to direct the outcome of her own life—including her desire to remain current on happenings at Carlisle. Underscoring her freedom of mobility, Hannah’s words also make loud claims to Indigenous authorship and are a powerful instance of what Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) refers to as “(re)mapping,” or a potent example of “Native narratives that mediate and refute colonial organizing of land, bodies, and social and political landscapes.”<sup>76</sup> Disciplinary records about other young Carlisle women similarly reflect the highly gendered nature of forced confinement, as well as the ways in which they challenged their comparative lack of rights under US law in the early twentieth century.<sup>77</sup>

\* \* \*

In seeking community guidance on this research, I have learned that although tribal members may not be familiar with this history, they are not surprised by it, either. Menominee Tribal Historic Preservation Officer David Grignon remarked recently that he was not aware of the Reading home, but he noted that repatriation efforts are ongoing at the Canton Asylum, which may be classed as a settler institution alongside Magdalene laundries and federally funded boarding schools. “There’s a lot of red tape,” Grignon said. These lacunae and interconnections are a critical part of the story as told from an Indigenous perspective; writing of Indigenous adoptees and

survival, Ho-Chunk historian Amy Lonetree (reading Margaret Jacobs) notes that “the moral of the story depends on who is telling the story.” “The surveillance of our families,” Lonetree further asserts, “was a common occurrence for Native people in the twentieth century, and it is a story that certainly needs to be told from the perspective of those who have lived through it.”<sup>78</sup>

The colonial archive rarely tells the story we expect it to tell, and several questions remain for future research. How was this partnership between Carlisle and the Good Shepherd home established? The Reading facility was Catholic and private, and therefore seemingly incongruous with a government-run boarding institution rooted in the mores of Protestantism.<sup>79</sup> But a similar relationship between industrial schools and laundries existed in Ireland as well, as young women deemed likely to fail were forced out of one institutional context and into another. Moreover, according to the US Department of the Interior, at least two federally funded American Indian boarding schools in Colorado and Wisconsin appear to have been administered by the Good Shepherds. Did other American Indian boarding schools have partnerships with similar facilities? How many Indigenous women perished behind asylum walls?

It is also important to note that the Good Shepherd home in Reading was not under the oversight or scrutiny of the Indian Service; it was autonomous and independent, but served a critical function in the settler apparatus as a place to which Indigenous women were disappeared. “Prisons in all but name,” Magdalene laundries are absent from discussions of settler colonialism and the carceral institutions that comprised the United States’ nebulous settler apparatus.<sup>80</sup> But as the extra-legal arrangements examined above make clear, Indigenous institutionalization at the Reading laundry directly benefited the settler society. Like Ireland’s “architecture of containment,” this history highlights the interlocking and interchangeable nature of Carlisle, the Good Shepherd home, and other settler facilities, such as local jails—parallels that have ongoing relevance for tribal nations today.

Historically, the US government and other settler-colonizer powers have worked assiduously to undermine tribes’ statuses as sovereign nations, a reality that distinguishes Indigenous peoples’ experiences of forced institutionalization in the United States and elsewhere from those of other populations. Carlisle enrollees entered the institution for many reasons, and some were sent to external institutions by US officials illegally and against the protestations of their families—a fact that showcases how Indigenous people uniquely experienced institutionalization as a tool of settler colonialism, but one that has not been sufficiently addressed or acknowledged in national political forums. Indeed, the Indigenous women sent to Reading were never called to testify; they have never had their experiences acknowledged by the state at all.

These silences obfuscate the global impact of Magdalene laundries. They also obscure the interconnected experiences of disparate, targeted populations in the United States, and the centrality of forced confinement to world-historical processes of imperialism and settler colonialism alike.<sup>81</sup> As McGettrick et al. point out and as is the case in the United States context, British colonialism frames the development and implementation of Ireland’s practice of confining society’s most vulnerable members.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Brenda Child offers another perspective on the legacy of settler invasion and

of colonizers' "civilizational" campaigns. She writes, "Our problems and tribulations as Indian people did not end with the decline of the government boarding schools. . . . After I concluded a presentation on a college campus about boarding school history, an Ojibwe woman in the audience commented that her mother had been forcibly sterilized in a reservation border town in Minnesota." Child continues:

At first glance, boarding school history and the more recent history of forced sterilization of Indian women . . . are not necessarily intertwined, unless viewed as part of a broader pattern of colonial violence. Clearly, this Ojibwe woman found a strong association between boarding school and forced sterilization, since both were practices implicated in this kind of state interference into Indian family life. . . .<sup>83</sup>

As Child's recollections make clear, Indigenous peoples' lived experiences reflect interconnections between the federal boarding school system and other seemingly unrelated colonial endeavors, an argument that this article makes, as well; the global history of women's forced confinement in Magdalene laundries, as the foregoing reveals, is also Indigenous history. Despite the legacy of this history for marginalized populations in the United States, however, the Reading home and similar facilities are generally not regarded as Magdalene laundries in the United States—except, perhaps, by the survivors themselves, their families, and their allies.<sup>84</sup>

What will healing look like for our tribes and communities? Director of Research and Education Deidre Whiteman (Meskwaki, Dakota, Ojibwe, Hidatsa) at the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition put it this way: "When we lead, we must lead in the interest of the survivors. . . . The survivors have said we need truth, justice, and healing" [Fig. 5].<sup>85</sup> Thomas Biron similarly remarked, "The truth is not going to come from one of us, it is going to come from all of us."<sup>86</sup> In a related vein, Pemina Yellow Bird (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara), a formidable Indigenous rights activist and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act consultant, expressed that healing from this past will require a recommitment to our "original instructions" and ancestral teachings as Indigenous peoples—a powerful counter to a westernized notion of "justice" that emanates from the legal apparatus.<sup>87</sup> As the US Department of the Interior continues to undertake listening sessions, it is possible that additional interconnections between settler institutions will be brought to light. Deb Haaland's Interior Department must broaden the scope of their boarding school investigation to examine other settler institutions, and compel the Catholic Church to release their records.<sup>88</sup> The entwined experiences of Indigenous and Irish women showcase the global reach of the Magdalene laundries; they also remind us that histories of institutionalization have not occurred in isolation—they have sustained one another.



**FIG. 5.** US Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) is honored during a blanket ceremony by staff members of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, May 7, 2022. From left to right: Director of Healing Programs Sandy White Hawk (Sicangu Lakota), CEO Deborah Parker (Tulalip), Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), Policy and Advocacy Director Theresa Shelton (Tulalip). Photo courtesy of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition.

## NOTES

1. For more on this relationship from a Choctaw perspective, see, for example, Christian Toews, “Choctaw-Irish Bond Continues to Strengthen over Time,” *Biskinik*, April 3, 2023.

2. See Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York’s Welfare System, 1830–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Steven Ruggles, “Fallen Women: The Inmates of the Magdalen Society Asylum of Philadelphia, 1836–1908,” in *Sexuality and Sexual Behavior* 10, (Munich: K. G. Saur Publishing, 1993); Negley K. Teeters, “The Early Days of the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia,” *Social Service Review* 30, no. 2 (1956): 158–67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30015894>.

3. The Protestant Magdalen Society Asylum was founded in Philadelphia in 1800; the first Catholic “asylum” was founded by the Good Shepherd Sisters in Louisville in 1842.

4. Nancymarie Phillips, “Education for Girls in the House of the Good Shepherd, US 1940–1980” (Cleveland: Cleveland State University, Dissertation, 2008), 92; Michelle Jones and Lori Record, “Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States,” *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17 (2014): 166–79, 171, <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/jiass/vol17/iss1/12>.

5. Phillips, "Education," 32.
6. "Landmark Comes Down," *Reading Eagle*, Reading, Pennsylvania, May 17, 1973.
7. Brenda Child, "The Boarding School as Metaphor," *Journal of American Indian Education* 57, no. 1 (2018): 37–57, 49, <https://doi.org/10.5749/jamerindieduc.57.1.0037>.
8. James Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
9. See US Department of the Interior, Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigation Report, May 2022. Combined Appendix A and B.
10. See Keramet Reiter and Thomas Blair, "Punishing Mental Illness: Trans-Institutionalization and Solitary Confinement in the United States," in *Extreme Punishment: Comparative Studies in Detention, Incarceration, and Solitary Confinement*, edited by Keramet Reiter and Alexa Koenig (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 177–96. For a discussion of transincarceration, a related concept, see Liat Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).
11. As Steven Ruggles (1993) remarks of the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia, "other institutions" were the greatest source (31.9 percent) of referral for "inmates" confined between 1903 and 1907.
12. Jones and Record, "Magdalene Laundries."
13. *Ibid.*, 174.
14. Phillips writes in "Education," "The majority of the Good Shepherd schools supplemented their income by doing commercial laundry and sewing embroidered clothing. Rural facilities had gardens and small animal farms for provision of food. The girls . . . provided the manual labor as part of the re-education process. . . . [T]he labor supported the facility without formal wages for the workers," 21.
15. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 24.
16. Smith notes that "the midcentury decades witnessed the arrival of female religious from abroad to participate in various philanthropic enterprises, including the operation of Magdalen asylums. . . . The Sisters of Our Lady Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers . . . were invited to Ireland in 1848 to assume control of a lay-managed Catholic refuge operated at Clare Street in Limerick. This French order, committed to the reform of fallen women, went on to 'dominate the Female Penitentiary Movement in Ireland for almost a century and a half'" (29). See also Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
17. See Claire McGettrick et al., *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021); Ian O'Donnell and Eoin O'Sullivan, *Coercive Confinement in Ireland: Patients, Prisoners, and Penitents*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2012); edited by Mark Coen et al., *A Dublin Magdalene Laundry: Donnybrook and Church-State Power in Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).
18. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 2.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. McGettrick et al., *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries*, 28.
22. *Ibid.*, 30.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 28.
25. Katherine O'Donnell, S. Pembroke, and C. McGettrick, "Oral History of Nora Lynch," *Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Oral and Archival History* (2013). Government of Ireland Collaborative Research Project, Irish Research Council (IRC), 1–78, 67.



26. "Oral History of Sinéad," IRC, 1–42. In another example of global interconnectedness, children born to unwed mothers in twentieth-century Irish laundries or mother and baby homes were illegally placed for adoption with American families. See Martin Sixsmith, "The Catholic Church Sold My Son," *The Guardian*, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/sep/19/catholic-church-sold-child>.
27. "Oral History of Maureen Sullivan," IRC, 1–52.
28. McGettrick et al., *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries*, 32.
29. "Oral History of Bernadette and Francis Murphy," IRC, 99–100.
30. Michael Coleman, *American Indians, the Irish, and Government Schooling: A Comparative Study* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).
31. The Justice for Magdalenes campaign sought a memorial for women who were exhumed from a mass grave in the early 1990s; a redress and compensation scheme; and a formal apology from the Irish state for the role it played in the forced confinement of women and children in laundries across the country. <http://jfmresearch.com/aboutjfmr/>.
32. McGettrick et al. point out that in the years following Kenny's apology, the state and subsequent investigations began changing the narrative back to one of victim blaming, 17.
33. "Oral History of Bernadette and Francis Murphy," IRC, 1–170, 118.
34. See, for example, US Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian School Service*, Department of the Interior, United States Indian Service (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913).
35. See Sarah Whitt, "An Ordinary Case of Discipline': Deputizing White Americans and Punishing Indian Men at the Carlisle Indian School, 1900–1918" *Western Historical Quarterly*, 2023.
36. "Lillian C—. Student File," Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center (CISDRC), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), RG 75, Series 1327, box 119, folder 4814, 10.
37. Minnie Morrison, "Life Story of Mrs. Minnie Morrison: Awful Revelations of Life in Convent of Good Shepherd, Indianapolis, Ind.: A True Story" (Toledo, Ohio, 1925). Pamphlet, University of Hawaii, Manoa, Social Movements Collection, 12–13.
38. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Phillips, "Education," 35.
41. *Ibid.*, 22.
42. See Cathleen Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869–1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Victoria K. Haskins, *Matrons and Maids: Regulating Indian Domestic Service in Tucson, 1914–1934* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); Beth Piatote, *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and Law in Native American Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
43. "Lucinda R—. Student File," CISDRC, NARA, RG 75, Series 1327, box 8, folder 364.
44. "Agnes W—. Student File," CISDRC, NARA, RG 75, Series 1327, box 103, folder 4439. Agnes' enrollment card reflects that she was sent to the Good Shepherd home on July 31, 1914, the same day she was cleared by the physician, who reported that she and Carrie were "not entirely well. Carrie has a valvular lesion of the heart, while Agnes has a chronic inflammation of the larynx which has resisted treatment in the past," 49.
45. The archival record is ambiguous as to whether Lipps sent Myrtle to Reading. Even after Myrtle's father had vociferously protested her transfer, Carlisle's physician performed an examination on Myrtle along with Agnes, Carrie, and Gertrude, and cleared all of the women for removal to the Good Shepherd home.
46. Jones and Record, "Magdalene Laundries."



47. The Reading home was for “erring women and unprotected children.” See US Government Printing Office, “Benevolent Institutions, 1910,” United States Bureau of the 13th Census, 1913, 246.
48. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 no. 4 (2006): 387–409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.
49. Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 1.
50. Institutionalization is attended by carceral logics. See Ben-Moshe, 3.
51. Private conversation, June 2, 2023. Cited with permission.
52. “Lillian C—. Student File.”
53. Kevin Whalen has documented similar tactics at Sherman in Southern California. He writes, for instance, “Once on the job, discontented domestic workers wielded a number of different strategies in order to improve conditions or, if need be, get sent home. A common form of resistance involved feigning incomprehension of instructions.” See *Native Students at Work: American Indian Labor and Sherman Institute’s Outing Program, 1900–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 48.
54. See Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “Domesticity in the Federal Indian Schools: The Power of Authority over Mind and Body,” *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 2 (1993): 227–40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/645643>.
55. “Lillian C—. Student File,” 16.
56. *Ibid.*, 12.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. “Carrie P—. A—. Student File,” CISDRC, NARA, RG 75, Series 1327, box 107, folder 4533, 15.
60. *Ibid.*, 58.
61. “Gertrude B—. P—. Student File,” CISDRC, NARA, Series 1327, box 47, folder 2327, 57.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, 53.
64. *Ibid.*, 67.
65. “Agnes W—. Student File,” 14.
66. The Sisters refused to release Agnes from the Good Shepherd home because, as Carlisle’s “outing” matron Lida Johnston explained, they felt that “[if Agnes were] to leave the institution now, she would land in a disreputable house in Reading”; “Agnes W—. Student File,” 25.
67. Chris Finley and Camilla Townsend, “All He Had Told Them . . . Was True,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 9, issue 2, (2022): 95–123, 97, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/863584>.
68. Dian Million, “Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 53–76, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.0.0043>.
69. See Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/241115>; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Karen Roybal, *Archives of Dispossession Recovering the Testimonios of Mexican American Herederos, 1848–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
70. “Grover A—. Student File,” CISDRC, NARA, RG 75, Series 1327, box 89, folder 4052, 4.
71. “Hannah K—. Student File,” CISDRC, NARA, RG 75, Series 1327, box 92, folder 4123, 25.
72. *Ibid.*, 21.
73. Susan Burch, *Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and beyond Institutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books, 2021).

74. According to his institutional file, Miguel M—. (Mesa Grande) appears to have been sent to Canton from the Carlisle Indian School in 1899. See “Miguel M—. Student File,” RG 75, Series 1327, box 17, folder 817.

75. Hannah K—. Student File,” 30.

76. Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words, Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 3.

77. Amelia H—., for example, a twenty-year-old Tuscarora woman, was made to testify in a US court of law against George Kraft in 1913 after becoming pregnant. Other Indian women who were enrolled at Carlisle and who became pregnant were sent home and occasionally became similarly embroiled with the legal system. See “Amelia H—. Student File,” RG 75, Series 1327, box 16, folder 745.

78. Amy Lonetree, “Indigenous Child Removal: Narratives of Violence, Trauma, and Survivance,” in *Violence and Indigenous Communities: Confronting the Past and Engaging the Present*, edited by Susan Sleeper-Smith, Jeffrey Ostler, and Joshua Reid. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021, 247–249.

79. See US Department of the Interior, Federal Boarding School Initiative Investigation Report, 2022.

80. Jones and Record, “Magdalene Laundries, 167.

81. McGettrick et al. (2021, 35) have pointed this out as well in *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries*.

82. McGettrick et al. write, “The new [Irish] Free State . . . utilize[ed] the largely inherited British colonial system of massive Victorian institutions funded by the State and managed by Catholic religious orders . . . . The mass institutionalization of the socially and economically vulnerable (particularly women and children) . . . was maintained by a system of capitation payments to the religious orders from the Irish State exchequer for most of the twentieth century,” 25.

83. Child, “The Boarding School as a Metaphor,” 15.

84. Numerous support groups and online forums are dedicated to the survivors of US Magdalene Laundries. Historians of American social reform document the rise of “charitable” institutions such as mother and baby homes under the Florence Crittenton name, as well as other “philanthropic” enterprises that purported to offer supplication to women in need in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but few studies address the history of US Magdalene laundries. It is unclear whether the organizations examined in these works could also be understood as Magdalene laundries, but it seems that this is a likely possibility. See, for example, Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890–1945* (Yale University Press, 1993); Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*.

85. Private conversation, May 31, 2023. Cited with permission.

86. Private conversation, June 2, 2023. Cited with permission.

87. Private conversation and correspondence, May 10, May 15, and June 5, 2023. Cited with permission.

88. I have made several attempts to obtain general records from the archivist at the House of the Good Shepherd in Saint Louis. His silence intensifies my sense that this history is ongoing—and that it cannot fully be understood without considering global flows of people, ideologies, and power.

