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Publication Date

2019

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
SANTA CRUZ

THE SCHOOL ON SNYDER STREET: SETTLER COLONIALISM AND
INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE AT THE STEWART INDIAN SCHOOL, 1890-2018

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

HISTORY

by Samantha M. Williams

September 2019

The Dissertation of Samantha M. Williams
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Table of Contents

Chapter One: An Introduction to Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Child Removal and the Stewart Indian School.....	1
Chapter Two: “And to this the student body protested:” Colonization and Negotiation at the Stewart Indian School, 1890-1925.....	31
Chapter Three: “But the Indian still remains:” Assimilation and Reform at the Stewart Indian School, 1925-1948.....	84
Chapter Four: “We will tell you about our school at Stewart:” Assimilation and the Navajo Special Program, 1946-1959.....	143
Chapter Five: “Here at Stewart, we can all have a special pride in being an Indian:” Activism and Assimilation at the Stewart School, 1960-1980.....	199
Chapter Six: “That was our home, and it needs to be remembered:” Erasing and Reclaiming the History of the Stewart Indian School.....	257
Conclusion	309
Bibliography.....	315

List of Tables

Table 1: The Twenty-Seven Off-Reservation Boarding Schools Administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as of 1909.....	6
Table 2: Number of Runaways, 1904-1909 School Years.....	56
Table 3: Stewart Indian School Enrollment and Attendance, 1890-1925.....	65
Table 4: Outing Program Participation, 1904-1909.....	78
Table 5: Navajo Program Enrollment, Stewart Indian School, 1947-1959.....	164
Table 6: Navajo Employment Status, Stewart Students, 1953-1953.....	188
Table 7: Percentage of Navajo Program Students Who Graduated from the Stewart School, 1947-1959.....	194
Table 8: Stewart Indian School Enrollment, 1960s.....	212
Table 9: Stewart Indian School Graduates from Nevada and Out of State.....	252

Abstract
The School on Snyder Street: Settler Colonialism
and Indigenous Resilience at the Stewart Indian School, 1890-2018

Samantha M. Williams

In 1879, the U.S. government embarked upon a program to assimilate thousands of Native American children who were taken from their homes and sent to off-reservation boarding schools managed by federal officials. These schools were designed to destroy the connections between Native children and their lands, isolate them from their families, and divorce them from their cultures and traditions. The Stewart Indian School opened in Carson City, Nevada, in December 1890, and enthusiastically embraced its mission. Newly enrolled students were separated from their families, had their appearances altered, and were forced speak only English. They were assigned work details on campus, compelled to attend church, and placed in remedial classes and vocational training programs. The message at Stewart, particularly during its early years, was clear: assimilation meant the adoption of white, middle-class values for Native students, forgoing their connections with tribal lands and communities, and the explicit acceptance of Indigenous inferiority and white supremacy. For U.S. officials, school like Stewart would resolve the “Indian problem” once and for all by eradicating Indigenous cultures, ending U.S. treaty obligations, and allowing the unfettered expansion of white settlers into Native lands.

In this dissertation, I argue that settler colonialism propelled U.S. government programs designed to assimilate generations of Native children at the Stewart Indian School. I examine the history of the Stewart Indian School from its opening in 1890

to its closure in 1980, and underscore the settler colonial underpinnings of assimilationist practices at the school. At the same time, I also employ a borderlands framework to explain how and why Indigenous students and their families subverted school rules, and to investigate tensions between federal officials and the local authorities charged with implementing their policies. I further evaluate the current status of the Stewart Indian School grounds to underscore the ongoing nature of federal and state settler colonial policies, which have focused, until recently, on erasing the trauma inflicted on generations of Native families connected to the school.

Each chapter explores different periods of the Stewart Indian School's history and connects them with trends in federal Indian policy. After a discussion of methodologies and the boarding school system, chapter two focuses on the early decades of the school, when students were subjected to harsh assimilationist policies. Chapter three examines reforms that occurred between 1925 and 1948, and argues that, despite new federal guidelines, Stewart School officials remained intent on the assimilation of Native children. The fourth chapter focuses on the implementation of the Navajo Special Program at Stewart, and connects this rigidly assimilationist program with federal attempts to terminate tribal rights and relocate Native peoples to urban areas. In chapter five, I describe student and parent-led reform efforts in the 1960s and 1970s, their connections with national self-determination movements, and Stewart officials' continued focus on assimilation. My final chapter examines the history of the Stewart School after its 1980 closure, and illustrates how state, federal,

and local officials sought to erase negative Indigenous experiences at the Stewart Indian School and replace them with an overwhelmingly positive historical narrative.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support of the faculty and staff of the History Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. My advisor and dissertation chair, Amy Lonetree, has helped me tremendously throughout this process by sharing her insights and advice, and in her careful reading of my work. I am grateful for her time and assistance. My committee members, Grace Peña Delgado and Renya Ramirez, have similarly shared their insights and ideas and I am thankful for their support. I would also like to recognize my fellow graduate students, especially the members of our writing group, who have listened to many presentations and read several papers about the history of the Stewart Indian School over the past several years.

I am also indebted to the Nevada Indian Commission and the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum. Sherry Rupert, Bobbi Rahder, and Chris Ann Gibbons allowed me the honor of working with them in the long-overdue establishment of a museum and cultural center dedicated to Stewart School students. They also introduced me to Stewart alumni and their families, integrated me into their team as they conducted research and designed exhibits, and allowed me access to their unique and valuable archival collection. I will be forever grateful for this opportunity, which has been a career highlight.

The research necessary to complete this dissertation was generously funded by several sources. The History Department and The Humanities Institute at the

University of California, Santa Cruz funded research trips in Nevada, San Bruno, California, and Washington, D.C. A grant from the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies also funded a separate follow-up research trip to Nevada. Additionally, in my position as a research consultant for the Nevada Indian Commission and the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum, I conducted research on the history of the school at National Archives and Records Administration repositories in San Bruno, California, St. Louis, Missouri, and Washington, D.C., and was permitted to keep copies of my findings for use in my dissertation research.

On a personal note, I could not have completed this PhD program without the support of my friends and family, and I am grateful to all of them. I especially want to recognize Brad and Marie Booth – thank you for sharing your home in Aptos with me. Your kindness and generosity are truly inspiring. Also, my mother-in-law, Barbara Mecchi, who retired to help care for my children when I started my classes in Santa Cruz, took care of school drop-offs, pick-ups, and extracurricular activities while I attended conferences and went on research trips, and made dinner for my family when I was in the depths of dissertation writing. How many people can say that about their mother-in-law? And, of course, I want to thank my husband, Richard Ericson, for his absolute, never-wavering support and love throughout this process. I am so lucky to have you in my life, and now that we will both be doctors, I expect you to refer to me accordingly. Dr. Samantha will suffice. To my children, Jack and Sophie Ericson, thank you for understanding my absences and my work, and for being curious and asking lots of questions. I am so lucky to be your mom!

Chapter One: An Introduction to Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Child Removal and the Stewart Indian School

In 1950, at the age of twelve, Florence Millet traveled almost 300 miles from her home on the Duckwater Shoshone Reservation in Eastern Nevada, to the Stewart Indian School, a Native American boarding school located in Carson City, Nevada, that opened in 1890 and closed in 1980. Millet had never been away from her family or the Duckwater Reservation, but her family was nonetheless compelled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to send her to the school. Upon arriving, she was assigned to work in the school infirmary as a nurse's assistant, where she provided care for sick and injured students. Millet did not enjoy her time at Stewart, and recalls feeling "lonely and homesick and really depressed" while she attended the school. She ran away from the school three times, even though she was unsure where to go or how to return to her home. Her punishments for these escape attempts included having her hair cut progressively shorter and being forced to scrub toilets with a toothbrush. Millet was unable to sleep or eat while at Stewart and cried almost continuously. After six months, she was permitted to write to her parents, who traveled to Stewart and took her back to the Duckwater Reservation.¹

Florence Millet's experiences were not uncommon among generations of Native Americans who attended one of the twenty-seven off-reservation Indian boarding schools scattered across the United States during the nineteenth and

¹ *Stewart Indian School Trail*. "Guide by Cell Audio Tour." Accessed February 17, 2016 on <http://stewartindianschool.com/walking-trail/>.

twentieth centuries. Beginning in 1879, the U.S. government embarked upon a program to assimilate and thus “civilize” thousands of Native American children who were taken from their homes and sent to off-reservation boarding schools managed by the BIA.² Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the first Native American boarding school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, argued that the education of Indian children was a humanitarian project that was critical to their survival and success in the United States. These schools were designed to destroy the connections between Native children and their lands, isolate them from their families, and remove them from their cultures and traditions, all as a means of promoting assimilation, but also to ensure the unfettered expansion of white settlers into Native lands. According to Pratt, the successful assimilation of Native children into white society could occur in one generation, but only if students were under the constant and firm supervision of BIA employees.

To accomplish this, the Indigenous children who attended these schools, some as young as four years of age, were forced to adhere to a strict set of rules that were enforced through corporal punishment and physical and emotional abuse. Students, even those with no knowledge of English, were prohibited from speaking their

² Native children were not always sent to off-reservation boarding schools. Some were sent to day schools, located on their reservations, where they attended school during the day and then returned to their families in the evening. Others attended reservation boarding schools, where they spent days and nights at the school, but were also able to interact with their family members who lived in the general vicinity. Like the off-reservation boarding schools, both promoted Indigenous assimilation and disparaged Indigenous ways of life. These varied types of Indian education are detailed in David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995) and Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).

languages, forced to adopt white middle-class gender roles, and were compelled to alter their physical appearances upon arrival at the schools. Indigenous children were targeted for this program as a means of instilling white social norms at a young age, and with the hope that they would attempt to restructure their communities according to settler colonial standards after their graduation. This traumatic process taught children to disavow their heritage, shattered bonds within Native communities, and fundamentally damaged familial relationships among generations of Indigenous peoples.³ These practices became so extensive that, by 1926, eighty-three percent of all American Indian children had spent time at one of the many BIA schools operating across the country.⁴ Shockingly, though this extensive educational system was central to the lives of generations of Indigenous peoples for over a century, it is a topic rarely addressed in U.S. history, particularly in terms of its traumatic impact on Native children and their families.

³ The damage inflicted on successive generations of Native families as a result of colonization, including the boarding school system, is documented in the following studies: Yael Danieli. *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*. (New York: Plenum Press, 1998); Eduardo Duran. *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native Peoples*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006); and Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran. *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). The impacts of the boarding school system in the U.S. are directly addressed in Andrea Smith. "Soul Wound: The Legacy of Native American Schools," in *Amnesty International Magazine*. (March 26, 2007). Additionally, in 2015 the Canadian Government released a report that describes the abuses that occurred in the Canadian Residential School system, as well as its harmful legacy on First Nations families. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. (July 23, 2015). Accessed on February 20, 2016 on http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf.

⁴ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, 151, and Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 27. This figure includes off-reservation boarding schools, on-reservation boarding schools, and day schools.

In this dissertation, I examine this complicated history through the experiences of students who attended the Stewart Indian School, and argue that settler colonialism, rather than the allegedly humanitarian impulses of the U.S. government, propelled the assimilation of generations of Native children at boarding schools. I also contend that it is critical to examine the entire history of the Stewart Indian School, including current efforts among Native communities to commemorate the experiences of students who attended it, to fully understand the scope and continuity of U.S. government programs designed to assimilate Native children at the school, as well as Indigenous efforts to adapt to, oppose, and subvert settler colonial practices. Throughout, I underscore that exploring this history requires a multi-tiered approach that considers the implementation of boarding school policies at three different levels; the federal, at which policy was developed and decreed; locally, where BIA personnel executed federal policy; and among those Native students and families who were forced to cope with the brutal impacts of assimilation policies. I further maintain that it is critical to evaluate the current status of the Stewart Indian School grounds to underscore the ongoing nature of federal and state settler colonial policies, which seek to erase the trauma inflicted on Native communities through the boarding school system. Equally important to evaluate are the efforts of Native Nevadans to commemorate both the painful and positive aspects of their experiences at the Stewart Indian School, and to counter historical narratives that ignore or diminish the damage caused to generations of boarding school students.

Examining the extended history of the Stewart School also demonstrates the evolution of the Indian boarding school system, which underwent multiple periods of reform and reorganization, but remained staunchly focused on the settler colonial objective of assimilation. Initially, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indian boarding schools were run as military academies; students were forced to participate in marching drills, and were subjected to violent forms of punishment if they underperformed or attempted to escape and return to their families. At its peak, this system contained twenty-seven different boarding schools across the United States, though the number varied as some schools were closed and others combined due to geographic proximity. At each of these schools, however, students were brutalized in various ways if caught speaking their own Indigenous languages, and were compelled to wear non-Native clothing and cut their hair according to institutional standards. Limited funding for these schools, a problem throughout their existence, led to overcrowding, malnourishment, disease, and death, as evidenced by the cemeteries built at many of these institutions.

Efforts to reform the boarding schools and protect those students forced to attend them began to reshape these institutions in the 1920s and 1930s. Native activists from organizations such as the Society of American Indians (SAI) pressed for reforms in the boarding school system, some calling for greater Indigenous autonomy within it, and others for it to be abolished completely. Non-Native reformers also pressed for changes and questioned both the utility and effectiveness of boarding school assimilation programs. In 1928, a Brookings Institution Report

entitled *The Problem of Indian Administration*, more commonly known as the Meriam Report, highlighted each of these problems and recommended that, over time, each of the overcrowded and poorly maintained boarding schools be closed. Shortly after, in 1934, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), also known as the Indian New Deal, which reformed some aspects of the boarding school system, but the left its assimilationist objectives largely in place.

Table 1: The Twenty-Seven Off-Reservation Boarding Schools Administered by the BIA, as of 1909 ⁵

School Name	Location	Years of Operation
Albuquerque Indian School	Albuquerque, New Mexico	1884-1982
Bismarck Indian School	Bismarck, North Dakota	1907- 1937
Carlisle Indian School	Carlisle, Pennsylvania	1879-1918
Chamberlain Indian School	Chamberlain, South Dakota	1898-1909
Chemawa Indian School	Salem, Oregon	1880-Present
Chilocco Indian School	Chilocco, Oklahoma	1884-1980
Flandreau Indian School	Flandreau, South Dakota	1893-Present
Fort Bidwell Indian School	Fort Bidwell, California	1898-1931
Fort Lewis School	Durango, Colorado	1892-1911
Fort Mojave Indian School	Fort Mojave, Arizona	1890-1931
Fort Shaw Indian School	Great Falls, Montana	1892-1910
Genoa Indian School	Genoa, Nebraska	1884-1934
Grand Junction Indian School	Grand Junction, Colorado	1886-1911
Greenville Indian School	Greenville, California	1895-1922
Haskell Institute	Lawrence, Kansas	1884-1970
Hayward Indian School	Tomah, Wisconsin	1901-1934
Morris Indian School	Morris, Minnesota	1897-1909
Mount Pleasant Indian School	Mount Pleasant, Michigan	1893-1934
Phoenix Indian School	Phoenix, Arizona	1891-1990
Pierre Indian School	Pierre, South Dakota	1891-Present
Pipestone Indian School	Pipestone, Minnesota	1893-1953
Rapid City Indian School	Rapid City, South Dakota	1898-1933
Santa Fe Indian School	Santa Fe, New Mexico	1890-Present
Sherman Institute	Riverside, California	1902- Present
Stewart Indian School	Carson City, Nevada	1890-1980
Wahpeton Indian School	Wahpeton, North Dakota	1908-1966
Wittenberg Indian School	Wittenberg, Wisconsin	1895-1917

During the late 1930s and 1940s, a majority of the Native American boarding schools in the United States were shuttered, though some, including the Stewart School, remained open and continued to educate thousands of Native students. The experiences of students who attended these schools beginning in the late 1930s differed dramatically from those who were forcibly enrolled in the late nineteenth century. The militaristic organization of the schools was eased, for example, and concerted efforts were made to improve school facilities and student health. Still, the lives of Native students remained under the control of school superintendents and teachers who perpetuated assimilationist and white supremacist policies, and dictated the parameters of their personal and academic lives. In the 1950s, assimilation programs were significantly expanded to accommodate large numbers of Navajo children, whom the U.S. government, in the midst of terminating its treaty obligations with all Native nations, deemed ill-prepared for life without federal assistance.

Though Native students and their families consistently pushed back against boarding school rules and regulations, serious changes did not occur until the late 1960s and 1970s. At that time, Indigenous activism forced federal authorities to reform Indian educational policy in a manner that granted Native communities greater control over their children's educations. This led to a stronger focus on American Indian history and culture at some schools, and a focus on academics, rather than

⁵ The information in this table is derived from the 1909 Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. See Office of Indian Affairs. "*Annual Report for the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1909.*" Digital Collections, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep09/reference/history.annrep09.i0002.pdf>.

vocational skills, for the first time. However, even as these changes were implemented, assimilationist policies that exposed students to Christian proselytizing and denigrated Native families remained in place as well. Further, as many of the remaining schools began to close, new battles over the history and legacy of the Indian boarding school system emerged. Efforts to commemorate the range of Indigenous experiences at these facilities were often ignored or countered with narratives that focused on the benefits of assimilation rather than the trauma many children experienced from being taken from their homes at a young age. This particular conflict continues in the present as Native communities resist the erasure of their boarding school experiences from U.S. history narratives that generally ignore these institutions and the pain they inflicted.

Each of these different eras in the history of the boarding school system can be better understood through a careful analysis of the history of the Stewart Indian School. Stewart was established by the federal government in 1890 at the request of Nevada legislators who first proposed building a boarding school in Nevada in 1887 for the purpose of educating and assimilating Native children throughout the state. Located just across the border from California, and fourteen miles east of Lake Tahoe, Carson City is located in a desert valley surrounded by the Sierra Nevada mountains. At the time the school was built, the town's population hovered at around 5,000 settlers, a number that had increased steadily since its founding in 1858 due to

the discovery of vast silver deposits in the region.⁶ The school was named after William Morris Stewart, a Republican Congressman from Nevada who served first in the House of Representatives and later in the Senate between 1864 and 1905.⁷ It was Stewart who secured funding for the school, which initially enrolled children from the Washoe, Northern and Southern Paiute, and Western Shoshone tribal nations. The reach of the Stewart School quickly expanded, however, and by the time Stewart closed in 1980, thousands of Native children from more than a dozen Indigenous communities across the West had attended the school.⁸

The experiences of Indigenous students who attended the Stewart School over its ninety-year history varied tremendously. School rules were closely connected with changes in federal Indian policy and similarly impacted by reform movements. Stewart students thus experienced the militaristic policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which included daily drills and marching, along with the sanctioned use of physical violence against students to enforce school rules. Pupils were also influenced by Indigenous activists who advocated reforms in the 1920s, and changes that permitted limited expressions of cultural identity initiated after the passage of the Indian New Deal. As federal officials pursued the termination of

⁶ “About Carson City: History.” *Carson City*. Accessed on March 8, 2016 on <http://carson.org/index.aspx?page=140>; “Population of Carson City.” *Population.us*. Accessed on January 19, 2017 on <http://population.us/about>. The total population of Indigenous peoples living in or near Carson City during the same period is unclear; federal authorities maintained data on Native peoples living on the three reservations in Nevada at that time, but did not do so with regard to cities or towns.

⁷ “Stewart, William Morris, (1827-1909).” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Accessed March 8, 2016 on <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=s000922>.

⁸ In addition to Paiute, Washoe, and Shoshone students, children from the Assiniboine, Cherokee, Sioux, Miwok, Navajo, Chinook, Tohono O’odham, Pima, Apache, Hualapai, Mono, Hopi, Maidu, Pomo, Chippewa, Yavapai, Pueblo, and Eel River nations attended the school.

relations with Native nations, an influx of Navajo students was sent to Stewart for a rapid and rigid assimilation program; this had the impact of permanently reducing the number of Native Nevadan students who enrolled at the school. In the 1960s and 1970s, students allied themselves with new generations of Native activists who pressed for greater control over Indigenous education, and urged reluctant school administrators to improve the school's curriculum and focus less on vocational training programs. And in the years since the school's closure, Native communities have sparred with state and federal officials over the proper way to commemorate the school's history and decried efforts to erase the trauma many experienced while attending the school. The intricacies of this complex and dynamic history have yet to be fully explored by historians, or examined in terms of two constants throughout the school's history: the ongoing attempts of U.S. officials to assimilate Native peoples, and their consistent subversion of, and opposition to, these efforts.

To explore this history, I rely on three methodological approaches. The central theoretical framework of my study is settler colonialism, which I use primarily as a means of exploring and understanding the assimilationist policies that were implemented at the Stewart School as well as state and federal efforts to erase the intricacies of student experiences from the school's history. For the purposes of this study, I define settler colonialism as a set of practices implemented by the U.S. government to force Native peoples from their land, destroy their cultures and values,

and compel them to accept and uphold settler norms.⁹ This differs significantly from purely exploitative colonialism. Settler states, rather than establishing a system of colonial subordination and separation, create a structure of continuous displacement or social absorption to permanently disrupt Indigenous life.¹⁰ This is done through violence, the destruction of cultures and identities, child abduction, reeducation, renaming and remapping, and territorial dispossession. An additional characteristic of settler states is their desire to incorporate colonized peoples into their societies through assimilation. Ann Laura Stoler refers to this process as “intimate colonialism,” and suggests that control over “sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child rearing” are all important in the structure and organization of colonial governments and settler societies, and “at the heart of colonial politics.”¹¹ It is further important to recognize that, as scholar Patrick Wolfe writes, settler colonial efforts in this regard are part of an ongoing “structure rather than an event,” which “destroys to replace” continuously over time.¹²

In the U.S., the boarding school system as it emerged in the late nineteenth century exemplifies several characteristics of settler colonialism. BIA officials declared that Native children should be targeted for assimilation to instill settler

⁹ This definition of settler colonialism draws particularly from the work of scholars Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini. See, for example, Patrick Wolfe. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” in *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8 (2006): 387-409, and Lorenzo Veracini. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹⁰ Lorenzo Veracini. “Introducing Settler Colonial Studies,” in *Settler Colonial Studies*, 1 (2011), 3.

¹¹ Ann Laura Stoler. “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies.” *The Journal of American History*. 88 (December 2001): 829, 835 and Stoler. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 8.

¹² Wolfe, 388, 390.

values in Indigenous populations at an early age, and with the hope that children would return to their communities and restructure them according to settler standards. At Stewart, teachers adhered to federally-designed courses of study and directed Native children to disregard their allegedly inferior cultures in favor of white, middle-class values, and to then pass these values to their tribal communities, so they all could survive and succeed. These efforts are evident in the history of the Stewart Indian School, where children were forced to disavow their languages, adopt white middle-class gender norms, alter their physical appearances to mirror those of white Americans, and were encouraged to live on familial, versus tribal, plots of land. Boarding schools such as Stewart directly attempted to destroy Indigenous cultures with the objective of replacing them with that of the white settler society.¹³

Further, the removal of Native children from their homes was intended to erase students' connections with their tribal lands, as many students enrolled in the schools were prohibited from visiting them during the school year and were often required to work in local cities and towns over their summer and holiday breaks. Such rules were characterized as an important aspect of an immersive assimilation program, but they also encouraged Native children to settle outside of tribal territories, which reduced their numbers and encouraged non-Native populations to usurp these lands. At Stewart, students were hired out for jobs in communities in and

¹³ Anthropologist Renya K. Ramirez, in her work on Henry Roe Cloud and Elizabeth Bender Cloud, writes that boarding schools were charged with “eliminating the Native physically, spiritually, and culturally” in conjunction with other settler colonial policies, including the allotment of Native lands through the 1887 Dawes Act. Renya K. Ramirez. *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe and Elizabeth Bender Cloud*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 9.

around Carson City and as far away as Oakland, California. Students worked as domestic laborers, ranch hands, and waitresses, and in casinos, hospitals, and in private homes. Though framed as a way to hasten their assimilation and ensure economic self-sufficiency, school administrators also hoped that training students for specific types of work would encourage them to settle outside of their tribal lands. This effort to dispossess Native peoples of their lands occurred throughout the period the Stewart School was open, and continued following its closure in 1980, when state and local officials ignored Indigenous efforts to acquire the campus and instead appropriated the land for use by the state of Nevada.

Given the enormity and intensity of the assimilation programs directed at Stewart Indian School students, chronicling the scope and impacts of federal policies on the management of the school is thus of paramount importance to this study. At the same time, however, as expansive as these efforts were, it is also important to examine the extent to which federal policies were either implemented or ignored by local authorities working at Stewart, and also how Native communities subverted or exploited these colonial policies to their advantage. To illustrate these moments, as well as the inability of the U.S. government to control all aspects of this system, I also utilize aspects of a borderlands approach in this dissertation. To do this, I have expanded and reimaged this framework to include the physical and cultural boundaries between U.S. officials in Washington D.C., local boarding school administrators, and Native communities operating within these spaces. I define borderlands as regions distant from imperial control that contain “contested

boundaries” as defining features, as well as “heterogeneous spaces” where subaltern populations can potentially evade colonial control.¹⁴

Imagining boarding schools as borderlands spaces also emphasizes the “imperfect imperial control” of Indigenous peoples by the U.S. government, challenges the notion that U.S. efforts to reshape and regulate Native lives occurred without opposition, and highlights the contested nature of power at colonial institutions such as Stewart.¹⁵ Employing this framework thus highlights the complex dynamics between Indigenous peoples and U.S. officials at the Stewart School, and illustrates how unique circumstances at the school influenced the implementation of settler colonial programs by administrators. This framework also allows me to demonstrate potential weaknesses in the settler colonial narrative in two important ways. By investigating the power dynamics between the federal government, local BIA agents, and Indigenous populations, I illustrate how local officials were forced to accommodate or negotiate with Stewart students and their families in some situations rather than simply follow the specific dictates of federal policy. I also employ a

¹⁴ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron. “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History.” *The American Historical Review*. 104 (June 1999): 816; Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett. “On Borderlands.” *The Journal of American History*. 2 (September 2011): 348.

¹⁵ Hämäläinen and Truett, “On Borderlands,” 359. John R. Gram also uses a borderlands approach in his analysis of the Albuquerque and Santa Fe Boarding Schools in New Mexico between 1881 and 1928. Gram argues that in New Mexico these two boarding schools constituted an “educational borderland” in which Pueblo families successfully forced school officials to negotiate terms of student enrollment. They did this by threatening to switch their children from one school to another based on school amenities, including students’ access to resources, curriculum, or training opportunities. Gram writes that through this process, Pueblo communities were able to influence how resources were spent and which subjects were taught at the Santa Fe and Albuquerque Boarding Schools. John R. Gram. *Education at the Edge of Empire: Negotiating Pueblo Identity in New Mexico’s Indian Boarding Schools*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 9, 61.

borderlands approach to underscore the fragility of settler colonial projects, as demonstrated by the willingness of such officials to ignore federal policy or bargain with Native families, as well as the ability of Native populations to subvert it.¹⁶

Incorporating this approach thus highlights instances of localized Native resistance and negotiation between BIA officials and Indigenous peoples, while also uncovering the ways in which the latter retained power in relation to local authorities throughout the Stewart School's history. For example, using these two frameworks in concert explains parents' ability to negotiate student attendance in exchange for visitation rights during a period when school officials relied on parents to voluntarily send their children to Stewart. This approach thus complicates our understanding of the relationships between federal authorities, local officials, and Indigenous actors, and moves beyond the idea of a binary relationship between colonizer and colonized by analyzing moments of cooperation and collusion between the two. Further, focusing on individuals who sought to resist or subvert the U.S. government's colonizing policies expands the scope of this study to include American Indian actors and their experiences rather than focusing exclusively on the state or those who implemented its settler colonial vision. This methodology also ensures that the state does not adopt an overly deterministic role in this study and therefore avoids creating

¹⁶ Two key works that explore borderlands approaches in this manner are Andrae M. Marak and Laura Tuennenman. *At the Border of Empires: The Tohono O'odham, Gender, and Assimilation, 1880-1934*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2013) and Adele Perry. *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004).

the decidedly incorrect impression that a powerful settler colonial state steamrolled over generations of Native students and their families.

Additionally, this dissertation is intended to serve as a decolonizing project, as described by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and to adhere to the principles of the “Indigenous paradigm” articulated by Seminole scholar Sue Ann Miller. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith urges scholars to “decolonize” the methods of analysis employed in their studies of Indigenous peoples by designing projects that consider, from their inception, their potential impacts and benefits on these communities.¹⁷ Smith further asserts that academic research has historically exploited Indigenous populations and points out that it can reinforce colonization if not conducted in direct collaboration with these communities. Miller advocates that Indigenous peoples and their perspectives be placed “at the center of historical narratives” as a means of highlighting their “realities” rather than those of non-Indigenous actors.¹⁸ I have incorporated these principles into my research with the objective of producing a dissertation that focuses on Indigenous experiences and benefits those affiliated with the Stewart School. I have also, therefore, privileged Native sources throughout this dissertation, and particularly those of Stewart Indian School students and their families, and included extensive quotes from these parties as a means of ensuring that their experiences are conveyed to readers in their own

¹⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (New York: Zed Books, Ltd., 1999), ix.

¹⁸ Sue Ann Miller. “Native America Writes Back: The Origin of the Indigenous Paradigm in Historiography.” *Wicazo Sa Review*. 23 (Fall 2008): 18.

words. Additionally, I have worked closely with the staff of the Nevada Indian Commission, which oversees the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum, a facility currently under construction and expected to open in 2019, and also works directly with school alumni and their families to maintain the legacy and memory of the Stewart School.¹⁹

The combination of these approaches, as well as the scope and timeframe of this dissertation, are unique in several regards. Most studies of Indian boarding schools focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and often end with the implementation of the 1934 Indian New Deal, which led to improvements in the administration of some boarding schools and the closure of those deemed substandard or unnecessary. Building upon these foundational works, my study illustrates how one institution changed over nearly a century by showing how the termination of Indian rights in the 1950s, and the rise of self-determination movements in the 1960s and 1970s, impacted Stewart and its student body and led to positive changes at the school that benefited some members of its student body. At the same time, however, by expanding the chronology associated with most boarding school studies, I underscore the ongoing, intrusive impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous communities, and demonstrate that the commitment of the U.S. government to assimilating generations of Native Americans continued during the second half of the

¹⁹ The Nevada Indian Commission is state agency that was established in 1965, and is mandated with improving relations between Native nations in Nevada and state and local authorities, as well as ensuring that Native concerns throughout the state are addressed. See “About Us.” *Nevada Indian Commission*. Accessed February 17, 2016 on <http://nic.nv.gov/about>.

twentieth century. Further, by examining the history of the Stewart School throughout the period it was open, as well as in the aftermath of its closure, my project highlights settler colonialism as an ongoing process through which settler states manipulate and obscure their colonial histories through control over physical spaces, archival practices, and historical narratives.

Unlike other boarding school histories, this dissertation also includes a public history component, which considers how federal and state ownership of school land, local museums, and archival records has allowed them to control Stewart's historical narrative. This analysis thus illustrates that the boarding school system, particularly its assimilationist objectives, is a topic rarely addressed in U.S. history, both in the classroom and in public spaces. This is true with regard to the Stewart School, in terms of the history of the institution while it was open, but also in the manner in which the school grounds were treated upon its closure. Once shuttered, the state of Nevada sought absolute control of the campus, and attempted to repurpose it in a manner that ignored the wishes of local Native communities, for whom the Stewart School represented a significant chapter in their history. Further, Nevada failed to support Indigenous efforts to establish a museum and cultural center on the school grounds, choosing instead to present the school's history at a state-funded museum that focused on the benefits of the Indian boarding school system while ignoring the trauma it also engendered. These examples illustrate the connections between public history and settler colonialism, and underscore how Native perspectives on the Stewart School have been consistently ignored and the U.S. government's

assimilationist agenda continuously obscured. This component of my study also underscores the importance of supporting efforts for Stewart alumni to share their stories in their own words and on their own terms, and demonstrates how these accounts may differ from those prepared by non-Native organizations and individuals.

Finally, this project highlights the histories of Great Basin Native Nevadan communities, about which little scholarship, particularly with regard to boarding school or assimilation experiences in the twentieth century, currently exists.²⁰ Many recent studies of Nevada's Great Basin tribes, which include the Washoe, Northern and Southern Paiute, and Western Shoshone nations, focus on uncovering events that took place between these communities and European colonial powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²¹ This important work demonstrates the influence of Native nations during these centuries, the many political and social exchanges that took place between Natives and early settlers, as well as the impacts of Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. colonization during this period. Other works have focused on undoing previous scholarship on Great Basin Indigenous nations, particularly that of anthropologist Julian Seward, who depicted these populations as primitive and

²⁰ Recent scholarship on Great Basin Native communities I build upon includes, Ned Blackhawk. *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Martha C. Knack. *Boundaries Between: The Southern Paiutes, 1775-1995*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

²¹ There are also important exceptions to this trend. Crum's work on the Western Shoshone explicitly focuses on the history of the nation during period after the Wounded Knee Massacre to underscore that "Indians have continued to be an active historical force since 1890 and into the twentieth century." Crum, *The Road on Which We Came*, ix. Additionally, Knack dedicates several chapters to the history of the Southern Paiutes during the twentieth century.

unsophisticated.²² My dissertation builds upon this scholarship by examining how exchanges between settlers and Indigenous communities continued into the twentieth century at the Stewart Indian School, while also countering negative portrayals of Great Basin peoples. This approach will provide new information about the experiences of Native Nevadans, while also underscoring the impacts of settler colonialism on these communities during the twentieth century and in the present.

Historiographically, this dissertation benefits from a rich body of secondary literature that examines both the Indian boarding school system and the history of Native American education in the United States. The scholarship of Brenda J. Child, Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, John R. Gramm, K. Tsianina Lomawaima, Clifford E. Trafzer, and Robert A. Trennert, Jr. provides examples of academic studies that focus on individual boarding schools and the experiences of the students who attended them.²³ Each of these works includes detailed accounts of individual boarding schools located throughout the country and describes how they evolved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each also provides relevant examples of how Native

²² See Richard O. Clemmer, L. Daniel Meyers, and Mary Elizabeth Rudden. *Julian Seward and the Great Basin: The Making of an Anthropologist*. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999).

²³ Brenda J. Child. *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert. *Education Beyond the Mesas: Hopi Students at Sherman Institute, 1902-1929*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Gram. *Education at the Edge of Empire*; K. Tsianina Lomawaima. *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Clifford E. Trafzer, Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, and Lorene Sisquoc. *The Indian School on Magnolia Avenue: Voices and Images from Sherman Institute*. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2012); Robert A. Trennert, Jr. *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). Additionally, an edited volume on the Carlisle Indian School focuses on the institution's history, as well as its commemoration by former students and their families. See Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose (eds). *Carlisle Indian School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

American perspectives can serve as central components of historical scholarship on the boarding school system, a practice I emulate. In addition to these scholars, David Wallace Adams, Jon Reyhner, and Jeanne Eder detail Indian education efforts in the U.S. between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and explore how BIA policies evolved during this period.²⁴

An emerging body of secondary literature that focuses on the connections between settler colonialism and Indigenous child removal practices in the U.S., represented most prominently by historians Margaret D. Jacobs and Cathleen D. Cahill, is also important to my study of the Stewart Indian School. Cahill examines Indigenous child removal through an institutional analysis of the BIA, and argues that settler colonialism drove this organization's efforts to assimilate Native men, women, and children between 1869 and 1933.²⁵ Jacobs takes comparative and transnational approaches to this topic, and examines Indigenous child removal practices in Canada, Australia, and the United States.²⁶ Unlike many scholars on this subject, Jacobs also extends her analysis into the latter decades of the twentieth century, and characterizes the Indigenous adoption programs that emerged between the 1940s and the late 1960s as settler colonial efforts to assure the continued assimilation of Native children. Throughout their work, Cahill and Jacobs also focus on the traumatic impacts of child

²⁴ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, and Reyhner and Eder. *American Indian Education*.

²⁵ Cathleen D. Cahill. *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

²⁶ Margaret D. Jacobs. *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) and *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

removal on Indigenous families, as well as their ongoing efforts to contest and undermine these policies.

Scholarship concerning the expansion of federal power in the United States is also critical to understanding the emergence and expansion of the Indian boarding school system during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And while the federal government often framed this expansion in terms of its desire to protect and preserve Native populations, legal scholars have increasingly questioned both the intention of federal officials and the methods they employed. Kunal M. Parker, for example, highlights periods of U.S. history during which Native Americans, African Americans, women, and immigrants, among others, have been deemed ‘foreign’ as a means of justifying both their political exclusion and state regulation of their lives.²⁷ The use of federal power to protect and “civilize” Native peoples is addressed by legal historian Barbara Young Welke, who argues that such forms of protection were often, in reality, attempts to subordinate Indigenous populations, strip them of their sovereignty and facilitate control over their lands.²⁸ Additionally, Gary Gerstle outlines the dramatic expansion of federal power during the Reconstruction, New Deal, and Cold War eras, and points out its use of surrogates, such as missionaries, to execute new policies.²⁹ Examining the history of Indian boarding schools through this lens connects the history of the Indian boarding school system with broader trends in

²⁷ Kunal M. Parker. *Making Foreigners: Immigration and Citizenship Law in America, 1600-2000*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁸ Barbara Young Welke. *Law and the Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century United States*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁹ Gary Gerstle. *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

U.S. history, and underscores the importance of evaluating events at schools like Stewart within the context of federal law and policy. Such scholarship also highlights repeated federal efforts to subjugate and constrain the actions of Native peoples.

Each of these scholars has made important contributions to studies of the state, Indigenous child removal, and the Indian boarding school system. However, much of this history requires further investigation. There are no published studies, for example, that address the long-term history of the Stewart School, highlight the experiences of the Great Basin Indigenous communities it served, employ settler colonialism as a means of understanding the history of one specific boarding school, or question how boarding schools are represented as public history sites. Further, works that focus on specific schools do not consider the history of the boarding school system during the postwar period or consider how these spaces fared in the decades following their closure. My study confronts each of these issues and also provides a much-needed example of how one boarding school changed over the decades it remained in operation and how its history was portrayed after its closure.

In writing this dissertation, I consulted a diverse collection of sources connected with the history of the Stewart Indian School. Throughout the research process, I sought to emphasize information that captured the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous students and their families, while also paying close attention to the federal and local officials who administered boarding school policy. Among these were documents from federal and state archives, newspaper and magazine articles, memoirs, as well as oral history interviews recorded with Stewart

alumni. Oral histories and student publications, especially school newspapers, are particularly important to this study, as they are, in some cases, the only historical sources which provide direct insights into Native perspectives on life at the Stewart School. Some of the interviews incorporated into this study were conducted by a local historian in Nevada during the same period I was conducting my dissertation research. These interviews are incredibly informative and I have relied upon them extensively in this dissertation. However, this project limited my opportunities to concurrently embark on a similar oral history project or find alumni who were both willing to talk and had not yet been interviewed. This more recent oral history project was funded and published by Nevada Indian Commission in 2017, while those dating from the 1960s and 1970s were conducted by the University of Nevada, Reno. Additionally, I conducted interviews with members of the Nevada Indian Commission and local museum staff members as part of my research. Many of these oral history sources, particularly those testimonials delivered by Indigenous peoples, are privileged and quoted extensively within this dissertation, as they provide the most accurate accounts of Native experiences at Stewart.

I also engaged in extensive archival research related to the history of the Stewart School. This research has taken me to the Nevada State Museum in Carson City and the Nevada Historical Society and University of Nevada, Reno. These institutions maintain extensive collections of documents, letters, photographs, and newspaper and magazine articles related to the Stewart School. The majority of archival sources regarding the Stewart School reside at the National Archives and

Records Administration (NARA) facility in San Bruno, California. This archive was critical to my project, as it contains documents that illustrate how local officials implemented federal education policies, as well as letters from Native American parents who sent their children to the school, and students' academic records and evidence of their extracurricular activities. The NARA facility in Washington, D.C., which serves as a repository for BIA records connected with federal Indian policy, was also an important source of information for this project. These records contain correspondence between federal and local BIA offices, quarterly and monthly reports from Indian boarding schools, student files, census records, school calendars, and monthly reports from school superintendents and social workers. I also traveled to the NARA facility in St. Louis, which maintains the files of former federal government personnel, to review the files of Stewart Indian School employees in search of additional details about their management of and experiences at the school. Additionally, I relied extensively on local publications, including the *Nevada State Journal*, *Reno-Journal Gazette*, *Nevada Appeal*, the *Native Nevadan*, and *Nevada Magazine*, which proved to be an excellent source of interviews with Stewart students and alumni over the decades it was open.

In October 2017, about a year into my dissertation research and writing, I learned that the Nevada Indian Commission planned to open a museum and cultural center on the former Stewart School campus, and that a new museum director, Bobbi Rahder, had been hired to oversee its management. I had previously met with Nevada Indian Commission staff in 2015 and had also reached out to the organization via

email to offer access to my research, and decided to send an email to Rahder introducing myself and offering to share items I had more recently found while conducting research, along with a draft of my second dissertation chapter. This led to a telephone call between the two of us in which she invited me to visit and tour the campus, including school buildings closed to the public, in November 2017. This visit, which included a meeting attended by museum curator Chris Ann Gibbons and Nevada Indian Commission Executive Director Sherry Rupert, fundamentally changed my relationship with the Stewart Indian School and profoundly impacted (and improved) my dissertation. In their efforts to build the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum (SISCCM), Rahder and Gibbons wanted to hire me as a research consultant to identify, collect, and provide them with copies of archival records connected with the Stewart School, conduct research related to these items, and assist with exhibit content organization and the text for panels in the museum. I would also be able to utilize copies of this research for my dissertation and have access to the SISCCM archival collection.

I accepted this position and began formally working with the SISCCM in February 2018. Since that time, I have traveled repeatedly to Carson City and had the honor to spend time with members of the Stewart Advisory Board, which consists primarily of alumni and their families, and have worked closely with Rahder and Gibbons to determine how best to commemorate the range of student experiences at the Stewart Indian School. This experience has been both informative and profoundly humbling. Rahder and Gibbons have shared the school's extensive archival collection

with me for incorporation into this dissertation, and these items from the 1960s and 1970s, in particular, formed the basis of my fifth dissertation chapter and dramatically reshaped my understanding of the Stewart School during the final two decades it remained open. More importantly, however, this experience has allowed me to personally connect with alumni and their families, and hear from them, in their own words, what it felt like to be separated from their parents and sent to an off-reservation Indian boarding school. Listening to their experiences and learning about the ways in which they hope the school and its students are honored at the SISCCM was an unexpected gift that has motivated my research, writing, and determination to convey the history of the Stewart Indian School as accurately as possible.

The following chapters outline the history of the Stewart Indian School, as experienced by its students, and examine how settler colonial practices influenced the U.S. government's management of the school and its legacy. Each chapter chronologically illustrates how BIA policy impacted the school in different ways over time and demonstrates that, even during periods of supposed reform, settler colonialism remained the driving force behind the administration of the school. At the same time, however, each chapter highlights the fact that these efforts were never completely successful, as evidenced by students' unremitting efforts to maintain aspects of their cultures and connections with their communities. They also emphasize that Native parents, contrary to the beliefs of many non-Native officials involved in the boarding school system, viewed education as critical to their children's futures, and worked tirelessly to reshape Stewart into an institution that

met the needs of Native communities and families. Each chapter also examines how federal officials developed and executed Indian education policy during specific periods as a means of providing historical context to the reader and illustrating how federal policy was consistently used to promote settler colonialism and hinder Indigenous sovereignty.

Chapter two argues that the policies implemented during first four decades after the founding of the Stewart Indian School were premised almost entirely upon settler colonial objectives that called for the assimilation of the Native children who attended the school. I illustrate this through a description of the practices and policies school officials utilized to assimilate Native children, the majority of which were dictated at the federal level. This chapter describes the regimented policies of the school between 1890 and 1925, the white supremacist assumptions of federal and local school administrators, and the harsh punishments to which Native students were subjected. At the same time, I highlight multiple instances of negotiation between Stewart administrators and Indigenous families, particularly with regard to student attendance and parental visitations, and connect this with students' abilities to protest against school policies and assert their equality in a white supremacist environment.

Beginning in 1925, federal officials, in collaboration with outside reformers, began to question the efficacy and brutality of the Indian boarding school system, given its perceived failure to successfully assimilate the previous generation of Native children. In 1934, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act as part of New Deal legislation, which, among its many provisions, included policies designed

to reform the Indian boarding school system. In chapter three I argue that, while material conditions at the Stewart School improved after these reforms, the main objectives of the school and its administrators remained focused on the assimilation of Native children and their families. Indigenous students faced continued pressure to adopt Christianity, for example, and were subjected to sustained gendered vocational training at the expense of their academic educations. Further, Indigenous families remained under attack by Stewart personnel for their supposed inability to care for their children, which rationalized their continued assimilation and the removal of Native children from their families. I also illustrate how Indigenous students and families fought these policies, confronted instances of abuse, sought greater input on educational programs, and moved beyond school officials' expectations by securing employment outside of their narrowly focused vocational training.

In 1946, the BIA established the Special Navajo Five Year Program, through which young Navajo children were removed from their homes in Arizona and New Mexico and placed in Native American boarding schools, including Stewart. Chapter four focuses on the administration of this program at Stewart within the context of the federal termination and relocation programs instituted after the Second World War. The Special Navajo Program was designed to address BIA concerns that Navajo children were 'falling behind' other Native children because they did not have proper access to educational opportunities that would allow them to integrate successfully into white society. I argue, however, that the Special Navajo program was another example of settler colonialism at the Stewart Indian School, and undertaken to hasten

the termination of Navajo treaty rights and the removal of Navajo citizens from their lands. The inception of the Navajo also program frustrated Nevada's tribal nations, however, as it reduced the number of Indigenous Nevadans who enrolled at Stewart.

Though some students at the Stewart Indian School were inspired by the Red Power and self-determination movements that emerged in the 1960s, and challenged Stewart faculty and administrators to change the school in a manner that better reflected their academic needs, they also faced continued assimilationist pressure from faculty during the final two decades the school remained open. In chapter five, I examine the efforts of Stewart students and their families to force administrators to reform the school's curriculum and vocational programs and reshape the institution into one that served the best interests of Indigenous students and communities. I also highlight the efforts of Native Nevadan communities, including many Stewart alumni, to exert greater influence over school admissions policies, which in the 1960s and 1970s led to the enrollment of more out-of-state students than students from local tribal nations and permanently changed the demographics of the school. At the same time, however, this chapter illustrates that local school officials continued to view Native parents and families as inferior, mentally and morally, and thus in need of assimilationist instruction.

My concluding chapter examines the history of the Stewart School after its 1980 closure, and uses settler colonialism as a framework to explain state and local institutions' interactions with the Stewart campus and local Native communities in subsequent decades. I argue that the Nevada state government and local history

institutions have consistently sought to erase Indigenous experiences at the Stewart Indian School and replace them with a historical narrative that ignores Native perspectives and obscures the U.S. government's assimilationist program. These efforts have focused primarily on the dispossession of the land on which the school was built, the failure to support, until quite recently, Indigenous efforts to build a museum on school grounds, and the construction of museum exhibits that perpetuate the settler colonial narrative that the Indian boarding school system was a universally uplifting experience for all Native peoples. At the same time, however, I illustrate how Stewart alumni and Indigenous Nevadans have constantly worked to refute such accounts in the decades since its closure.

This history of the Stewart Indian School examines the positive and negative experiences of Native American children who attended the Stewart Indian School during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Further, it details the ways in which the U.S. government utilized settler colonialism as a means of assimilating thousands of Indigenous children and then sought to erase its actions by controlling the documentary history of this period. At the same time, it also examines the ways in which Native students and their families negotiated their experiences, maintained their Indigenous identities, and shaped Stewart in ways that benefited their communities. Indian boarding schools were central to the experiences of generations of Native Americans, and their histories need to be written as a means of commemorating their experiences and placing the assimilationist policies of the U.S. government securely within the historical record. This dissertation therefore seeks to

recognize and honor the range of Stewart Indian School student experiences, as well as the ongoing efforts of Stewart alumni and their relatives to take control of this historical narrative and commemorate it in their own words and voices.³⁰

³⁰ Throughout its history, the Stewart Indian School was known by several different names: Carson Indian School, Carson Industrial School, Carson Indian Training School, Carson Boarding School, Clear Creek Boarding School, and the Stewart Institute. Throughout, I refer to the school as the Stewart Indian School, both for simplicity's sake and because this was the name of the school when it closed and is the name associated with current efforts to commemorate the site.

Chapter Two: “And to this, the student body protested:”

Colonization and Negotiation at the Stewart Indian School, 1890-1925

Winona James, a citizen of the Washoe nation, was born in 1903 in Genoa, Nevada, and as a child lived at fishing camps in the Lake Tahoe region in the summer, and on a ranch in Carson Valley, where her family worked as laborers, during the winter. In the fall of 1910, local officials from the Stewart Indian School found James, and, since she was a school-age child, took her from her family and enrolled her at the school. After spending the 1910-1911 school year at Stewart, James returned to her family, who, after experiencing the pain of having a child forcibly removed from their custody, decided that she would not return the following year. Thus, in the fall of 1911, when Stewart officials came to collect Winona James at the outset of the new school year, they found themselves unable to find the then eight-year-old. According to James, her family “hid me out” as a means of avoiding her return to the school. “They had me hide, probably in the brush or something,” she recalled further, adding, “they wouldn’t let them [Stewart officials] come near me.” James also recollected her grandmother’s specific concerns about letting her go to the school. “I can remember that my grandmother didn’t want me to come back to Stewart because she thought I would never, ever go back home again.”³¹

³¹ Winona James. “An Interview with Winona James: A Contribution to a Survey of Life in Carson Valley, From First Settlement Through the 1950s”. (1984) *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 12, 2018)
<https://ia802806.us.archive.org/18/items/JamesWinona/James%2C%20Winona.pdf>.

The experiences of Winona James and her family illustrate the complex nature of interactions between Native families and Stewart School officials during the early decades after the school was open. The Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) in Washington, D.C. promoted an educational program that called for the assimilation of Native children through a regimented assimilation program designed to rapidly strip them of their cultures and tribal connections.³² If done properly, according to prevailing thinking at the OIA, within one generation Native children's Indigeneity could be completely erased, allowing them to be fully assimilated into white, American society. Though willing to concede that Native parents would likely resist aspects of this program, the OIA instructed its agents and administrators on the ground to ruthlessly track down and enroll Native children in off-reservation boarding schools, to threaten parents who resisted, work with local law enforcement to aggressively hunt down children and their families, and to arrest any child who ran away from their school.

Given the forceful manner in which OIA officials were instructed to pursue Native children and their families, Winona James' story seems remarkable, especially since her family's refusal to send Winona to Stewart could have led federal authorities to retaliate against them or to deploy local law enforcement to forcibly transport her to the school. Neither of these things happened, however, and, after remaining out of school for a couple of years, James ultimately attended a public

³² Until 1947, the BIA was called the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), and will be referred to as such in chapters two and three.

school in Mottsville, Nevada, instead. Though the response of Stewart officials in this case runs contrary to federal dictates, and the relentless manner in which OIA authorities were instructed to hunt down Native children for the purpose of placing them in boarding schools, the early history of the Stewart Indian School suggests that this incident was not isolated, and that negotiations between Native families and school administrators actually occurred regularly. This was true not just with regard to the efforts of Stewart officials to enroll students at the school, but also in their interactions with Indigenous families and students.

In this chapter, I examine how these processes unfolded during the early decades of the Stewart Indian School's existence, between 1890 and 1925. I also describe Nevadan lawmakers' calls for the establishment of an Indian boarding school in the state, and connect this with the desire of state and federal officials to confine Native peoples on reservations, erase their cultures and land claims, and to train them to serve as manual laborers employed by the white Nevadan population. Also explored are the racial and educational philosophies that influenced assimilationist programs during this period, as well as the ways school officials altered federal policies based on the responses of Stewart students and parents.

Importantly, this chapter also underscores the many ways in which Native peoples contested and subverted the settler colonial mission of the Indian boarding school system at the Stewart Indian School. Records from this period describe daily life at Stewart, and also document student and parental protests against school policies, which, in some cases, led to concrete changes by Stewart officials. Parents

also persuaded school authorities to allow them to visit sick children while they recovered, or to send their children home when ill, both of which contradicted federal policy. Students negotiated long absences from their studies, while others simply ran away as a means of escaping their situation. Other Stewart students secured positions teaching younger children or planned to apply what they learned at the school toward helping their tribal communities. And some students pushed back against a system that encouraged and expected them to adopt a subservient role in relation to non-Native populations by asserting their ambition and affirming their equality.

These moments do not lessen the trauma experienced by children stolen from their parents and forced into a foreign environment in which they had little control or autonomy regarding their everyday lives. Nor do they negate the effects of an educational system in which Indigenous children were denied the use of their languages and repeatedly told that everything about their lives and cultures deserved erasure. However, these moments are critical to the story of the Stewart Indian School, as they illustrate the resilience of Native students and their families in the midst of an encounter with an oppressive system that deployed countless policies designed to destroy their cultures and supplant them with non-Native values. The fact that they contested these processes, even in the smallest of ways, is an inspiring aspect of Native history that requires a prominent space in accounts of the early years of the Stewart Indian School.

“If this is the kind of civilization awaiting us on the reserves...”³³

Beginning in the 1850s, four decades prior to the Stewart School’s establishment, a growing influx of white settlers into the Great Basin region dramatically disrupted the lives of its Indigenous inhabitants. These settlers flocked to the Nevada Territory after the discovery of gold, silver, and ore in the 1850s and 1860s, and sought control of Shoshone, Paiute, and Washoe land as a means of securing mineral rights and the profits they would generate.³⁴ As settlers increasingly sought to obtain Indigenous lands by force, the federal government, through the Office of Indian Affairs, attempted to sequester the entire Native population on reservations located on opposite ends of the state. This plan was intended to open Native lands for white settlement and exploitation, and also to create an environment in which the tribes could learn to farm and embrace Christianity. The process of moving Native peoples onto reservations was also framed as a humanitarian act that would protect them from settler violence.

Federal officials had a difficult time, however, in their efforts to imprison and indoctrinate Native nations in Nevada, who consistently made their displeasure with their proposed resettlement known. In 1870, for example, Paiute leader Sarah Winnemucca wrote a letter to Nevada Indian Agent J.M. Less in which she described the problems with the land set aside for her tribe, as well as their unwillingness settle

³³ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1870.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 107. (Accessed June 16, 2017) <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep70/reference/history.annrep70.i0007.pdf>.

³⁴ Michael S. Green. *Nevada: A History of the Silver State*. (University of Nevada Press: Reno, 2015), 74,79, 109.

in such spaces. On April 4th, 1870, she asserted that the Paiutes would starve if they remained on the land assigned to them, and further declared, “If this is the kind of civilization awaiting us on the reserves, God grant that we never be compelled to go on one, as it is much preferable to live in in the mountains and drag out an existence in our native manner.”³⁵ Regarding federal plans to force all Native peoples from their lands onto reservations, Winnemucca wrote the following: “...it will require a greater military force stationed around to keep them within the limits that it now does to keep them in subjugation.”³⁶ She added, however, that

...if the Indians have any guarantee that they can secure a permanent home on their own native soil, and that our white neighbors can be kept from encroaching on our rights, after having a reasonable share of ground allotted to use as our own, and giving us the required advantages of learning...I warrant the savage (as he is called to-day) will be a thrifty and law-abiding member of the community fifteen or twenty years hence.³⁷

Though Winnemucca’s calls for land, education, and settlement were seemingly in line with OIA settler colonial objectives, local officials throughout the state were unwilling and unable to meet these requirements. White settlers continued to stream into Nevada in the 1870s and 1880s, as copper and coal mining and large-scale ranching operations flourished.³⁸ Each of these endeavors required vast stretches of lands, including those occupied by the Washoe, Shoshone, and Paiutes, and frequently forced the movement of these nations from their tribal lands. The Northern Paiutes, for example, were forced from Western Nevada into Shoshone

³⁵ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1870,” 107.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Green, 164-165.

territory in the center of the state, while some Western Shoshone moved north.³⁹ The Washoe were forced to establish encampments around settler towns and were repeatedly denied a reservation of their own.⁴⁰ Southern Paiutes faced a similar situation during this period, and were repeatedly granted allotments on land poorly suited for farming, which rendered them unable to feed and support families.⁴¹ In response to these changing circumstances, Indigenous populations continued to move throughout the state, and in doing so impeded what the OIA viewed as its ‘civilizing’ mission. As the superintendent of the Carson Indian Agency wrote in 1870, “...owing to the scattered condition and migratory habits of the Indians,” efforts to educate Native peoples had been largely unsuccessful.⁴²

As a means of correcting this perceived problem, the OIA built three reservations in Nevada during the 1870s: the Pyramid Lake Reservation in Western Nevada, the Walker River Reservation in central Nevada, both of which were established in 1874, and the Western Shoshone Reservation (now known as the Duck Valley Reservation), which straddles the Nevada-Idaho border, in 1877. Each of these reservations maintained ‘day schools’ where Native children would attend classes during the day and return to their parents in the afternoon. In 1885, the OIA opened a

³⁹ Steven J. Crum. *The Road on which we Came: A History of the Western Shoshone*. (University of Utah Press: Salt Lake City, 1994), 41.

⁴⁰ Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada. *Wa She Shu: The Washoe People Past and Present*. (Washoe Cultural Resource Office: Gardnerville, Nevada, 2009), 28. (Accessed June 16, 2017) https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5251066.pdf

⁴¹ Martha C. Knack. *Boundaries Between: The Southern Paiutes, 1775-1995*. (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 2001), 147.

⁴² United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1870,” 105.

boarding school on the Pyramid Lake Reservation, at which children lived during the school year, but which also allowed them continued access to family members living on the reservation. The school quickly filled to capacity with the children of families living on and around the reservation, leaving many potential students with no reservation school at which they could enroll. Walker River administrators thus made the decision, without consulting Native parents, to send older children who had reached a certain level of proficiency out of state to other on- and off-reservation boarding schools to continue their educations.

Unsurprisingly, this decision elicited passionate reactions from Native parents and students, and had the effect of bolstering local OIA support for the establishment of an off-reservation boarding school in Nevada. In 1885, William D.C. Gibson, the Indian Agent at Walker River and a future superintendent of the Stewart School, expressed “grave doubts” about the practice of sending children out of state, and noted its “demoralizing effect on these scholars,” who had “lost some of their ambition in that direction” since the program was announced.⁴³ He further described the responses of Native parents whose children had been sent to school in Grand Junction Colorado, writing that they “mourn them as lost, or as they would the dead...it is really a pitiful sight to witness their distress and sorrow.”⁴⁴

⁴³ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1885.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 163. (Accessed June 16, 2017) <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep85/reference/history.annrep85.i0018.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Foreshadowing the ability of future generations of Native families to effect change, it seems that their reaction did impact Gibson's recommendations regarding the future of this program at the reservation. Though remaining a staunch advocate of the importance of the assimilation and civilization of Native children, Gibson advised that an off-reservation boarding school be established in Carson City or elsewhere in Nevada, in part to ease the concerns of Native parents. "The Indians," he asserted in his 1885 report, "are praying for such a school where the children can be within their reach."⁴⁵

Concurrently, however, Gibson also lobbied for the passage of a compulsory education law in Nevada that would allow the OIA, in concert with local law enforcement, to collect Indigenous children throughout the state for the purpose of educating and assimilating them.⁴⁶ Despite his sympathy for Native children and parents who were separated from one another at the Walker River Reservation, Gibson's description of how such schools could be populated affirms the harsh

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The establishment of the Stewart School and the expansion of the Indian boarding school system across the country mirrors the rise of a federally managed public education system during the second half of the nineteenth century. Public schools were perceived as venues through which to create a shared sense of moral and patriotic public values for Americans, and to ensure that future generations could contribute to the economic growth of the country. Between 1870 and 1890, public school expenditures more than doubled, from sixty-nine million dollars to one-hundred forty-seven million dollars, and enrollment increased from 7.6 million to 12.7 million students. Though the majority of public schools established in the late nineteenth century were intended for the children of white Americans, this period also saw the construction of parallel educational institutions for African Americans as well as programs designed to assimilate the children of recent immigrants into U.S. society. See Sheila Curran Bernard and Sarah Mondale. *School: The Story of Public Education*. (Beacon Press: Boston, 2001), 15, 58 and Eric Foner. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. (Harper Perennial: New York, 2002), 144, 146.

lengths to which the OIA would go for the purpose of advancing the assimilationist objectives of the U.S. government:

I have no doubt but that the State law could be readily so amended as to require peace officers to arrest all Indian children of school age and deliver them to Indian agents and superintendents at their terminal points for receiving along the lines of railroads, from where they could be conveyed to schools on reservations at a very slight expense to the government... There is certainly no class of people within the confines of our Government upon whom the rigid enforcement of such a law could bestow such benefits as it would our aborigines.⁴⁷

According to Gibson, therefore, the transfer of Native students to out-of-state boarding schools was unacceptable, while the arrest and transportation of young Indigenous children by train across the state, presumably without being accompanied by a parent or guardian, was a satisfactory solution to what he viewed as the urgent problem of collecting and educating Native Nevadan children. Two years later, in 1887, the Nevada State Legislature approved the establishment of an Indian boarding school in Nevada, and in December 1890, the Stewart Indian School opened in Carson City. The OIA goal of compelling all Native Nevadan children to attend assimilationist schools, rather than just those living on or near reservations, was on its way to becoming a reality, and at a time in when compulsory education and progressive reforms were impacting children across the U.S.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ United States Office of Indian Affairs. "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1885, 164.

⁴⁸ The emergence of the Progressive Movement in the United States also influenced the management of the Indian education system between 1890 and the 1920s. Progressive reforms in the Indian Service focused on standardized curriculums for Native boarding schools, efficiency in educational practices, and ensuring that graduates could be economically self-sufficient upon graduation and easily integrated into American society. This integration would only go so far, however, as reformers in the Indian Service also viewed Native children through the lens of racism and white supremacy, and therefore considered them unsuitable for higher education or any career outside of manual labor. These

“To educate the Indian in the ways of civilized life is to preserve him from extinction.”⁴⁹

The federal drive to assimilate Native nations dates back to the years following the end of the Civil War, and became a central component of what in 1869 was referred to as the ‘Peace Policy’ toward Native Americans. In response to violent white encroachments onto Native lands, and in some cases outright calls by state and local officials for the ‘extermination’ of Indigenous tribes as a means of allowing the advance of settler populations, the administration of Ulysses S. Grant declared the U.S. government’s intent to establish “a permanent peace” with Native peoples by ‘civilizing’ and assimilating them into white society.⁵⁰ The creation of an educational bureaucracy within the Office of Indian Affairs was a key component of this policy, and led to the vast network of day schools and boarding schools that existed at Stewart’s founding. And, as this 1903 statement from Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Arthur Jones highlights, while federal officials consistently asserted the humanitarian nature of these schools, the philosophical underpinnings for their existence were also motivated by settler colonialism:

“To educate the Indian in the ways of civilized life...is to preserve him from extinction...As a separate entity he cannot exist...in the body of this great

sentiments influenced federal Indian education policy, the actions of Stewart School officials, and impacted Native parents and Stewart students. See Michael McGerr. *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement*. (Oxford University Press: New York, 2003), 206, 207.

⁴⁹ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1903.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 2. (Accessed June 16, 2017) <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep03p1/reference/history.annrep03p1.i0003.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Ulysses S. Grant, “First Annual Message,” (December 6, 1869). Gerhard Peters and Hohn T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. (Accessed May 30, 2017.) <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29510>.

nation. The pressure for land must diminish his reservations to areas within which he can utilize the acres allotted to him, so that the balance may become homes for white farmers who require them. To educate the Indian is to prepare him for the abolishment of tribal relations, to take his land in severalty, and in the sweat of his brow and by the toil of this hands to carve out, as his white brother has done, a home for himself and family.”⁵¹

Richard Henry Pratt, the Army Officer who founded the first off-reservation boarding school in 1879 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, also expressed such sentiments. In Pratt’s paternalist view, Indigenous peoples would only become “prosperous” and “useful” through focused periods of living with and being educated by white Americans.⁵² He further believed that, as a result of attending boarding schools, future generations of Native Americans would agree that “living in small tribal groups,” rather than among white Americans, was actually a “great disadvantage.”⁵³ The destruction of tribal life would also, according to Pratt, “relieve the Government of the expense of special tribal supervision.”⁵⁴ These views highlight the financial concerns that underscored a key aspect of the assimilationist agenda, and the federal government’s desire to “hasten the time when the Indian will no longer be considered a ward of the nation, but a self-supporting citizen of the Republic.”⁵⁵ Indigenous input was not sought in the creation of the off-reservation boarding school program, nor were parents given a choice about whether their children would participate. For

⁵¹ “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1903,” 2-3.

⁵² Richard Henry Pratt. *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*. Edited by Robert M. Utley. (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1964), 215, 221.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 221-222.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ Office of Indian Affairs. “Report of the Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1902.” (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1900) Box 1, General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

families who did not live near reservation boarding or day schools, their students would simply taken from their custody and transported to the nearest school.

Federal officials mandated that these ideas be put into practice in precise ways, always with the stated objective of preparing assimilated students to live and work among white Americans. In 1892, for example, the OIA produced the *Rules for Indian Schools, with Course of Study, List of Text-Books, and Civil Service Rules*, a manual for educators that contained nearly two hundred rules for employees to follow, as well as specific student lessons for grades one through eight. Academic lessons were designed to teach students basic information on subjects including English, science, reading, and math, and to complement their industrial training. To develop and prepare students for citizenship, teachers were also directed to engage in moral instructions with students, and to emphasize topics such as the virtues of cleanliness, respect, patriotism, kindness and obedience, as well as the importance of self-denial, self-control, confession, and avoiding the use of profanity.⁵⁶

Equally important to OIA officials during this period was that Indian children enter this school system at a young age and remain until they were fully indoctrinated by their teachers. In 1900, Superintendent of Indian Schools Estelle Reel wrote, “...the Indian must be placed in school before the habits of barbarous life have become fixed, and there he must be kept until contact with our life has taught him to

⁵⁶ Office of Indian Affairs. *Rules for Indian Schools, with Course of Study, List of Text-Books, and Civil Service Rules*. (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1892) 39. Box 1, General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

abandon his savage ways and walk in the path of Christian civilization.”⁵⁷ This meant that Native children, especially those attending off-reservation boarding schools, should not only attend these schools full-time, but also live there and, in some cases, remain there for the full twelve months of each year of their instruction. The OIA was adamant with regard to these rules, and declared that Native parents were not permitted to remove their children from a school without the permission of the superintendent and the local Indian agent, and also proclaimed that, once students were enrolled in a school, they were “considered as members of that school until separated therefrom by authority of the Indian office.”⁵⁸ Thus, according to federal rules, by enrolling a child in an Indian school parents formally agreed to relinquish custody of their children to school officials.

To underscore the authority of this school system among students, teachers were directed to “create a spirit of love and brotherhood in the minds of the children toward the white people” in their lessons, and to “relate the innumerable instances of heroic sacrifices and acts of friendship on the part of white settlers and missionaries” toward Indigenous populations.⁵⁹ Teachers were further instructed to “dwell on those things which have showed nobility of character on the part of either race in their dealings with the other,” as well as the “bright examples of faithfulness and devotion

⁵⁷ Office of Indian Affairs. *Report of the Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1900*. (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1900), 21. Box 1, General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁸ Office of Indian Affairs. *Rules for Indian Schools, with Course of Study, List of Text-Books, and Civil Service Rules*, 8.

⁵⁹ Office of Indian Affairs. “Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States, Industrial and Literary.” (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1901), 39. Box 1, General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

by the Indian inhabitants.”⁶⁰ Advancing this false, white supremacist narrative of U.S. history was meant to emphasize the supposed humanitarian nature of this education system, and to justify the destruction of Native families and cultures and the usurpation of Indigenous lands.

More critical than academic instruction for Native children, however, was the industrial training they received while attending school. As Native children were deemed largely unsuitable for higher education, OIA officials, most prominently Superintendent of Indian Schools Estelle Reel, asserted that more ‘practical’ forms of instruction would ensure students’ successful transition from tribal life and should therefore be the focus of their education. Students thus received training in agricultural work, blacksmithing, carpentry, sewing, and laundering. In 1900, Reel wrote, “one half of each day shall be devoted to the literary department and the other half to industrial training.”⁶¹ She also emphasized the irrelevance of additional academic work within the Indian school system. “Higher education,” she declared, has no place in the curriculum of Indian schools, where all that was needed for students was “A thorough groundwork in the English branches, carrying a pupil to about the sixth or eight grades.”⁶² Rather, according to Reel, a student’s mind should “be stored with practical information” and a “sense of responsibility,” and should “be given a sufficient knowledge of English for daily use,” but not burdened “with words

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Office of Indian Affairs. “Rules for the Indian School Service, 1904; Extracts from Official Circulars.” (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1904) Box 1, General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

⁶² Ibid.

he will find difficult to understand and which will not be needed in everyday transactions.”⁶³ In setting federal educational policy, Reel thus rejected the academic potential of all Indigenous children, and constructed a system in which they were trained solely for jobs requiring low-skilled labor.

For Reel, industrial education was also an important tool of assimilation, as it would instill “the work habit” in Native children while simultaneously ensuring they would “fill a useful place in the world.”⁶⁴ Additionally, industrial education was a means through which white gender norms and gendered labor were reinforced at Indian schools on a daily basis. Male students, according to Reel, would receive training in specific trades, such as carpentry, and in areas that would help them settle their government-allotted lands. “Those trades are taught,” she wrote, “which will be helpful to the boy who settles on his allotment, enabling him to give proper care to his implements, his stock, and his home and farm buildings.”⁶⁵ The OIA mandated that industrial instruction for Native girls focus almost entirely on domestic skills. Female students were therefore trained “to become successful homemakers; able to preside over a home so as to make it neat, cheerful, and healthful,” and learned how to cook, sew, do laundry, and organize their homes.⁶⁶ For Reel, the role of these girls was particularly important to the overall mission the OIA, as they were expected to become civilizing forces in their communities: “Through the girls in the schools is

⁶³ Ibid, 1.

⁶⁴ “Report of the Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1902,” 18.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

almost the only way of reaching the home, and as they are to be the future wives and mothers, the fate of the coming generations will be, in huge measure, in their keeping.”⁶⁷ Students also filled manual labor positions at the schools, serving as farmers, carpenters, seamstresses, and laundresses. And while school administrators and federal policy makers framed unpaid student labor as another tool of assimilation, it was also necessary to keep the schools, which faced chronic underfunding and personnel shortages, functioning.

Perhaps surprisingly, OIA officials also encouraged Indigenous students to maintain their skills in manufacturing tribal crafts, such as basketry. Reel wrote in 1901 that “...these arts may be made very profitable,” and therefore “It might be well to endeavor to sell some of the baskets and other Native work brought in by the children.”⁶⁸ Reel further suggested that the continued production of Native crafts would encourage self-sufficiency among Native peoples, particularly Native women, as they could construct these goods while engaging in their domestic work. This focus on Indigenous “industries,” as Reel referred to them was not part of a broader effort to preserve Native cultures initiated by the OIA, but rather a means through which school officials could teach students about capitalism and work.

The establishment of outing programs at Indian schools, whereby children were sent to work at white homes, ranches, and farms, was another means by which the OIA sought to instill white social and economic values in Native children.

⁶⁷ “Report of the Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1900,” 21.

⁶⁸ “Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States, Industrial and Literary, 1901,” 145.

Through such programs, which continued into the 1920s and 1930s, Native children were placed with “select white families,” sometimes over the summer and sometimes for an entire school year, to work as domestics and farm or ranch hands.⁶⁹ Students were paid a small wage, which they were directed to divide between clothing, incidentals and savings accounts to be controlled by their school. Outing programs were not apprenticeship programs through which students learned trades that would benefit them in the future. Rather, they were designed to give Indigenous students experience in various fields of low-skilled, manual labor the federal government deemed appropriate based on their gender and perceived level of intelligence. Outing programs were also deemed an assimilation tool: “Under this system the Indian pupil is surrounded by all the civilizing influences of a good home...Association with white peoples is of the utmost importance to the Indian child, for only by this contact can he be taught to think and reason as does the Anglo-Saxon.”⁷⁰ Ultimately, while outing programs were intended assimilate Native children through the examples of their white employers, they were also a way to uphold the racial hierarchy by making sure Native children understood that they were being trained to work for, rather than with, white Americans.

Religious instruction was also a critical component of the assimilation mission of the Indian school system, though federal officials claimed that students maintained an element of choice in the matter. Installing a sense of “Christian citizenship” in

⁶⁹ “Report of the Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1902,” 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Native pupils was a stated objective of the OIA, however, rules governing the instructive of children also explicitly stated that “Proselytizing among pupils, pastors, priests, employees, or pupils is strictly forbidden.”⁷¹ Even so, students were required to attend church services while enrolled at OIA schools, and those who did not already belong to a specific church were “urged to affiliate with some denomination.”⁷² During the school week, students were required to attend confession, take communion, and receive religious instruction “Not exceeding two hours on a week day.”⁷³ Further, a 1902 policy circular affirmed “Church and mass attendance on Sundays, at hours agreed upon by the respective pastors, will be strictly insisted upon by the school superintendent.”⁷⁴ Based on these edicts, Native students had no choice but to partake in religious instruction, and given the amount of time devoted to teaching Christianity, OIA officials clearly deemed it a critical component of students’ ‘civilization’ and education.

OIA officials also developed specific sets of rules governing student and employee behavior, the nature of relationships between schools and Native parents, and regulations regarding the disciplining and punishment of pupils. Regarding relations between students and school employees, the guidelines state that the latter were not permitted to use students as servants, and also that students were prohibited from spending time alone in employee rooms unless specifically permitted by the

⁷¹ “Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States, Industrial and Literary, 1901,” 6; “Rules for the Indian School Service, 1904; Extracts from Official Circulars,” 44.

⁷² “Rules for the Indian School Service, 1904; Extracts from Official Circulars,” 44.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

school superintendent and then only for specific reasons.⁷⁵ These rules also assert that enrolled students who assumed professional positions at schools, such as teachers or band leaders, would not be compensated for their work. Rather, this labor was to be considered as “part of their training.”⁷⁶

Also outlined were the procedures local officials would use to pressure Indigenous families to enroll students in Indian schools. Local OIA representatives were thus reminded that “The law (27 Stst., p. 635) provides that the Secretary of the Interior may, in his discretion, withhold rations, clothing, and other annuities from Indian parents or guardians who refuse or neglect to send or keep their children of proper school age in some school during a reasonable portion of each year.”⁷⁷ They were therefore directed to engage in “every effort” to compel parents to send their children to school.⁷⁸ School employees were not permitted to use financial inducements to entice parents into enrolling their children, nor were they permitted to promise that students would definitely be sent home during summer vacation periods. Once enrolled, school staff was instructed to keep children attending the schools until they graduated or turned twenty-one. Students were not permitted to return to their homes “without special permission from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ These rules are mentioned repeatedly by federal OIA officials, which suggest that both issues posed problems in the Indian school system in the past. Though no additional information regarding specific circumstances is provided here, these statements strongly indicate that local OIA officials had previously engaged in behaviors that necessitated such rules. “Rules for Indian Schools, with Course of Study, List of Text-Books, and Civil Service Rules, 1892”; “Rules for the Indian School Service, 1904,” 26.

⁷⁶ “Rules for the Indian School Service, 1904,” 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Students' daily lives were also controlled by OIA regulations. Rules governing their sleeping habits, mealtimes and bathroom breaks were dictated according to federal rules, and school employees were instructed to observe them at all times to ensure they behaved properly. Their time outdoors was similarly ordered. According to rule number 213, "Special hours shall be allotted for recreation. Provision shall be made for outdoor sports and school excursions."⁸⁰ These activities would be divided according to gender; rule 214 asserted, for example, that separate sitting rooms and playing spaces were required for girls and boys. And all of these daily activities – eating, playing, learning, and working – were to be conducted "under the eye of a school employee."⁸¹ Additionally, students who misbehaved, did not respond to "moral appeals" or "whose training has developed their animal and left their higher nature underdeveloped," faced particularly harsh forms of discipline.⁸² In a supplemental to his 1892 report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs T.J. Morgan wrote that, if "milder forms of punishment" failed to change student behavior, stricter measures, such as "corporal punishment, confinement, deprivation of privileges, or restriction of diet" could be used against students.⁸³ The federal government thus authorized the beating, imprisonment, and starvation of Native children as acceptable punishments.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 27.

⁸¹ Ibid, 28.

⁸² United States Office of Indian Affairs. "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1892; The Care of Indian Schools." (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C. 1892), 617. *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*. (Accessed June 19, 2017) <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep92/reference/history.annrep92.i0030.pdf>.

⁸³ Ibid.

The Indian school system, as designed by federal officials such as Richard Pratt and Estelle Reel, was designed to assimilate Native children into white society and transform them into English-speaking Americans who practiced Christianity and readily accepted white middle-class notions of gendered life and labor. By removing them from their families and tribal nations, the OIA expected these children to readily distance themselves from their Indigenous heritage and then return to their communities to similarly instruct them in the ways of Anglo-Saxon life. At the same time, federal officials sought to create an Indigenous underclass that would serve the low-skilled labor needs of white communities across the country. Each of these practices was designed to serve the needs of a settler colonial state that wished to erase Indigeneity and usurp Native lands, while also creating a workforce to support the needs of the dominant white society. However, there were fundamental problems with this system. OIA officials assumed that Native children would readily abandon their families and accept the social and professional roles assigned to them by school staff. They also assumed that Native parents would accept policies that would prevent them from seeing their children for years at a time. As school officials sought to administer these policies, federal expectations consistently clashed with local realities.

“As we must depend solely on the inclinations of the Indians for our pupils, we let them go.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1896; Reports of Independent Schools.” (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1896), 380. *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*. (Accessed June 19, 2017)

The Stewart Indian School opened on December 17, 1890, with 37 Paiute, Shoshone, and Washoe students officially enrolled. These students were collected by school officials who traveled to Indigenous settlements throughout the state. Some parents allowed their children go to Stewart, while others were taken by force. By the end of the school year the facility's first superintendent, William D.C. Gibson, reported that 105 pupils, five over its 100-person capacity, had attended Stewart during its inaugural year, and that he could easily could have admitted "...200 and possibly 300 children, had there been room to accommodate them."⁸⁵ However, the school year was not without its trials. In January 1891, an outbreak of mumps occurred at the school, infecting an estimated ninety percent of the student body.⁸⁶ The epidemic led some students to flee the school "...through fear, while the parents of others, hearing of the sickness, came to the school and insisted on their children being allowed to return to their homes with them." This "exodus," as Gibson referred to it, led to a twenty percent decrease in the daily attendance average.⁸⁷ Gibson also relayed his unhappiness regarding the overall level of discipline achieved at the school, and explained why he could not be as strict as he might have wished: "...discipline was not as rigidly enforced as I would have liked it, on account of children running away when too much restricted."⁸⁸

<http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep96/reference/history.annrep96.i0026.pdf>

⁸⁵ Ibid, 571.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Gibson and other Stewart officials quickly learned that running the school according to the strict standards of federal officials at the OIA would be a difficult, if not impossible, endeavor. The general assumption that Native children and parents would readily acquiesce to an educational system that sought the indefinite imprisonment of Native children and attempted to separate them for years at a time from their families proved false among Indigenous communities in Nevada. In fact, Stewart students ran away consistently during the first three decades after the school was established, and parents regularly opposed policies that sought to keep them from seeing their children. Further, students organized to oppose school policies they felt were unfair, and countered the low expectations of Indian school officials as a means of showcasing their ambitions and equality. Native children and parents thus forced Stewart officials to negotiate with them over school rules, the ability of students to leave and return to the school, and in terms of parental rights to their children.⁸⁹

That OIA officials underestimated Native people's willingness to stand up for themselves in this regard is not surprising, given their overall low opinions of Indigenous nations. What is perhaps unexpected, however, is the readiness with

⁸⁹ That Stewart officials also had trouble attracting school personnel who could serve as proper moral examples for students is also reflected in two separate instances. In 1898, the *Carson City Morning Appeal* reported that an investigation at the school was "coming to a head that will implicate several citizens of this city." According to the paper, the scandal had to do with the "moral training" at the school and as many as seven "sudden marriages" at the facility. Decades later, in 1917, Stewart Superintendent James B. Royce lamented his need to transfer some school employees and force others to resign for not upholding proper moral standards. *Carson City Morning Appeal*. "Another Investigation." (November 20, 1898) From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>; United States Government Office of Indian Affairs. "Annual Report, 1917, Superintendent of the Stewart Indian School." Microfilm M1011, Roll 9. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

which Stewart officials seemingly abandoned some of the core tenets of the assimilationist educational project to accommodate Native Nevadans. It is important to note that they did not negotiate with Native parents and students out of kindness or because they recognized the misguided nature of the Indian educational system as it existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead, local officials often negotiated with Native families only after trying unsuccessfully to follow federal rules, which were often thwarted by students and parents because of the specific circumstances in Nevada during that time. OIA representatives in the state consistently complained that they lacked the personnel to actively collect Native children throughout the state, and lamented the fact that families who did not want to send their children to Stewart merely had to move out of their reach to evade school officials. School administrators therefore discovered that they needed to be on good terms with Native parents to prevent them from withdrawing their children from the school, and thus accommodated their wishes to bolster student enrollment.

As circumstances changed in Nevada in the late 1910s and 1920s, and the school was able to more easily enroll Native children at Stewart, local authorities' willingness to oblige Native families in this manner eroded. Further, Stewart School officials' willingness to negotiate with Native families between 1890 and 1925 did not lessen their commitment to the settler colonial goals of the Indian school system, or mitigate the traumatic nature of educational programs designed to strip Indigenous children of their languages, cultures, lands, and families. Rather, the employees of the Stewart School ascribed to racist theories of white supremacy and remained

committed both to the assimilation of Native children and their placement as low-skilled laborers upon graduation from the school.

Immediately following the opening of the Stewart School, its staff focused on enrolling and retaining as many students as possible. During the summer of 1892, when all but 27 students were home for the summer, smallpox, scarlet fever, and diphtheria outbreaks occurred at Stewart and in surrounding communities.⁹⁰ Of the 173 pupils enrolled in the 1892-1893 school year, only 79 arrived at the beginning of school, a decrease Gibson suggested was due to parents' fear of disease at the school and the close proximity of students and their families to school grounds.⁹¹ He wrote that, given the "...school being located in an Indian country where nearly all of the pupils can reach their homes in from one to six hours travel, it is hard to hold them in attendance with the ordinary force of employees."⁹² In an effort to adhere to OIA mandates, Gibson proposed the employment of student 'sergeants' at the school, who were charged with the difficult task of forcing their peers to remain on campus.

Regardless, the problem of students leaving school, mostly by running away, continued to be a problem during the first three and a half decades the school was in session. Though administrators during this period did not keep track of the number of students who ran away each year between 1890 and 1925, the statistics they did report illustrate the magnitude of this problem. Between 1904 and 1908, large

⁹⁰ Those students who stayed behind during summer months were often orphaned children who lived at the school throughout the year. Those with living parents or other close relatives traditionally went home during the summer, though Stewart officials intermittently pressed for all students to remain at school during the entire year.

⁹¹ "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1892," 678.

⁹² *Ibid.*

numbers of students ran away from the school on an annual basis. During the 1906-1907 school year, for example, 91 students ran away at various times during the year, and while 62 of these students eventually returned, fully one-third did not. With an average attendance of 283 that year, this means thirty-two percent of the student body ran away over the course of the year, with ten percent not returning at all.

Additionally, that same school year, two students died and six were sent home because of illness. Though these numbers represent an especially difficult year in terms of enrollment, they underscore Stewart administrators’ problems maintaining student attendance.

To resolve the runaway situation, the school took three different approaches.

Table 2: Number of Runaways, 1904-1909 School Years ⁹³

School Year	Total Students Enrolled	Runaway Students	Runaway Students Returned	Students Expelled	Student Deaths	Sent Home for Illness
1904-1905	307	48	28	0	4	9
1905-1906	290	53	26	1	4	5
1906-1907	283	91	62	0	2	6
1907-1908	288	63	40	4	2	3
1908-1909	299	23	8	0	0	4

First, Stewart officials abided by federal recommendations that local law enforcement be involved in returning runaway students to the school. On several occasions, Stewart superintendents alerted local sheriffs and requested their assistance in

⁹³ The number of total students attending the Stewart Indian School was compiled from the Annual Reports of the Indian Commissioner for each of these years. The data regarding the number of students who left the school was compiled from the following: Office of Indian Affairs. “Statistics from Monthly School Reports, 1904-1910. Volume 1 (1904-1906), Volume 2 (1906-1908).” General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

capturing students. The Carson City *Morning Appeal* reported on January 28, 1902 that Stewart Superintendent J.K. Allen had sent a letter to a sheriff in Inyo County, California, the previous week in which he requested that the Sheriff arrest and hold three unidentified boys who had escaped the school. The boys were captured by the sheriff and “immediately escorted to jail.”⁹⁴ The newspaper article added that the children were returned to Stewart and emphasized the right of school officials to arrest children who ran away. In 1905, a Stewart School official reached out to A.N. Jones, the deputy sheriff in Hawthorne, Nevada, to confirm that a child, Tom Sullivan, whom they had previously discussed, was at the school, but also to collaborate with him to collect other Native children to attend the school, with the justification that they were better off at Stewart than at home. The official wrote,

The situation regarding Indian children is this: If there are any children running around Hawthorne, Mina, Sodaville, or any other town in this vicinity who have no visible means of support, or are running wild and misbehaving themselves, you can bring them up to the U.S. Indian School at Carson... who will take them as Indian wards. All the Indians (with few exceptions) claim to be reservation Indians, and as such, their children are subject to Govt. supervision as to their schooling, etc. In most of these cases, you will find the old Indians bitterly opposed to their children going to any school, but you are also fully aware that that some of them use their female children, and in fact get money from the chinamen (*sic*) in the towns in return for using their Indian children. In view of which facts it is only a mercy to take them away from their unnatural parent and place them where they can be attended to, which in this state is the Carson School.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Morning Appeal. “Runaways Captured.” (January 28, 1902). From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

⁹⁵ Unnamed Stewart Indian School Official to A.N. Jones, Deputy Sheriff, Hawthorne, Nevada, September 30, 1905. Box 2, Folder 3. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

Such outreach, which likely occurred with other law enforcement officials in the state as well, paid off for the school. In September 1907, Deputy Sheriff Jones wrote to the school about two unidentified Native children, a girl and a boy, who, in his opinion, “better be sent to Carson.”⁹⁶ Jones offered his services in “hunting them up” and also in looking for other Native children he had heard were living in Mina and Sodaville, Nevada.⁹⁷

Still, even with the knowledge that law enforcement officials would willingly “hunt them up,” students continued to run away from Stewart. That not all of them were recaptured is likely connected to the fact that, early on, most Stewart students had family in nearby regions with whom they could hide or seek refuge. It also reflects the desperation of students to leave the facility if they were willing to brave arrest and punishment should they be caught, as well as inclement weather during the winter in order to escape. The specific stories of students’ runaway attempts were never included in the reports Stewart staff sent to federal officials, but they were often reported in local newspapers. Some of these students were quickly found by law enforcement officials and returned to the school in good condition. In May 1903, for example, three unidentified boys had escaped the school with the purpose of heading to Virginia City, located sixteen miles north of Carson City.⁹⁸ In July 1910, three female students, Jennie Butler, 15, Eva Butler, 14, and Nellie Harding, 17, were

⁹⁶ A.N. Jones, Deputy Sheriff, Hawthorne, Nevada, to Stewart Indian School, September 21, 1907. Box 2, Folder 3. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Morning Appeal. (May 27, 1903). From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

found in Carson City after having been missing for several days and were promptly returned to the school in good health.⁹⁹

Other students, however, attempted to run away from the school, as well as its satellite outing program in Oakland, California, under more challenging circumstances. In December 1905 four female students ran away from the school in the dead of winter and were not found for several days. According to a report in the *Tonopah Bonanza* newspaper, “When found, the girls were unconscious from cold and exhaustion. They were lying in the open under the trees with the thermometer three degrees below zero.”¹⁰⁰ In 1922, eight female students sent to Oakland to work in domestic positions in white homes attempted to escape from the outing facility over a two-month period. In July 1922, Lena Bender and Lena Piper, both 17, disappeared after attending church services at a Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) facility in Oakland. Less than one month later, 14-year old Stewart student Louise Stevens failed to return to her post after spending a Saturday afternoon at the Oakland YWCA. These three girls were found in late August and were described as being “homesick...for the life of the school.”¹⁰¹ Despite their capture, five more unidentified female students fled the outing program that August,

⁹⁹ Carson City Daily Appeal. “Indian Girls are Captured.” (July 30, 1910). From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹⁰⁰ Tonopah Bonanza. (December 9, 1905). From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹⁰¹ Carson City Daily Appeal. “Third Stewart Girl Missing at Oakland. (August 17, 1922). From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

though it is unclear whether they were captured or returned to the school.¹⁰² Why so many young women attempted to leave Oakland that summer remains a mystery, but their attempted escapes illustrate the ongoing willingness of Stewart students to defy school rules.

Given their ongoing inability to prevent students from running away from the school during this period, Stewart officials devised other means to shore up enrollment while accommodating students and families who sought to leave the school. They also seemingly differentiated between students who ran away from the school without permission and those, mostly local students with family nearby, who negotiated their departure and planned returns. Between 1901 and 1903, reports in the school newspaper the *Indian Advance* highlight a policy whereby students were permitted by Stewart staff to leave the school for extended periods of time, presumably with the understanding that they would later return.¹⁰³ Students left because of illness, to see a parent, to do work for the school, or, in one case, to work in town. Other absences were unexplained. In January 1901, it was reported that Tom Williams “has again entered the school after several months absence,” while in June 1901 the *Advance* noted that “George Washoe was sent home a few days ago to

¹⁰² Carson City Daily Appeal. “Five Lonely Indian Girls Flee Homes.” (August 16, 1922 From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹⁰³ Stewart School staff primarily wrote this newsletter, though students themselves wrote some articles, with likely vetting and editing by school employees. The newspaper chronicled various events at the school, including parental visits, student sickness, and jobs maintained by students at the school. Between 1890 and 1925, the Stewart newspaper changed names four times: the *Indian Advance* became *The New Indian* in 1904; by 1914 the paper was called the *Nevada American*, and in 1917 the paper was entitled the *Indian Enterprise*. Few copies of each of these newspapers appear to have survived.

recuperate and secure other pupils for the school.”¹⁰⁴ Similar accounts are reported over the next two years. In May 1902 Alice Earl and Mamie Murphy, who went home due to “ill health,” were described as “improving rapidly” and hopefully returning to Stewart the following year.¹⁰⁵ In June 1903, student Dick Bender traveled home to see his mother, who was sick, while Lettie Gildersleeve, “who was at work in town for a number of months has returned to the school.”¹⁰⁶

These circumstances continued throughout the following decade, prompting complaints from school officials regarding the number of students leaving the school before their matriculation. In 1912, Superintendent Jessie B. Mortsof wrote that between 1904 and 1912 there were just twenty-four graduates at the school. And while some students were apparently expelled because of their behavior, he noted that “a large majority” of pupils were not completing the full instruction offered by the school because they found jobs as farmhands or domestic workers in Carson City.¹⁰⁷ In annual reports to the OIA, Mortsof pledged to reach out to these students and to encourage them to return to the school to continue their studies.

These and numerous other accounts of Stewart students leaving and coming back illustrate school officials’ willingness to ignore OIA rules, which mandated that students remain at the school consistently and abstain from interactions with their

¹⁰⁴ *Indian Advance*. Vol. 2, No. 5. (January 1901); Vol. 2, No. 10. (June 1901). Microfilm N0223. University of Nevada, Reno.

¹⁰⁵ *Indian Advance*. Vol. 4, No. 9. (May 1903). University of Nevada, Reno. Microfilm N0223.

¹⁰⁶ *Indian Advance*. Vol. 4, No. 10. (June 1903). University of Nevada, Reno. Microfilm N0223.

¹⁰⁷ United States Government Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report, 1912, Superintendent of the Stewart Indian School.” Microfilm M1011, Roll 9. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

families and tribal communities. At the same time, however, school officials remained committed to their assimilationist mission and looked for ways to increase enrollment and encourage pupils to stay at the school. One of the solutions to this problem was the admission of students who lived outside of Nevada and who could not easily maintain contact or seek refuge with their parents. Beginning in 1902, Stewart School employees were permitted to collect Native children from central and northern California and southern Oregon to populate the school, a program that expanded significantly after the closure of a number of boarding schools in the 1920s and remained in place throughout the school's existence.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, school officials relied on current and former students to encourage attendance. Student George Collins, one of the attendance 'sergeants,' was sent to Inyo County in California to collect students, for example, while former students Daisy and Jonny Frank returned to discuss their respective lives as a homemaker and carpenter. The Franks reportedly ended their 1917 visit by extolling the opportunities the school afforded its students, who "ought to make good" of their educations.¹⁰⁹

Still, the majority of Stewart students during this period lived in or near Carson City, which meant that school officials were often forced to contend with parents who openly opposed school policies, but were also committed to ensuring their children received a proper education. The relationship between Stewart parents

¹⁰⁸ Morning Appeal. (November 7, 1902) From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹⁰⁹ *Indian Advance*, June 1901; Stewart Indian School. "Indian Enterprise." (March 1917), 14. *Nevada Historical Society*, Stewart Indian School Folder.

and school employees was thus complicated during this early period by the fact that the latter relied upon parents to send their children to school, and understood that angering parents could result in their children's withdrawal from the institution. At the same time, some parents sent their children to Stewart for very specific reasons and at the behest of Indigenous leaders. Wovoka, the Paiute Ghost Dance Messiah also referred to as Jack Wilson, instructed Native parents to "Educate your children. Send them to schools," and himself sent his children to the Stewart Indian School for their educations.¹¹⁰ Other communities believed that educating their children was critical to establishing self-sufficient towns and Native-run businesses. The *Indian Advance* reported in June 1901 that an unidentified group of "Carson Valley Natives" held a meeting at which it was proposed that they establish a village "somewhere on the east fork of the Carson River" to which their children could return after graduating from Stewart.¹¹¹ This village would have individual ranches, fields, and gardens, as well as "shops where boys may practice trades they have learned at school."¹¹² If the goal was to create such towns for Native communities, the willingness of parents to send their children to Stewart to learn the skills needed for such an endeavor was a logical course of action.

Former students also recall being sent to Stewart because of the discrimination they faced in Nevada and their exclusion from the public-school system. Washoe

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Louis Warren. "Wage Work in the Sacred Circle: The Ghost Dance as Modern Religion." *Western Historical Quarterly*. 46 (Summer 2015): 159-160.

¹¹¹ *Indian Advance*, June 1, 1901.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

citizen Bernice Auchoberry recalled, for example, that the public schools in Douglas County, Nevada, where her family lived, "...wouldn't accept Indians. They didn't like Indians, period."¹¹³ Native peoples faced discrimination outside of the school system as well. According to Auchoberry, before the 1920s Native Nevadans were not permitted to eat at certain restaurants, or were forced to enter those that did serve Native clientele through back doors. She further describes movie houses in which Native patrons were forced to sit in the upper tier seating, and recalls a curfew throughout the Carson Valley that forbade their presence in town after six in the evening. Former Stewart student John Dresser recalls a similar situation in Douglas County. Dresser lived in a Washoe community in the Carson Valley, but was not permitted to attend the public schools near his home because of his heritage. In an interview from 1970, he notes that this discrimination, along with the financial difficulties experienced by his family, were the reasons he attended Stewart.¹¹⁴

Those parents who willingly sent their children to the Stewart School, despite the long-term separation they knew it would entail, also, it seems, had certain expectations about the type of education their children would receive, and expected that they would continue to have access to them while they attended the school. Further, based on their willingness to travel to the school remove their children from

¹¹³ Bernice Auchoberry. "An Interview with Bernice Auchoberry: A Contribution to a Survey of Life in Carson Valley, From First Settlement Through the 1950s." (1984) *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 12, 2018)

<https://ia802808.us.archive.org/1/items/AuchoberryBernice/Auchoberry%2C%20Bernice.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ John Dressler. "Reflections of a Washoe Statesman." (1972) *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 12, 2018)

<https://ia802805.us.archive.org/2/items/DresslerJohn/Dressler%2C%20John.pdf>.

Stewart during times of disease outbreaks, they believed their children deserved a clean and safe environment in which they could learn and thrive. They also expected them to learn skills that would enable them to establish successful careers upon their graduation that would benefit their families and communities. What they did not

accept was the OIA notion that students became school property once they were enrolled or that they had granted the school custody of their children.

Table 3: Stewart Indian School Enrollment and Attendance, 1890-1925 ¹¹⁵

School Year	Overall Enrollment	Average Attendance
1891 (Dec-June 30 1891)	105	83.5
1891-1892	173	79
1892-1893	141	91
1893-1894	122	75
1894-1895	139	119
1895-1896	141	117
1896-1897	154	126
1897-1898	182	144
1898-1899	213	145
1899-1900	170	147
1900-1901	250	192
1901-1902	271	232
1902-1903	235	219
1903-1904	235	207
1904-1905	307	232
1905-1906	290	267
1906-1907	283	260
1907-1908	288	263
1908-1909	299	268
1909-1910	--	--
1910-1911	270	254
1911-1912	325	267
1912-1913	294	235.7
1913-1914	303	252.85
1914-1915	285	255
1915-1916	306	265
1916-1917	323	293
1917-1918 ¹¹⁶	--	--
1918-1919	371	285
1919-1920	373	341
1920-1921	415	366.5/336 ¹¹⁷
1921-1922	497	403
1922-1923	437	410
1923-1924	457/454 ¹¹⁸	424
1891-1925	480	425

¹¹⁵ The data from this table was compiled from annual Indian Affairs Commissioner reports.

¹¹⁶ Neither Stewart School nor federal officials documented enrollment numbers for this school year.

¹¹⁷ Stewart and federal officials documented two different average attendance numbers for this year.

¹¹⁸ Stewart and federal officials documented two different enrollment numbers for this year.

Stewart superintendents encountered parental resistance repeatedly in the 1890s, not just with regard to the 1892 incident in which parents refused to send their children to the school. In 1895, newly installed superintendent Eugene Mead informed his superiors in Washington, D.C. that a proposed plan to keep Stewart students twelve months of the year, rather than nine, was abandoned due to parental opposition. Mead wrote that while keeping the children year-around was in their own best interests, and would hasten their assimilation, school officials had sent most of the children home because of complaints from their parents. His detailed explanation about the incident includes additional insights about the dynamics between Stewart parents and employees during this period. Mead noted, "...as there is no way to secure pupils for our school other than by persuasive means, it would be impossible to put into practice, as the parents become very much dissatisfied if they are not permitted to have their children during or part of a vacation." He further added, "While we do not encourage parents to take their children to their homes...we have been compelled to do so."¹¹⁹

The following year, Stewart officials announced their plan to keep students for a 12-month period, and were forced into negotiations by parents once again. Parents were so angry about the new school policy that Mead pledged to allow them to go home the following summer, despite his belief that keeping the children at the school

¹¹⁹ United States Office of Indian Affairs. "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1895; Reports of the Superintendents of Indian Schools." (Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1895), 379. *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*. (Accessed June 19, 2017) <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep95/reference/history.annrep95.i0026.pdf>.

was the correct course of action. He wrote in 1896, "...without compulsory laws of education it was considered for the best interests of the school to let them go, and as we must depend solely on the inclinations of the Indians for our pupils, we let them go."¹²⁰ The following year only a fraction of the students was permitted to go home over the summer, and by 1898, Mead noted in his report that it was becoming much easier for the school to enroll children in the school. No additional discussions of parental protests are included in superintendent reports, which suggest that, as school officials had an easier time enrolling students, parents' influence in this regard waned. The sway of Stewart parents further declined during the following two decades as the Nevada State Legislature passed compulsory education laws in 1903 and 1911 that applied to Native and non-Native children.

Parents continued to find ways to make contact with their children, however, throughout the duration of the school year. The *Indian Advance* newsletter recounts numerous visits from parents and grandparents to the Stewart School. In some cases, these visits occurred when a child was sick. In March 1901, for example, it was noted "Little Harry Sampson, who has been in bed for the last month with a very bad foot, is improving slowly. The little fellow had his mother and brothers with him most of the month."¹²¹ In January 1903, student John Bliss' parents and sister visited him while he was recovering from an unidentified illness, and the following month the

¹²⁰ "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1896; Reports of Independent Schools," 380

¹²¹ *Indian Advance*, March 1901.

Indian Advance reported that Julia Mitchell's father was with her when she died from "brain fever and heart trouble."¹²²

Family members also visited for other reasons. In March 1901 a group of students' mothers and their young children attended a Sunday School program at the school, and were "delighted with the children's songs and stories."¹²³ Three months later, Jackson Henry's grandmother visited the school, bringing baskets with her, which would be sold at the school.¹²⁴ Another report, from March 1903, notes that "George Minkey's father, a genuine Washoe, visited the Kindergarten and Primary yesterday and showed a great deal of intelligence in expressing his pleasure at independence."¹²⁵ Additionally, a "large number of parents" were described as having visited the school in May 1903.¹²⁶

In at least one case, a family member lied in order to retrieve a student from the school. Corbett Mack, a Paiute citizen who attended the school between 1905 and 1910, recalled that a male relative arrived at Stewart in May 1910 and told the superintendent that he wanted to take Mack to Carson City and purchase some new clothes for him. Instead, the relative took Mack back to his home in Smith Valley, located southeast of Carson City, so he could be with his family. Mack speculated that his family believed that he had been in school long enough and that his relative may have wanted to reunite Mack with his mother. He noted that his relative had

¹²² *Indian Advance*, January 1903; February 1903.

¹²³ *Indian Advance*, March 1901.

¹²⁴ *Indian Advance*, June 1901.

¹²⁵ *Indian Advance*, March 1903.

¹²⁶ *Indian Advance*, May 1903.

“fooled” school officials into allowing his departure, but also lamented the fact that he had not been able to graduate from Stewart.¹²⁷

There is also evidence that Native parents asked non-Native interlocutors to intervene on their behalf, particularly as their leverage over school officials decreased and it apparently became more difficult for them to visit the school. In a 1919 letter to school superintendent Frederick Snyder, J.A. Phifer, a teacher from an Indian School in Lovelock, Nevada, requested on their parents’ behalf that two students, Mable Sany and Lucy Wasson, be permitted to leave the school over the summer. He asserted that the students had “excellent Indian homes to come to,” and suggested that permitting their return might make it easier for him to recruit students for the school in the future.¹²⁸ Snyder reluctantly approved this request, noting that the girls would have to be “looked after quite carefully,” and asked Phifer to agree that should the girls’ “conduct be unbecoming in any degree” they be “returned promptly to school.”¹²⁹

Though this evidence of parental visits and involvement at the school may be anecdotal, it points to a broader pattern of Stewart faculty permitting interactions between Native students and parents when OIA policy forbade them from doing so. These examples likely reflect the need of school officials to ensure parents’ support

¹²⁷ Michael Hittman. *Corbett Mack: The Life of a Northern Paiute*. (University of Las Vegas Press: Reno, 2013), 79-80.

¹²⁸ J.A. Phifer, teacher, Lovelock, Nevada, to Frederick Snyder, Stewart Indian School Superintendent, Carson City, Nevada, June 2, 1919. Box 2, Folder 3. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

¹²⁹ Frederick Snyder, Stewart Indian School Superintendent, Carson City Nevada, to J.A. Phifer, teacher, Lovelock, Nevada, June 5, 1919. Box 2, Folder 3. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

for the school, lest they withdraw their students, and represent the accommodations they made with parents in this regard. School officials also differentiated between parents who were “reluctant” to send their kids to school and those “not totally ignorant of what will be helpful to their children in the future,” and presumably wanted to ensure their ongoing support.¹³⁰ Being committed to the assimilation of Native peoples in general, however, Stewart staff may also have viewed these visits as an opportunity to ‘civilize’ Native parents alongside their children. If allowed to visit their children regularly, parents may have judged this an acceptable compromise.

“As well and as orderly as any white man or woman:” Student Life at Stewart¹³¹

Despite such accommodations, Stewart School officials generally attempted to follow the rules and assimilationist policies dictated by federal officials, particularly with regard to students’ educations and industrial training. And they were committed in their belief that the Indian school system would universally benefit Native children, as emphasized by Stewart Superintendent Mortsof, who asserted that “the only hope” for Native children in Nevada was “that they may be kept in school until they become young men and women and have instilled in their minds and hearts the necessity of being sober and moral and upright citizens.”¹³² School officials therefore attempted to follow federal guidelines regarding academics, vocational training, the implementation of outing programs, and in terms of religious instruction. Stewart

¹³⁰ *Indian Advance*, June 1, 1902.

¹³¹ *Indian Advance*, July 1904.

¹³² United States Government Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report, 1913, Superintendent of the Stewart Indian School.” Microfilm M1011, Roll 9. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

officials were consistent in this regard, but not uniformly successful. For their part, students seemingly had little choice but participate in the training programs at the school. They did, however, assert themselves when they could.

In terms of academics, children began their school day between 5:00am and 6:00am, and spent their mornings learning academic lessons and their afternoons engaged in vocational and industrial training. An 1899 document that outlines courses of study at the Stewart School for kindergarten through eighth grade shows that teachers at the school focused their lessons for younger children on developing English language skills, counting, and basic math, and addressed topics such as “patriotism,” “homes,” and “orderly living,” as a means of advancing Native children’s assimilation.¹³³ In keeping with the idea that academic lessons should remain simple and practical, fifth grade lessons included a “review of colors” and a unit on “races of men” in North America, while seventh graders learned about “profit and loss” and had history lessons on the “colonization of colonies now embraced within the limits of the United States.”¹³⁴

Religious instruction was also considered paramount for Stewart students. Though not included in their daily academic studies, Sundays and some evening were devoted to church activities, and the school invited local clergy to lead religious activities and later housed both a Baptist church and missionary. On Sundays, students were required to attend Sunday School at 9:15am, as well as a YM/WCA

¹³³ “Course of Study: Carson Indian School.” (November 1, 1899). *Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries*, 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 8, 10.

activity at 2:00pm, and a chapel service at 7:00pm. During the week, the school missionary hosted evening events as well, and students also had the opportunity to sing with a choir. In 1914, Baptist missionary Lillian R. Corwin joined the school and was charged with organizing the religious education of the students. The importance of religious instruction at the school is indicated by the fact that Corwin's activities were prominently featured in annual superintendent reports into the 1920s, and she was also given space to write a "Chapel Notes" section in the school newsletter.

Individuals who attended the school during this period and recorded their experiences have little to say about their academic and religious training at the school. Former students Winona James and Corbett Mack both recalled learning English at the school, and Mack also remembered that, in addition to basic lessons in math, reading, and geography, he was taught that an angel had directed Christopher Columbus toward the "discovery" of America.¹³⁵ Mack also recalled that he had attended church each Sunday from 9:00am to 11:00am while at the school, and that students lined up and marched together in a line to the religious services. He also recollected praying each night before bed at the behest of the matron in charge of his dorm.

Students do, however, recall in detail the militarized atmosphere at the school. Though military drills and marching were supposedly not introduced to at the school

¹³⁵ Hittman, 68.

until 1913, James' testimony about daily life at the school between 1910 and 1911 suggests otherwise.¹³⁶ She recalled:

I do remember it was a really very dramatic experience. They got you up at 5:00 in the morning and put your uniform on, and you had to go out in the cold and drill before breakfast just like in the army. Then you went in and had your breakfast and then you'd come back to the dorm and change your clothes and get ready for school.¹³⁷

John Dressler, who enrolled in the school in the early 1920s, had a similar experience at the school almost ten years later:

During the time I was going to school, we were pretty much regimented, and it was somewhat like a military school. We used to have to march in formations to all activities...the school was so regimented it created a lot of problems for many of our youngsters, and they would eventually run away from there.¹³⁸

Former students also recall specific details about the disciplinary structures at the school, and provide greater insights in this regard than records left by Stewart officials. Mack notes that a Stewart staff member was assigned the role of 'disciplinarian,' and contends that this person was in charge of the school jail. He describes the jail as dark and small, with no window and containing only a bed. Students were put in the jail, according to Mack, primarily for fighting. He also noted that while he was never sent to the jail he did once "get a good whippin" for riding a calf in the school barn.¹³⁹ Mack also describes the different forms of violence

¹³⁶ Superintendent Mortsof wrote in his 1913 report "Early in the year military organization was instituted" and "regular drills became a part of the daily program" and that officers were appointed among the male pupils, who were "given military rank and prestige." Annual Report, 1913, Superintendent of the Stewart Indian School, 7.

¹³⁷ James, "A Contribution to a Survey of Life in Carson Valley."

¹³⁸ Dressler, "Reflections of a Washoe Statesman."

¹³⁹ Hittman, 75.

employed against students by various staff members, stating that the “matron, they can hit you on the wrist with the rod, but disciplinarian, he hit you right here where your shirt is.”¹⁴⁰ Other students describe similar violence. Howard Rogers, who attended Stewart around 1915, recalled that faculty would yell at students for not saluting them, and that one teacher, Mr. McLean, would “beat the hell out of you for speaking your own language.”¹⁴¹ By the early 1920s, according to John Dressler, the same infractions led to “extra duties on the weekend or evenings with some menial task.”¹⁴²

In the midst of this harsh system, however, students did find ways to flout the rules, in both positive and negative ways. James, who was just seven when she was sent to Stewart, remembers getting daily assistance from older female students: “...you always had somebody older taking care of you; a big sister I guess you would call it, would help you and take care of you.”¹⁴³ Similarly, Dressler discussed attending the school the same time as his aunt, who was younger than him, and intentionally failing his courses and misbehaving so he could return to his previous class and remain with her.¹⁴⁴ Other students had less positive interactions with their peers. Older boys stole food from Mack during mealtimes, leaving him hungry on most days.¹⁴⁵ Frank Burns, a citizen of the Mono nation from California, was harassed by his fellow students: “The other kids told me I didn’t look Indian – I had

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 74-75.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 287.

¹⁴² Dressler, “Reflections of a Washoe Statesman.”

¹⁴³ James, “A Contribution to a Survey of Life in Carson Valley.”

¹⁴⁴ Dressler, “Reflections of a Washoe Statesman.”

¹⁴⁵ Hittman, 71.

curly hair and it was pretty light – and since I was from California they said I didn't belong."¹⁴⁶

Students also protested in more formal ways as well. Dressler highlights two specific instances in the early 1920s when students expressed their frustration with conditions at the Stewart School. According to Dressler,

...one of the complaints was the food at the school. The food wasn't exactly first rate. Oftentimes, it created dissatisfaction among the students. So it came to the point where the students were complaining about the food and some other activities within the school curriculum that a study body was organized. With the organization of the student body, many of the complaints were brought, and in turn, we brought various departments of the school for their consideration and correction... With the formation of the study body we met with the home economics department to make these corrections. And eventually the food situation was corrected.¹⁴⁷

Dressler describes a similar situation with regard to student objections to the firing of an athletic coach that was beloved by students:

...all the boys played hard and trained hard under this particular coach, and he was well liked. And there was a new regulation submitted by the agency [the Carson Indian Agency] to dismiss the coach because of the fact that he had not the sufficient educational background. And to this, the student body protested. And the result was the retention of the coach for another year.¹⁴⁸

Moments such as these are important, because they illustrate how, even in the midst of a system designed to control Native children and stifle their initiative, students organized to assert themselves where they could. And while they may not have been able to directly challenge the assimilationist program advanced by the school, they

¹⁴⁶ Colleen O'Brien. "Stewart School Days," in *Nevada Magazine*. (Sept/Oct 1990), 35.

¹⁴⁷ Dressler, "Reflections of a Washoe Statesman."

¹⁴⁸ Dressler, "Reflections of a Washoe Statesman."

did continue to push for changes with officials and interact with fellow students on their own terms.

Per federal guidelines, industrial training was another key aspect of student life at the Stewart Indian School. Afternoons were generally devoted to gendered physical work, which school officials considered to be the most important aspect of students' training. In a 1903 edition of the *Indian Advance*, school officials emphasized their adherence to the guidelines established by Estelle Reel in this regard, and asserted that the school "gives classroom work due attention, but lays special stress upon agricultural industrial instruction."¹⁴⁹ They further noted, "The object of the Indian schools is to teach the Indian child to work. Will it not be better to have the Indian boys to be blacksmiths, shoemakers, and carpenters than to be idlers, drunkards, and loafers?"¹⁵⁰ At the same time, school officials maintained low expectations about the work prospects of their pupils. Superintendent Mortsolf asserted in 1913,

This school endeavors to prepare the Indian boys and girls for the life that they will probably have to live on farms and ranches and in small shops. All instruction is prepared with the full knowledge that their surroundings will probably be not much changed from what they are at present, and that most of them will have to work for others before starting independently.¹⁵¹

Male Stewart students thus learned carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring, shoe making, harness making, farming, and how to work with dairy equipment and as plumbers. Female students focused on "Domestic Science," which included cooking,

¹⁴⁹ *Indian Advance*, March 1903.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Annual Report, 1913, Superintendent of the Stewart Indian School, 8.

baking, sewing, laundry, and housekeeping.¹⁵² Students also held specific positions at the school; female students worked as office, dorm, and teacher's assistants in lower grades, while male students could serve as the "Superintendent's boy," or participate in allotting of lands to Native Nevadans.¹⁵³ Stewart officials also supported the production of Indigenous basketry, particularly those made by Washoe basket maker Dat-So-La Lee, and publicized the money she made by selling them.¹⁵⁴

This training was deemed important as it would teach students how to support themselves financially when they left the school. However, their unpaid labor was also essential to keeping the school functioning on a daily basis. Students of all ages were expected to participate in vocational training at the school until 1925, when the school was supposed to change its policy to have students in kindergarten through third grade attend classes all day.¹⁵⁵ Whether this actually occurred or not is unclear; a school calendar from the 1927-1928 school year shows that students continued to spend the first half of their day in the classroom, and the second half engaged in industrial training.¹⁵⁶ The reliance on student labor may also explain why, in some cases, the rules regarding gendered labor were ignored. Corbett Mack lamented that he was forced to take a "woman's job" while at the school. Mack swept floors in the

¹⁵² Ibid, 4.

¹⁵³ *Indian Advance*, August 1902, December 1920, January 1903, May 1903, June 1903; *The New Indian*. (November 1903), University of Nevada, Reno. Microfilm N0223.

¹⁵⁴ Stewart Indian School. *The Nevada American*. (April 4, 1914) Microfilm N0488. University of Nevada, Reno.

¹⁵⁵ United States Government Office of Indian Affairs. "Annual Report, 1925, Superintendent of the Stewart Indian School." Microfilm M1011, Roll 9. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵⁶ Carson Indian School. "Annual Calendar, School Year 1927-1928. *Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries*, 3.

boy’s dorm room and also worked at the school laundry, along with several other male students.¹⁵⁷

The Stewart School also developed a robust outing program during this period, and encouraged students to participate as a means of developing experience, earning money, and benefiting from the examples supposedly set by white employers. This program was also a way to bolster support from the local Carson City community by creating an underclass of low skilled labor from which they could benefit. In the March 1903 edition of the *Indian Advance*, school officials issued a plea for assistance in rounding up the estimated 1,700 Native children living in Nevada who were not enrolled in an OIA school. “Help the government school, and they can help you. Give the government employees the 1700 Indian children not in the school, who are in the camps and in the streets, growing up in ignorance and vice and the schools will give you trained help for you field, shops, and kitchens.”¹⁵⁸

The importance of the outing program as a means of enhancing the assimilationist goals of the Stewart School is further demonstrated by the expansion of the program between the early 1900s and the 1920s. The bulk of students who participated in the outing program did so during the summer months, first in the

Table 4: Outing Program Participation, 1904-1909¹⁵⁹

Year	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
1904-05	43	38	26	21	21	24	22	18	18	17	18	25	291
1905-06	44	28	18	22	21	19	20	20	18	17	17	20	264
1906-07	34	23	11	12	8	9	10	10	10	-	12	-	139
1907-08	64	40	26	10	11	11	11	11	11	9	10	10	224
1908-09	85	64	5	9	9	4	--	--	--	--	--	--	176

¹⁵⁷ Hittman, 69.

¹⁵⁸ *Indian Advance*, March 1903.

Carson City area, and then expanding to service in Oakland and San Francisco in 1912. Perhaps hundreds of students, particularly girls, participated in this program between 1890 and 1925. And while they did have the opportunity to earn limited amounts of money for their work, this program was also a means of reinforcing the idea that manual labor was the only suitable form of work for Stewart graduates.

However, students also pushed back against such notions by articulating ambitions that exceeded both the expectations of Stewart faculty and undercut the white supremacist ideals they promoted. Beginning with the June 1901 edition of the *Indian Advance*, some graduating students published detailed accounts of their post-Stewart career plans, and underscored their personal and professional aspirations. Graduate Jack Mahone shared a comprehensive account of his post-graduation intentions:

After I leave school I am going to build me a little house at first and of course a little farm. After ten or twelve years of hard working the farm and the house will be a great deal larger. Around the house will find lawn and trees, flowers of all kind along the walk and in the house I'll have kitchen, dining room, a parlor and bed rooms. In the parlor I'll carpet the floor, piano in the room and curtains on the windows and pictures on the wall besides all this I'll have barn and blacksmith shop. I'll have two working horses and two carriage horses. In the garden I'll have all kinds of vegetables planted and in the larger field I'll have hay. I also will raise cattle sheep and chickens. When time comes for cutting hay I'll hire some man to help me get all my hay in and this will be the first crop, then when the second crop is ready I'll hire some more men to help me get in the hay. Then when all this work is done I'll get in the potatoes and other vegetables and store them away for winter use and after all this work is

¹⁵⁹ This data was compiled from, "Statistics from Monthly School Reports, 1904-1910. Volume 1 (1904-1906), Volume 2 (1906-1908)." Numbers from January through June for the 1908-1909 school year were not provided. Additional data provided by Stewart officials regarding the number of students who participated in outing programs is incomplete, and some years no data is provided. The following additional data was compiled from annual superintendent reports: During the summer of 1912, 36 students participated in outing programs; 24 students in the summer of 1914, 60 during summer 1918, 75 during summer 1919, 40 during summer 1924, and 90 during the summer of 1925. Aside from the data included in the above table, no additional data regarding the participation of Stewart students in outing programs during the school year is provided.

done I'll bring in my cattle and sheep and I'll be feeding them [a] lot of hay during the winter so they will be fat by spring and ready for sale. Cattle \$20.00 each. Sheep \$10.00 each. And the eggs 20 cents a dozen.¹⁶⁰

Through this statement, Jack Mahone does two things. He seems to embrace the assimilationist vision of OIA officials that called for Native peoples to live on individual allotments, which they would farm and earn money from. However, he also rejects the white supremacist ideas espoused by Stewart officials by stating his intent to manage his farm independently, rather than working for someone else.

Peter M. Johnson, a Paiute citizen who graduated around 1903 expressed similar sentiments as he sought to purchase land in Nevada. According to an account published in the *Indian Advance* in 1903, in which he uses a slur to compare himself favorably with Southern European immigrants, Johnson was

...seeking to learn whether he has the rights of a citizen in entry of land, mining property, etc. or not. He says he wants to know whether he has as much privilege as an ignorant dago who has just landed in the country. We know he should have and believe he will find he has as much right in that matter as any man of whatever color. He is a native born and maintains no tribal relation and makes his living as any honest laborer. His desire to know where he is at is laudable.¹⁶¹

Though this account is troubling in its anti-immigrant sentiments, and also expresses Johnson's apparent ambivalence with regard to his Paiute heritage, it illustrates that some Stewart students were not content with assuming a subservient role to white Americans upon their graduation or departure from the school.

¹⁶⁰ *Indian Advance*, June 1901.

¹⁶¹ *Indian Advance*, July 1903.

Female Stewart students also identified post-graduation plans that defied the expectations of school officials and often indicated their commitments to working with their tribal communities, in some cases through employment in the Indian school system. As articulated through the following “Class Prophecies” published in the *Indian Advance*, young women were similarly focused on their professional futures and proving their equality to white women. 1904 graduate Lizzie Dutch planned to be a laundress and also manage her own laundry business. Emma Bobshaw would be the head nurse at an Indian school, where should would demonstrate that she was “equal to any white woman as far as nursing is concerned.”¹⁶² Pansy Henry intended to become a seamstress and create her own unique dress patterns, and,

After many years of successful work, she will think of her Washoe tribe. She will go out among them and tell the folks to send their children to school to learn what it means to have an education. She will then teach them how to worship the true living God.¹⁶³

Emma McGeary planned to attend college to become a teacher, and then

...work her way into some public school. Here she will show her skill in teaching as well and as orderly as any white man or woman. And after a few years of beginner’s work she will be employed in an Indian school as [a] teacher where she will remain and help the Indians.¹⁶⁴

These students’ plans are particularly intriguing, as they suggest that these women planned to continue working not only after they graduated, but also for decades to come, potentially eschewing the homemaker roles they were supposed to adopt. Given that they were taught by women who themselves had not followed the

¹⁶² *Indian Advance*, July 1904.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

stricture that women should remain in the domestic sphere, they may have been influenced by such examples.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, these girls' plans to work in Indian schools presumably managed by the OIA raises questions about whether they planned to do so out of support for the system, as a means of ensuring that Native children received quality educations, or because they believed they might do a better job working with Indigenous students than their non-Native teachers.

Former Stewart students also moved beyond the subservient roles school officials expected of them by assuming positions within tribal communities and advocacy organizations. John Dressler, the first student body president at Stewart, later became the chairman of the Intertribal Council of Nevada in the 1960s. In that role he encouraged young people to focus on their educations, though in a 1970 interview, when the Stewart School was still open, he expressed ambivalence about whether the federal boarding school system was the best choice for Native children.¹⁶⁶ In 1922, Harry E. Thacker, a Stewart graduate, joined a group called the Organized Indians of Nevada and California as a delegate, and supported its efforts to force the U.S. Congress to honor treaties signed in 1851 and 1852 that would have granted Indigenous nations 7,000,000 acres of land across both states.¹⁶⁷ In their advocacy for Native peoples, Dressler and Thacker rejected the sentiments of an educational system that advanced Indigenous subservience to settler society.

¹⁶⁵ Margaret D. Jacobs and Cathleen Cahill examine the experiences and motivations of such women in, Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, and Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*.

¹⁶⁶ Dressler, "Recollections of a Washoe Statesman."

¹⁶⁷ Carson City Daily Appeal. "Nevada Indians Seeking Rights at Washington." (January 24, 1922). From the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. (Accessed March 2017) on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

Each of these different instances shows the desire of Stewart officials to implement the settler colonial vision of the U.S. government, which would be accomplished through the assimilation of Native children and their adoption of settler norms. Events at the Stewart School between 1890 and 1925 illustrate the difficulty of such an endeavor, however, given the efforts of Indigenous parents and students to utilize the school for their own purposes and on their own terms. Still, the Office of Indian Affairs remained adamant that the Indian educational system was crucial for the survival and prosperity of Native peoples living within the United States, even as some U.S. officials increasingly questioned the efficacy and value of the Indian boarding school system in the late 1920s.

Criticism was also mounted from prominent boarding school graduates. Indigenous educator Henry Roe Cloud argued that the industrial labor students engaged in at the schools “was not educative,” while Society of American Indians co-founder Laura Kellogg decried the “restricted lives” boarding school “inmates” were forced to endure.¹⁶⁸ After an independent commission issued a blistering report of the system in 1928, many Indian boarding schools were closed, while others underwent a series of reforms designed to improve material and intellectual conditions and reduce the assimilationist tenor of instruction. Stewart, however, remained open, and students attending the school between the late 1920s and 1940s supposedly focused on academics more than industrial training and were no longer subjected to the

¹⁶⁸ Henry Roe Cloud. “Education of the American Indian, 1914,” and Laura Kellogg, “Laura Kellogg Attacks the Government’ System of Indian Education,” in *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie. (Bedford/St. Martin’s: Boston, 2001), 61, 55.

assimilationist rhetoric of decades' past. In reality, however, the settler colonial drive for assimilation remained in place, while Stewart students and families continued to subvert it on multiples fronts.

Chapter Three: “But the Indian Still Remains:”¹⁶⁹

Assimilation and Reform at the Stewart Indian School, 1925-1948

In the late-1930s, at age 13, Albina Redner enrolled in seventh grade at the Stewart Indian School. Redner, a member of the Shoshone nation, grew up in Austin, Nevada, and spent her days hunting, trapping, and foraging alongside her family members. She recalled that, upon first setting foot on the Stewart campus, she was in “heaven” because of the manicured lawns, the dormitory with individual student beds, the availability of food and medical care, and the large swimming pool.¹⁷⁰ Other aspects of life at Stewart were less appealing, however. Redner remembered school officials’ fixation on cleanliness, an emphasis on militaristic order, and being forced to attend church services on Sundays. She also recalled the lack of academic education available during the three years she attended Stewart, which she attributed to the attitudes of teachers who looked down on Native students and made disparaging remarks about Indigenous cultures. The impacts of such sentiments led Redner to think poorly of herself and her heritage, as she expressed nearly five decades later: “...sometimes I didn’t like myself; I didn’t like being an Indian, because they were dirty and they were ignorant and they didn’t know how to work.”¹⁷¹ Moreover, as she reflected on the long-term impacts of her time at Stewart,

¹⁶⁹ This quote is taken from a speech delivered by Stewart Indian School student Ralph Aquilar at the 1936 commencement ceremony at the school. The full quote reads, “The Indian record over these centuries is clouded with many wrongs. But the Indian still remains.” Ralph Aquilar. “The New Deal for Indians.” (May 29, 1936) Nevada State Museum, Stewart Indian School Collection.

¹⁷⁰ Albina Redner. “Albina Redner: A Shoshone Life”. (1990), 39, 44, 46. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 12, 2018)

<https://ia902805.us.archive.org/31/items/RednerAlbina/Redner%2C%20Albina.pdf>.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Redner realized how dramatically it had altered her life: “I think my home life and the way I was meant to live was all taken away by the powers of this world...here I was used to the wide-open ranges which were home to me, and I ended up with no home life.”¹⁷²

Albina Redner’s experiences at the Stewart Indian School contrast with the reforms federal officials in charge of the Indian educational system sought to institute beginning in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period, reformers from outside and inside the U.S. government urged that dramatic changes occur in the administration of Native American off-reservation boarding schools. As early as 1926, reformers from the Society of American Indians (SAI), the Office of Indian Affairs, the Brookings Institution, and the Committee of the One Hundred called for enhanced academic programs at boarding schools, the elimination of military regimentation, and the development of curricula that considered the specific experiences of Native students and incorporated aspects of their tribal cultures. By the mid-1930s, New Deal reformers in the federal government had closed multiple boarding schools, passed legislation to reshape the Indian educational system, and decreed that students still attending boarding schools were entitled to freedom of religion and substantive academic and vocational training in an environment that celebrated Indigenous cultures and eschewed the assimilationist practices of the past.

The intensity with which federal officials pursued these reforms runs contrary to the experiences of Stewart students such as Albina Redner, whose sentiments were

¹⁷² Ibid.

echoed by others who attended the school during this period and reflected in the letters and memoranda composed by Stewart officials between 1925 and 1948. At the same time, however, this period saw dramatic change at the Stewart School: facilities were rebuilt and updated, students' diets were considerably improved, scores of books were added to multiple new libraries, students were granted more freedom of expression, and a school social worker was added to the faculty to evaluate enrollment practices. All of these changes assuredly improved student life at the Stewart Indian School. They also obscured the reality, however, that many local OIA officials remained wedded to the assimilationist practices on which the Indian educational system was built.

In this chapter I argue that, while conditions at the Stewart Indian School improved beginning in the late 1920s, the main objectives of the school and its employees remained focused on the assimilation of Native children. This was true during the late 1920s and early 1930s, as well as after the institution of New Deal-era reforms that are frequently heralded as a positive turning point for the Indian boarding school system. This chapter thus underscores the reach of settler colonial assimilation practices, even during periods of reform, and confirms long-term efforts to reshape Native lives to mirror those of white middle-class Americans. Between 1925 and 1948, there were multiple examples of this at Stewart Indian School. Teachers and administrators forced students to participate in Christian religious instruction and continued to embrace gendered vocational training and a militarized environment. Further, the introduction of a school social worker reinforced negative

stereotypes about Native parents and justified both the removal of Native children from their families and the continuation of assimilationist practices. Additionally, students who attended the Stewart School during this period reported numerous incidents of abuse at the hands of school employees, which raises questions about the complicity of school administrators and their willingness to properly protect students. Collectively, these factors underscore the need for a reevaluation of the reform efforts that occurred between the late 1920s and 1940s and their impacts on Indigenous boarding school students.

The actions of Stewart students and their families during this period are also an important part of this story. This chapter illustrates the many ways Native students took advantage of new opportunities at the school to participate in different activities, or enjoy a degree of autonomy whenever possible. Students also continued to excel in their studies and vocations during this period, and used their educations to either continue on the career path established for them at the school, or to seek different types of employment better suited to their interests. And, as in years past, they also found ways to adapt to or oppose Stewart policies with which they disagreed. Some students, for example, pressed for changes in their vocational assignments, while others rebelled in more traditional ways, by jumping on beds rather than making them, sneaking boys into the girl's dormitory, or by running away from the school. Native parents also challenged Stewart officials in various ways, by refusing to send their children to the school, calling Stewart officials to task over incidents of student abuse, and by challenging social workers that attempted to remove children from their

homes. The resilience of Native parents and students throughout this era therefore remains central to the history of the Stewart Indian School.

“All civilization does not lie in the white race”¹⁷³

The effort to reform the Indian boarding school system in the late 1920s was driven by a number of different factors. Indigenous boarding school graduates issued some of the earliest critiques of boarding schools, and pressed both for substantive changes to the educational system and highlighted its negative impacts on Native peoples. In addition to the criticisms levied by Henry Roe Cloud and Laura Kellogg, Society of American Indians founding member Arthur Parker condemned the Indian school system for focusing only on small children, rather than preparing students for meaningful careers by helping them attend secondary schools and colleges. Parker also decried the white supremacism inherent in boarding school curricula, asserting that “all civilization does not lie in the white race” and arguing that Native peoples’ achievements would surpass that of white Americans’ if they were given equal educational opportunities.¹⁷⁴ Physician and former Carlisle Indian School employee Carlos Montezuma took his critiques further, suggesting that the Office of Indian Affairs be completely abolished as a means of restoring Indigenous sovereignty.

¹⁷³ Arthur Parker. “Arthur Parker Argues for College Education for Indians,” in *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie. (Bedford/St. Martin’s: Boston, 2001), 65.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Montezuma charged that the OIA was “instrumental in dominating over our race” and in destroying “our children’s future prospects.”¹⁷⁵

Such critiques flourished during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and were increasingly resonant in the aftermath of the First World War, in which over 10,000 Native Americans served despite their lack of U.S. citizenship and the U.S. government’s continued allotment and usurpation of Indigenous lands.¹⁷⁶ In the years after the end of the war, Indigenous and non-Native reformers called for a thorough review of U.S. policy toward Native peoples. In addition to the SAI, organizations such as the Indian Rights Association, the American Indian Defense Association, and individuals such as future Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, called for a change in the way the OIA implemented federal Indian policy and the Indian educational system. The advocacy of these groups led to the creation of the Advisory Council on Indian Affairs in 1923, also referred to as the Committee of the One Hundred, a collection of one hundred individuals with varying degrees of expertise on Native American issues who were invited to advise the federal government on proposed policy changes. As Frederick Hoxie notes, however, the Committee, whose work was sponsored by the U.S. government, failed to address issues regarding Indigenous citizenship in the United States or the ongoing allotment of Native lands. Rather, the Committee issued vague pronouncements supporting missionary activities

¹⁷⁵ Carlos Montezuma. “Carlos Montezuma Advocates the Abolition of the Indian Office, 1914,” in *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie. (Bedford/St. Martin’s: Boston, 2001), 93.

¹⁷⁶ A law mandating citizenship for all Native Americans was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1924.

amongst Native peoples and the ongoing need for them to be protected as wards of the U.S. government.¹⁷⁷

Off-reservation boarding school administrators also clamored for changes to the system, though their concerns, unlike those of some Indigenous graduates, were largely focused on a chronic lack of resources rather than the assimilationist objectives of the Indian education system. By the mid-1920s, Commissioners of Indian Affairs routinely complained of lackluster appropriations and the subsequent inability of boarding schools to properly house, feed, and educate Native children, or to recruit capable teachers and staff. Commissioners and school administrators also connected funding problems with the need to employ student labor at boarding schools, while acknowledging that doing so took them away from their academic and vocational studies. The need to modernize boarding school curricula was also discussed among local boarding school superintendents at a conference in May 1926, where they advocated surveys and community visits to determine the effectiveness of school instruction.¹⁷⁸

In 1926, as a means of partially addressing this issue, the OIA declared that students at some boarding schools, including Stewart, would spend a maximum of one-quarter of their day engaged in “institutional work details,” with another one-quarter spent on vocational training and the other half of their days spent in academic

¹⁷⁷ Frederick Hoxie. *This Indian Country: American Indian Activists and the Place They Made*. (New York: Penguin, 2012) 269-271.

¹⁷⁸ “Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations Adopted by the Conference of District Superintendents of the Indian Field Service, held at Washington, May 3 to 12, 1926.” General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

instruction.¹⁷⁹ This arrangement, referred to as the “platoon system,” was meant to limit the amount of non-educational work in which students engaged, while also addressing the ongoing need for their labor at boarding schools. With regard to personnel shortages and deficiencies, the Indian Affairs Commissioner noted in 1927 that, while some boarding school employees possessed an “innate missionary spirit,” decades of underfunding had created a substandard workforce and a severe shortage of qualified vocational instructors in particular.¹⁸⁰ Notably, these Commissioners did not seek reforms to the assimilationist mission of the boarding school system; rather, they sought additional funds as a means of intensifying and hastening its objectives.

Though few concrete steps to reform the Indian education system were taken in response to the critiques levied by boarding school graduates and administrators, a renewed effort to study the flaws of Indian administration in the U.S. began during this same period. In 1925, the Institute for Government Research, later known as the Brookings Institution, began a years-long project to examine the administration of American Indian policy within the United States and to investigate the circumstances in which Indigenous peoples were living across the country. This three-year project was led by Lewis Meriam, a researcher with expertise in government administration,

¹⁷⁹ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1926.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 7. (Accessed December 20, 2017)
<http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep2132/reference/history.annrep2132.i0006.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1927.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 4. (Accessed December 20, 2017)
<http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep2132/reference/history.annrep2132.i0007.pdf>.

and studied a wide range of issues, including the impacts of allotment, economic conditions on and off reservations, missionary activities, health problems, and the educational programs designed for Native children. The outcome of this study was a report published in 1928, commonly referred to as the Meriam Report, which charted the devastation wreaked by the allotment of Native lands, the cultural disruption caused by assimilation programs, and illustrated the poor health conditions that were common among Native communities.

The Meriam Report was also overwhelmingly critical of the OIA-managed educational system. The report described the Indian school system as overcrowded, dirty, and lacking proper academic and vocational instruction, largely due to inadequate government funding. Students suffered from malnutrition and preventable illnesses, and were subjected to corporal punishment by school staff for minor infractions. The report also decried the militaristic nature of the schools and recommended that regimented drills and marching cease. Some of the most scathing criticism in the report focused on practice of taking young children from their families and placing them in off-reservation boarding schools for years at a time. The report declared, “Among no other people, so far as is known, are as large a proportion of the total number of children of school age located in institutions away from their homes as among Indians under the boarding school policy.”¹⁸¹ The removal of children from their families was further described as “at variance with modern views

¹⁸¹ “The Problem of Indian Administration (Meriam Report).” National Indian Law Library, 403. (Accessed December 20, 2017)
https://www.narf.org/nill/documents/merriam/o_merriam_chapter9_part2_education.pdf.

of education and social work, which regard home and family as essential social institutions from which is it generally undesirable to uproot children.”¹⁸² The report recommended that the boarding schools quickly transition into facilities that taught students beginning at the sixth grade, and then evolve again into high schools for students in ninth grade and above.¹⁸³ This particular critique questioned the fundamental purpose of the off-reservation boarding school system, which was based on the premise that enrolling young children in such schools and separating them from their families would hasten their assimilation and definitively resolve the so-called “Indian problem” in the United States.

The Meriam Report also recommended a substantive restructuring of the boarding school system. Report authors suggested that each of the off-reservation boarding schools focus on specific vocational programs, such as agriculture or Indigenous arts and crafts, depending on the needs of Native communities in the region.¹⁸⁴ These schools would thus transition into vocational high schools for older Native students with career guidance and placement programs to aid students upon their graduation.¹⁸⁵ The report further recommended that other off-reservation boarding schools accommodate specific Native populations; students with learning disabilities could be concentrated at one school, while students with behavior problems or from economically depressed or “socially submerged” homes could

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 404.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 406.

attend others.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, social workers would be employed at each of these schools to interact with Native families to ensure student well-being and assimilationist progress. Based on these recommendations, it is clear that the authors of the Meriam Report sought to improve the material conditions at Native American schools and end the practice of removing young children from their families. The assimilationist nature of the educational system, however, remained largely unquestioned, and suggested reforms focused on advancing the OIA agenda rather than challenging its core tenets.

The federal response to the recommendations made in the Meriam Report was mixed and defensive in tone. In many ways, the concerns raised in the report echoed those of OIA officials over the previous decade: resources were limited, schools overcrowded, and facilities were often in disrepair. The 1928 report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs also acknowledged the importance of placing Native children in schools near their homes, but outright rejected the notion that removing children from their families was in any way harmful. Instead, Commissioner Charles H. Burke emphasized the importance of introducing Native children to so-called civilizing forces at a young age:

...the segregation on reservations of Indian children during their earlier years, the nomadic life of their parents and of a large proportion of the population, and the frequent controversies and complications as to property right make it impossible for approximately one-half the Indian children to be provided with public school facilities. Consequently, the Indian Service now maintains for

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 405.

these children 204 schools, with a capacity of 26,000 pupils, and about 5,000 pupils attend mission schools supported by religious denominations.¹⁸⁷

With regard to the suggestion that off-reservation boarding schools be converted into vocational high schools, the Commissioner pointed out that some high school-level classes were introduced into the Indian Service in 1921, though at only one unspecified school, but that this school now featured five high school courses. Otherwise, Burke noted, “There is not an Indian school in the United States that is strictly a high school.”¹⁸⁸ Further, he wrote that while the OIA was not opposed to reforming aspects of the boarding school system, a “Shortage of funds for the support of Indian schools makes it impossible to equip them adequately.”¹⁸⁹ The Meriam Report suggestions were thus interpreted as well-meaning but unrealistic, particularly because of the limited funds at the disposal of the OIA.

However, during the years immediately after the report was released, and in response to the especially damning findings of the Meriam Report, federal officials began implementing some recommended reforms within the boarding school system. One of the most important of these was the decision to encourage younger Native children to enroll in local public schools, which in turn received financial subsidies from the federal government to accept Native pupils. By mid-1929, approximately

¹⁸⁷ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1928.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 2. (Accessed December 20, 2017)
<http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep2132/reference/history.annrep2132.i0008.pdf>

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

35,000 Native children were enrolled in public schools.¹⁹⁰ The U.S. Congress allocated additional funds to the Office of Indian Affairs to pay for this program, but also increased OIA funding so it could improve school facilities, hire more teachers, raise salaries, and revise curricula. This increase in funding continued into the early 1930s, despite the economic disruption caused by the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, and over time included funding to buy new student uniforms for female students, who were previously charged with sewing their own uniforms, and to improve vocational facilities at the schools. Officials were quick to note, however, “The purchase of the girls’ ready-made clothing does not, of course, in any way interfere with clothing instruction and practice.”¹⁹¹

Though these funds were primarily focused on improving conditions at the boarding schools, additional reforms were also considered by federal officials. In 1929, boarding school superintendents were instructed to survey former students to determine whether their vocational training was useful to them in securing employment after graduation. These surveys, according to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, were “...a step in the development of guidance and placement which, with consistent attention of the office and cooperation of the field service, should

¹⁹⁰ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1929.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 2. (Accessed December 20, 2017)
<http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep2132/reference/history.annrep2132.i009.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1930.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 11. (Accessed December 20, 2017)
<http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep2132/reference/history.annrep2132.i010.pdf>.

bring to pass in the near future the more definite growth and development of Indian employment.”¹⁹² School administrators were also directed to improve students’ diets at boarding schools, and to place an “emphasis on child welfare,” which, of course, begs the questions of why focusing on child welfare had not been a primary objective of the Indian educational system in decades’ past.¹⁹³ The following year, the OIA began preparing to close boarding schools in areas where public schools were accessible to students and where white and Native populations were “amenable” to integrated schools.¹⁹⁴

Over the next two years, the OIA became increasingly introspective about the design and implementation of the Indian educational system and more open to some of the reforms suggested in the Meriam Report. Surprisingly, federal officials also acknowledged, for the first time, that the structure of the Indian educational system was deeply flawed and that the practice of removing young children from their homes had harmed Native families. They also again increased funding for boarding schools, which allowed them to hire more staff and improve conditions. In 1931, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles J. Rhoads wrote,

Accordingly, if the Indian Service were starting afresh on the task of Indian education, with what is now known of the processes of change and adjustment through schools and other agencies, it would undoubtedly begin with the Indian people in their own environment or in some comparable environment in which they could develop their own resources. It would employ other methods than some of those that have been employed – it would not use to

¹⁹² 1929 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 6.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ 1930 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 10.

any extent the reservation, “rations,” or distant boarding schools for young children. But we are not starting afresh and cannot...¹⁹⁵

As this comment reveals, officials did not consider dismantling the network of boarding and day schools that stretched across the country, but rather attempted to transform the system that was already in place. However, several important policy changes were also implemented. As of 1931 it was declared that the forcible “dragging-in” method of enrollment must stop, and that parents should instead be enticed to enroll their children in OIA schools by “the lure of good facilities, good personnel, [and] need of education.”¹⁹⁶ The practice of beating disobedient children was also officially banned:

With regard to attitudes toward Indian children in school, the office emphatically does not and will not tolerate flogging. On various occasions during the past year cases of corporal punishment have been summarily dealt with. This policy will be vigorously continued.¹⁹⁷

Federal officials also proposed dramatic changes in the ways in which Native children were taught at government schools. The style of “progressive education,” increasingly popular in public schools across the United States, was introduced to the Indian educational system in the early 1930s. In a 1932 article for the journal *Progressive Education*, Director of Indian Education Carson Ryan described this concept as a form of teaching that involved “recognizing and providing opportunities

¹⁹⁵ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1931.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 4. (Accessed December 20, 2017)
<http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep2132/reference/history.annrep2132.i0011.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

for various learning outcomes rather than beginning and ending teaching procedures mainly with subject matter.”¹⁹⁸ This approach would thus permit teachers to focus on the needs of individual children or communities, and incorporate aspects student histories and cultures into lessons. This was particularly important for the Indian educational service, according to Ryan, as these practices could aid Native children in their academic courses and serve as a way to preserve aspects of their Indigenous heritage. Combined with Meriam Report-inspired reforms, the principles of progressive education demonstrably altered the stated objectives of federal education for Native Americans:

The purpose of education for any indigenous peoples at the present day is to help these peoples, both as groups and as individuals, to adjust themselves to modern life, protecting and preserving as much of their own way of living as possible, and capitalizing their economic and cultural resources for their own benefit and their contribution to modern civilization.¹⁹⁹

Actual changes to the boarding school system began in earnest in 1932. By that year, 2,000 children had been taken from off-reservation boarding schools and enrolled in public schools near their homes.²⁰⁰ Several of the larger boarding schools dropped one elementary school grade with the objective of forcing younger children to attend public schools, and social workers were hired and sent to off-reservation boarding schools. Additionally, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs asserted that,

¹⁹⁸ W. Carson Ryan, Jr, and Rose K. Brandt. “Indian Education Today,” in *Progressive Education*. IX (February, 1932), 83.

¹⁹⁹ 1931 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 4.

²⁰⁰ United States Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1932.” *University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Collections*, 6. (Accessed December 20, 2017) <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep2132/reference/history.annrep2132.i0012.pdf>.

instead of forcing Native children to attend federally-operated boarding schools, the Indian Service would focus on preventing such institutions from becoming overcrowded and ensure spaces were “reserved for those for whom adequate facilities are not otherwise available.”²⁰¹ These policy changes impacted life at the Stewart Indian School in different ways, though primarily in terms of material conditions at the institution.

“The Future of the Indian is in their Keeping”

In the late 1920s, Stewart School officials pressed less for comprehensive reforms to the Indian educational system and more for increased appropriations so they could rebuild the crumbling infrastructure at the school. They repeatedly sought funds to build at least four new student dorms, and also requested monies to build a new gym and a space in which to teach home economics. They were also increasingly concerned with Nevada’s growing reputation as a haven for illicit activities. Virginia City and Reno, two cities easily accessible from the Stewart School by rail and highway, were particularly well known as cities where one could drink illegal alcohol, gamble, or, if need be, get a quick divorce. Economic conditions in the state were troubling as well; even before the Great Depression the mining industry had slowed down and work was increasingly difficult to secure. Local OIA officials lamented the impact all of this had on Native communities, whom they described as

²⁰¹ 1932 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 4.

“gambling to an inordinate degree,” and further complained that alcohol was easily obtainable near population centers.²⁰²

And while Stewart administrators advocated for new buildings and improved spaces for their students, events at the school also reflected the problems highlighted by those pushing to reform the boarding school system. Between 1926 and 1932, there were various epidemics at the school, of influenza, measles, scabies, tuberculosis and mumps, along with multiple cases of chicken pox, pneumonia, scarlet fever, and spinal meningitis.²⁰³ These epidemics were likely exacerbated by overcrowding and poor student diets, issues that were addressed directly by school administrators in later years. Officials also touted the “work and influence” of their resident missionary, Bessie Culver, a member of the Baptist Society who was responsible for the religious education of the entire student body.²⁰⁴ Additionally, the school continued to maintain a militaristic environment during the late 1920s, and remained focused on student hygiene and cleanliness, as recollected by former student Hilman Tobey, a Paiute citizen who enrolled at Stewart at age 10 in 1926. Hilman was issued a uniform upon his arrival, and described an average day at the school: “I remember having to march in a line to the dining room and to our classrooms. Before we could march to the dining hall, our hands were inspected. If

²⁰² United States Government Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Report, 1926, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.” Microfilm M1011, Roll 9. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

²⁰³ United States Government Office of Indian Affairs. “Annual Reports, 1926-1932, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.” Microfilm M1011, Roll 9. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁴ Annual Report, 1926, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.

they weren't clean we would have to go back and wash them again."²⁰⁵ Still, the school remained open at a time when many others closed, most likely because it drew Native students from so many states across the West and because there were so few educational opportunities for Native students in Nevada, where many public schools refused to enroll Indigenous children until the 1930s.

At the same time, however, school officials advocated for their students and attempted to improve both their living conditions and their educational opportunities. In addition to repeatedly asking for money to build new dorms and funds to hire additional staff, superintendent Frederick Snyder had the school join a statewide athletics association in 1927 as a means of encouraging interaction between Stewart and public-school students. Aware that public school teachers in Nevada had expressed the opinion that Native children should be excluded from their classes based on the "belief that Indian children are filthy, have vermin, and are diseased," establishing this type of interaction between Native and non-Native schools was an important way to challenge local racism.²⁰⁶ That same year, Snyder asserted that most graduates of the school should continue their educations after leaving Stewart, either at other Indian schools across the country, or at local high schools at which they could take more advanced classes. In 1928, the first playground was installed at the school for the enjoyment of younger students, and the 'platoon system' was initiated as a

²⁰⁵ Hilman Tobey. "Shops (Carpentry)." *Stewart Indian School Walking Trail*. (Accessed December 20, 2017) <http://stewartindianschool.com/walking-trail/>.

²⁰⁶ Annual Report, 1927, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.

way to limit students' industrial duties and ensure they focused upon "practical work...along with actual instruction."²⁰⁷

1928 was also the year the Meriam Report was released, and its recommendations influenced events at the Stewart School over the next several years. Stewart added a tenth-grade class in 1929, a dorm for younger female students was constructed, approximately 300 Native children from Nevada were enrolled in public schools, and students in the fourth through seventh grades planted a garden as a means of supplementing student meals. A girls' 'auditorium teacher' was also hired, which allowed female students to participate in outdoor athletic activities and learn folk dancing and gymnastics. Additionally, in 1929 Superintendent Snyder sent a survey to former Stewart graduates, as recommended by the OIA, to determine whether they had used the education and training they received at Stewart to secure employment, and to ask in what ways the school might continue to provide students with assistance.

The total number of surveys the school sent out is unknown, but 39 former Stewart students completed and mailed them back. The one-page survey asked a number of questions pertaining to students' post-graduation activities: whether and where they were working, how long they had been in their position, what vocational training they received at Stewart, and whether or not they were working in the field

²⁰⁷ Annual Report, 1928, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.

for which they were trained.²⁰⁸ The responses of former students were mixed. Of the 39 students, nine were continuing their studies at other Indian schools, with the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, listed most often as the location of their continued education. 12 of the 39 students reported employment in fields that matched their vocational training, while the other 19 indicated they were not using their vocational training. Among those who were using their vocations, six were women working in domestic service, which included housework, laundry, and sewing, while four male former students worked as carpenters, though one had secured only short-term employment; and two additional men worked as farmers.²⁰⁹

Of the 19 students not using their vocational training, some declined to state why and some women indicated they were working solely within their own homes. Several former students also expressed displeasure with the education and training they received at Stewart. Of the former group, Rose H. Pete wrote that while she was performing housework for a family, she did not receive adequate training in this field and described her training at Stewart as “not efficient.” Lydia Holbrook wrote of the school, “It teach me nothing,” while Willis Summerfield responded that he was unable to get a job “because of inexperience,” despite his time at Stewart. Bryan Smith stated of his education at Stewart that it “helped me wonderfully,” but that he was unable to hold a steady job as a carpenter because he did not own a personal set

²⁰⁸ Unfortunately, the surveys did not indicate the years these students attended the school, when they graduated or left the school, where they were living at the time of the response, or their tribal affiliation.

²⁰⁹ Frederick Snyder, *Untitled Surveys of Former Students*. (April 4, 1929) Box 18, Folder 4. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

of tools. And James Vidovich relayed his appreciation for his education, but noted that he had taken up a different trade and was working for the Southern Pacific Railroad.²¹⁰

Two other former students, however, moved beyond their training and school expectations to assume prominent positions within the Indian Service, including at the Stewart School. Nellie Shaw reported that she was teaching first grade at the Shoshone Boarding School, a position she had held for the past seven months, and had a salary of \$1500 per year. At Stewart, she had studied domestic sciences and art, and wrote that her education at the school had helped her “By giving me knowledge for personal care, food, and clothing.” Tellingly, Shaw, in response a question about whether she continued to use her vocational training wrote, “Personally, yes.” Professionally, however, Shaw had moved beyond the limited expectations held by most boarding school officials during the early twentieth century. Similarly, Helen J. Thurman listed her position as Assistant Field Matron at the Stewart School. Thurman had worked at Stewart for six months at that time and earned \$80 per month. Like Shaw, she was also trained in domestic sciences, which had “helped her in every way.” With regard to whether she followed the vocation for which she was trained, Thurman wrote, “To some extent,” and declined to comment further. Whether these women attained these positions as a means of helping Indigenous communities or because they believed in the schools’ assimilationist mission is

²¹⁰ Ibid.

unknown. In both cases, however, Nellie Shaw and Helen Thurman moved beyond the expectations of school officials in pursuing careers outside of domestic training.²¹¹

As federal officials warmed to some of the recommendations from the Meriam Report, circumstances at the Stewart School began to change as well. In 1930, as a result of increased federal appropriations to the Indian Service, funding for another new dorm, a shop vocational building, a laundry facility, and a commissary was allocated, and school officials asked for additional funds for a new gym and a building in which to teach home economics classes. In 1931, Superintendent Snyder issued a detailed report in which a number of subjects were formally addressed for the first time. In addition to listing the number of deaths and illnesses at the school, and the addition of four new buildings to the campus, Snyder wrote that every classroom was fitted with a library of at least 100 books, which included primers for the younger students, that all teachers had received assignment books, that monthly exams and grades were given, and that a written report was produced for each child. Additionally, all students took exams in math, spelling, reading and other subjects, the results of which indicated that they tested below grade level in comparison with public school students. And while the existence of school libraries and academic testing might not seem extraordinary, this is the first time books and academic testing were mentioned in a Stewart superintendent annual report.²¹²

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Annual Report, 1931, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.

The influence of the Meriam Report and efforts to reform the boarding school system were reflected in other ways as well. In a newly formatted, more extensive annual report, Superintendent Snyder chronicled the dietary reforms initiated during the 1930-1931 school year, which emphasized the apparent lack of fresh food previously available to students. He wrote,

...due to more liberal appropriations, the diet of the students has been much improved in variety and especially in the matter of fresh fruits. On account of the proximity to California, all kinds of fruits can be purchased at a low cost, and an abundance of oranges, apples, peaches, apricots...has been provided daily.²¹³

School officials also received a number of cows from the shuttered boarding school at Fort Bidwell in northern California, which allowed them to provide students with a pint and a half of milk every day. The vegetable garden planted two years prior was also cited as a source of fresh vegetables that would improve students' diets.

Further changes occurred the following year. In addition to the construction of a new home economics building Lucile Hamner was hired as a social worker at Stewart. Hamner was charged with evaluating the families and homes of Native children to determine their eligibility to attend the school in light of new admissions procedures. As reported by the superintendent, the only students admitted to the school were children with no relatives to care for them, those who lived too far from or who were denied admission to a public school, those whose "home conditions are such as to make it necessary to take the children," and those who wished to attend a

²¹³ Ibid.

secondary school when none were located near their homes.²¹⁴ These changes reflect efforts to enroll more Native children in public schools, but also created a student population largely free of parental interference, which left students vulnerable to harsh school policies and predatory figures in subsequent years.

With regard to academics, room libraries were enlarged and the school curriculum was altered “to conform with state requirements” and the “Nevada State Course of Study.”²¹⁵ Achievement tests were given again for students in grades three through six, and students separated into slower and faster academic groups. A new vocational training schedule for students in different grades was also established, which allowed younger children to spend more time in an academic environment and older students more time for training. Boys in grades seven through ten had five hours per week of training in their choice of auto mechanics, machine shop, plumbing, engineering, and carpentry, while girls in these grades had six hours per week on “home making subjects.”²¹⁶ Children in second through fourth grades had vocational training for one hour per week, and kids in fifth and sixth grades two hours per week.

These changes were instituted to improve the lives of Stewart School students and to modernize the Indian educational system. And in some ways, they reflected previous calls from school superintendents for additional funds to improve conditions at the school. At the same time however, some reforms introduced by the federal government engendered resentments on the part of Stewart personnel. Even in 1931,

²¹⁴ Annual Report, 1932, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

writing in his annual report, Superintendent Snyder complained about the burden of preparing the more extensive, newly formatted annual report. At the end of a section entitled, “Program for the Coming Year,” Snyder noted the following:

The above report has been prepared under very adverse circumstances...there are very few uninterrupted hours in the day, and it has been difficult to keep at work on the report for more than short periods at a time. Beside the regular interruption since I started the report a few weeks ago, five visiting officials and the Secretary of the Indian Rights Association have been at the school for varying periods.

Snyder’s message was clear: the new report format was a burden he did not appreciate, and one that interfered with the important work of managing the school.

What was missing from the reforms of the late 1920s and early 1930s was a discussion of the assimilationist practices that were, after more than three decades, firmly engrained at schools like Stewart. Even with revised curricula and improved diets and facilities, the ultimate purpose of the Stewart School remained the assimilation of Native children from Nevada and the surrounding states. The continued desire of Stewart officials to reshape and improve the character of Indigenous populations is clear in Snyder’s 1929 annual report, in which he insulted previous graduates for their alleged shortcomings:

We are endeavoring to impress the children as they pass through our school that the future of the Indian is in their keeping, and that it devolves upon them to see that the coming generation is a marked improvement on the present, for the morality and progressiveness of the present generation is far from what we would wish it.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Annual Report, 1929, Superintendent of the Carson Indian School.

Such attitudes, along with an unwillingness to abandon assimilationist practices, continued to propel the educational system at Stewart during the New Deal era.

“To rebuild the shattered morale of a subjugated people”²¹⁸

The election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president in 1933 ushered in an administration that quickly redefined relations between the federal government and United States’ citizens. As the country continued to reel from the economic crisis unleashed by the Great Depression, Roosevelt and his advisors sought relief for the American population by instituting fundamental changes in the federal government’s approach toward social and economic issues.²¹⁹ These changes, collectively referred to as the New Deal, consisted of economic assistance programs, financial regulations to protect consumers, and work programs, among others. Each utilized the power of the federal government to alleviate financial hardship across the country.

The Office of Indian Affairs similarly sought to use federal power to affect the lives of Native peoples living in the United States. The newly appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, was the central figure of this period, and he quickly sought to reshape the relationship between the federal government and Indigenous tribes. Collier, who had spent time in the 1920s living among the Pueblo peoples in the Southwest, had long championed the reform of U.S. Indian policy and was particularly critical of allotment and assimilation policies, which he argued had

²¹⁸ John Collier. “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1934,” in *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 225.

²¹⁹ Michael Hiltzik. *The New Deal: A Modern History*. (New York: Free Press, 2011) 7-27.

severely damaged the lives of Native Americans. Upon his appointment, Collier pushed for legislative changes to grant additional funds for Native children to attend public schools, loans for them to attend college, and an end to the allotment of Indigenous lands. Such policies were intended to provide Native American children with greater intellectual opportunities that also incorporated aspects of Native cultures and languages alongside vocational training.

In 1934, two pieces of legislation emerged out of Collier's efforts: the Johnson-O'Malley Act, which authorized federal contracts to pay local school districts for enrolled Native pupils, and the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which ended allotment, called for the rebuilding of tribal governments, and the protection of Indigenous cultures. Collectively, these programs were often referred to as the 'Indian New Deal,' and were instituted to give Native peoples limited control over their economic, political, and cultural affairs. In his 1934 annual report, Collier asserted that the IRA took a step toward ending the "train of evil consequences" that U.S. policy toward Indigenous peoples had wrought since the end of the late nineteenth century.²²⁰ Collier further decried the "incalculable damage" previous federal policies had caused Native Americans, and called for federal efforts "to rebuild the shattered morale of a subjugated people...taught to believe in its racial inferiority," and for increased "educational opportunities for Indians" as a means of improving their social and economic prospects.²²¹

²²⁰ Collier, "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1934," 225.

²²¹ Ibid, 225, 227.

With regard to the Indian boarding school system, Collier built upon the reforms instituted during the previous years, but embraced new ideas as well. During the 1933-1934 fiscal year, ten boarding schools were closed and 4,500 fewer children than the previous year were enrolled in the boarding school system.²²² The boarding schools that remained open were directed to continue to dropping elementary school grades as a way to focus on older students, and both vocational programs and reservation day schools were “strengthened” through improved funding.²²³ The employment of social workers at boarding schools was also continued. A 1934 federal report on Indian affairs further suggested that OIA planned to adopt the Meriam Report suggestion that individual boarding schools be retooled to focus on specific types of vocational training for older students. Additionally, the prohibition on corporal punishment continued during the New Deal period, with Collier pointing out the deleterious effects of physical violence against students in a 1934 letter: “...it is, or should be self-evident that so long as physical force, and acts of humiliation directed against the children, are used, no happy or healthy morale will be possible.”²²⁴ He further pledged that any “teacher or disciplinarian guilty of...abuses will be held responsible for committing them.”²²⁵

²²² John Collier. “Summaries of Bureau Reports: Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1934,” 84. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

²²³ Ibid, 85.

²²⁴ “Commissioner Collier’s Letter on Indian School Discipline, August 22, 1934,” in *Indians At Work: A News Sheer for Indians and the Indian Service*. (September 1, 1934), 6. *Nevada State Museum Stewart Indian School Collection*.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Other reformers working within the OIA also challenged the basic tenets of the boarding school system. Mary Stewart, the Assistant Director of the Indian Education Office under Collier, wrote in 1935 that the Native American boarding school system was developed as a practical measure to combat poverty and to educate Native children in communities that lacked “entrenched educational traditions.”²²⁶ However, the price of this well-intentioned system was, according to Stewart, “homes broken, parental authority weakened and responsibility shifted, children estranged from home and parents, and unfitted for reservation life upon their return.”²²⁷ She further railed against the regimented and militaristic environments at the schools, along with “the bells and bugles and marching.”²²⁸ Though the OIA was attempting to correct these problems, she concluded that much still needed to be done.

New Deal reformers also rejected the assimilationist policies of the past. A January 1934 Indian Service circular issued by Collier criticized the Indian Service for being “unsympathetic” to Indigenous cultures, religious practices, and languages, and decried the fact that some federally-managed schools had completely “banned” all such expressions by students.²²⁹ Such practices must cease, according to Collier, who also asserted that any “interference” in Indigenous cultural life would not be tolerated.²³⁰ Further, he wrote that “The cultural history of Indians is in all respects to be considered equal to that of any non-Indian group,” and that it was preferable that

²²⁶ Mary Stewart. “Changing Cultures and Indian Education.” (1935), 7. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ “Summaries of Bureau Reports: Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1934,” 90.

²³⁰ Ibid.

all Native students be “bilingual” speakers of both their Indigenous language and English. In addition, he noted, “The Indian arts are to be prized, nourished, and honored.”²³¹ Mary Stewart expressed similar sentiments: “White and Indian workers are encouraged to respect tribal disciplines, customs, and beliefs...and to bring patience and understanding to surviving taboos and prejudices.”²³²

Religious freedom was another issue addressed by Collier. Also in January 1934, Collier issued a circular entitled “Indian Religious Freedom and Indian Culture,” in which he proclaimed that Native Americans, including children attending boarding schools, should be afforded “the fullest constitutional liberty in all matters affecting religion, conscience, and culture.”²³³ Collier wrote that he and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes had discovered that Native children in federal boarding schools were consistently forced to attend denominational services through “official coercion” and were denied Constitutional protections regarding freedom of religion.²³⁴ This had resulted in what Collier termed “physical persecution” of students, even throughout the early 1930s, which would no longer be tolerated by federal officials.²³⁵ The Indian Office’s solution to this problem was to come to a similar arrangement as existed in the public school system at that time: with parental consent, Native students could opt out of religious instruction without facing negative

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Stewart, “Changing Cultures and Indian Education,” 12.

²³³ Circular quoted in John Collier. “The Policy of the Office of Indian Affairs on Religious Liberty Among Indians, February 19, 1936,” page 1-2. Box 10, Folder 7, Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

²³⁴ Ibid, 2.

²³⁵ Ibid.

consequences. However, local boarding school officials were also instructed not to interfere with the work of missionaries who, according to the Indian Office, still provided a “valuable service” to Native students.²³⁶ This mixed message thus called for Native children to have religious freedom while at the same time allowing Christian missionaries to retain their access to boarding school students.

The policies introduced during the period of New Deal reforms represented a clear departure from the past, particularly with regard to federal attitudes toward assimilation and religious instruction. However, the development and administration of these reforms were also consistent with previous federal policies, as Collier developed them without input from Native families or former boarding school graduates. What emerged, then, was a set of policies designed without consideration for cultural or geographic distinction or recognition of the diversity of Native peoples living across the United States. Additionally, while Collier and his colleagues disparaged assimilationist practices and rallied against them, they sometimes also hedged on these issues, as they did with the issue of Christian religious instruction. Further, as demonstrated in the history of the Stewart Indian School during this period, local boarding school employees sometimes refused to follow federal policy guidelines and instead continued to adhere to previous assimilationist policies. The scope and impact of the reforms were also hampered by the onset of U.S. involvement in World War II, which led to reduced funding and attention for the Indian educational system, and lower enrollment in boarding schools as male students

²³⁶ “Summaries of Bureau Reports: Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1934,” 90.

enlisted in the military and female students left schools for jobs in the defense industry.²³⁷

“A home away from home:” New Deal Reforms at the Stewart Indian School

The New Deal had a variety of impacts on Nevada, outside of those that affected the student body at the Stewart School. Federal funds injected cash into the Nevada mining industry, and led to state projects including the construction of the Hoover Dam.²³⁸ The Civilian Conservation Corp-Indian Division (CC-ID) was deployed throughout the state as well, and provided jobs primarily for Native men on reservations, where they built fences to keep cattle from roaming, cleaned water springs, and improved roads.²³⁹ The Johnson-O’Malley Act paid schools to integrate Native students into public classrooms, and also funded the construction of day schools for elementary aged children in remote parts of the state.

Daily life at the Stewart School was also impacted by New Deal reforms, though a great deal of continuity with the past was also maintained. Students’ school days, for example, continued to be a combination of academic and vocational training, with the amount of each depending on the grade and age of the individual student. As in the late 1920s and early 1930s, administrators sought to improve

²³⁷ The onset of World War II also seemingly impacted the amount of archival evidence available regarding life at the Stewart Indian School between 1942 and the end of the war. While New Deal reforms were chronicled in detail during the second half of the 1930s and into the early 1940s, the amount of correspondence to and from the school dropped off significantly beginning in 1942. Whether this was because the school itself began producing less correspondence, or whether it has simply been lost in subsequent decades is unclear. However, it worth pointing out that the amount of material thus far available to scholars from the war years is limited.

²³⁸ Green, *Nevada: A History of the Silver State*, 242.

²³⁹ Crum, *The Road on which we Came*, 86-87.

academic instruction and material conditions, and directed more resources toward support for Indigenous cultures and crafts. Of the material improvements to life at the school, students enrolled during the New Deal period seemed most excited about the food served at the school. Florence Frances Hooper, a citizen of the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone tribe, attended Stewart beginning in 1944 at age 10, and remained at the school until 1952. She recalled her time at Stewart as “pleasant” and “a home away from home,” and in an interview described the amenities she particularly enjoyed.²⁴⁰ The school provided “clean sheets” and “good food to eat,” which she did not enjoy at her home because her family “just didn’t have the money” to purchase the same items.²⁴¹ Delbert Holley, a member of the Western Shoshone nation who attended the school for two years in the mid-1940s, similarly praised the food at the school. In a 2017 interview, he noted that Stewart “had good food, you know, like all the greens you could eat.”²⁴² Washoe alumna JoAnn Nevers, recalled a specific dish she enjoyed at the school: “I liked one dish particularly. That was the gravy over bread. That was delicious!”²⁴³ She also lamented, however, that when she was at the school in the mid-1940s between the fourth and six grades, she and her classmates were

²⁴⁰ Florence Frances Hooper. Nevada State Museum, *Under One Sky Exhibit Interview*.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Delbert Holley. “Boy from Owyhee: An Interview with Delbert Holley.” (2017), 6. Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 21, 2017) <https://ia902806.us.archive.org/17/items/HolleyDelbert/HolleyDelbert.pdf>.

²⁴³ JoAnn Nevers. “Continual Student and Ethnohistorian: An Interview with JoAnn Nevers.” (2017), 4. Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 21, 2017) <https://ia802808.us.archive.org/32/items/AnnNeversJoAnn/Ann%20NeversJoAnn.pdf>.

constantly hungry because “there was not too much left when the big girls got through.”²⁴⁴

Older students who attended Stewart after 1934 were also granted a greater degree of freedom than in the past, and particularly enjoyed having access to a newly opened student store, called Novake, where they could purchase snacks and soda. Students jokingly referred to the store as the “E.C.A.,” or Eat Candy Anytime, store and seemingly enjoyed both the autonomy of choosing and purchasing their own items as well as the rituals they created to enjoy their snacks. Paiute citizen Roger Sam, who enrolled in the school at age 14 in 1943, and later returned as an employee in the 1950s, purchased “Pepsi or peanuts,” which he enjoyed after football practice before heading back to class.²⁴⁵ Ruth Abbie, a member of the Washoe and Paiute nations who attended the school in the late 1940s during the sixth and seventh grades, liked to buy Coke and peanuts, and had a specific routine for enjoying them. After purchasing these two items, Abbie liked to “pour the peanuts in the Coke and go outside and sit down under the trees and drink the Coke and snack on the peanuts, or in the room and read or do my homework or something.”²⁴⁶ Nevers also enjoyed the Coke and peanuts combination, sometimes with a donut:

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Roger Sam. “Stewart for the Long Term: An Interview with Roger Sam.” (2017), 4. Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 21, 2017)

https://ia802806.us.archive.org/25/items/SamRoger_201807/SamRoger.pdf

²⁴⁶ Ruth Abbie. “Happy Classmate: An Interview with Ruth Abbie.” (2017), 4. Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 21, 2017)

<https://ia802805.us.archive.org/26/items/RuthAbbieFinal/Ruth%20Abbie-final.pdf>

...if I had money, I'd get a Coke and a doughnut or peanuts and put it in my Coke...and then the donut I'd put around the lip...we'd put it around there, like. We'd chew it and drink. It was kind of a fad or something.²⁴⁷

Students also seemingly had more latitude to express themselves and shape activities at the Stewart School during this era. Student groups sponsored co-ed dances during the 1930s and 1940s, joined Girl and Boy Scout programs at the school, and performed in plays both for the student body and as a traveling company that visited reservations and Indian day schools throughout the state.²⁴⁸ In addition to student government opportunities, male and female students could become officers in their individual dorms and cottages, where they made decisions about sponsoring various events at the school.²⁴⁹ Stewart students could also continue to express themselves and demonstrate their athletic prowess by joining one of the many sports teams available to male and female students at the school.²⁵⁰ After the onset of World War II, older students also staffed a Civilian Defense Committee as a means of protecting local communities in Nevada, and participated in War Training Courses that trained male and female students for civilian defense jobs, or prepared men for specific jobs within the armed forces.²⁵¹ Students too young to participate in these

²⁴⁷ Nevers, 4.

²⁴⁸ *Sierra Redskins*. "Senior News: The Laughing Moon." (February 7, 1941) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

²⁴⁹ *Sierra Redskins*. "Home Quarters." (February 7, 1941) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

²⁵⁰ A thorough evaluation of the role and importance of sports at the Stewart School is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it should be noted that the abilities of Stewart School athletic teams were renowned and respected throughout Nevada and among other boarding schools. Games in which Stewart teams participated were also regularly documented in Carson City newspapers, while school sports generally received two full pages of coverage in each issue of the *Sierra Redskins* school newspaper.

²⁵¹ *Sierra Redskins*. "Civilian Defense." (January 12, 1942). *Stewart Indian School Collection*; *Sierra Redskin*. "War Training Courses." (February 2, 1942). *Stewart Indian School Collection*. Additionally,

programs launched paper collection and Defense Stamp drives as a means of contributing to the war effort.²⁵²

The school's 1935 curriculum also illustrates reformers' commitment to instruction and respect for Indigenous cultures. The youngest children at Stewart, those in kindergarten to approximately fourth grade, received academic lessons on topics with which Indigenous students might be familiar, pertaining, for example, to daily life and nature, while students in the upper grades were gradually introduced to the broader world around them. Nevers, for example, praised a class she had in fifth grade that taught students about the history of the Aztec Empire in South America. In this class, which she described as her favorite, students learned and performed Aztec songs and chants as their teacher accompanied them on the piano.²⁵³ And eighth grade students studied the histories of their own tribes and created historical outlines and maps of their tribal territories.²⁵⁴ In a 1939 interview, Gretchen Devine, a Native woman who served as secretary to School Superintendent Alida Bowler, confirmed the importance of this aspect of students' education. In an interview with a Reno reporter, she asserted that, because most of the students at the school would return to their home communities when they graduated, "their instruction was planned toward

many Stewart alumni also immediately enlisted in the military. In January 1942, Principal Ernest C. Mueller asserted, "Over forty recent graduates and former students of the Carson Boarding School are in the United States military service at this time." *Sierra Redskins*. "Our Student Body." (January 12, 1942) *Stewart Indian School Collection*.

²⁵² *Sierra Redskins*. "Paper Collection," and "Ninth Grade." (April, 1942). *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

²⁵³ Nevers, 4.

²⁵⁴ *Sierra Redskins*. "Eighth Grade." (November 29, 1940). *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

that end,” with a particular emphasis on Indigenous cultures and crafts.²⁵⁵

Additionally, school officials invited tribal representatives to speak with teachers and administrators about the ways in which their children could retain aspects of their cultures. In 1941, Stewart Superintendent Don Foster planned a meeting at which George Meacham, identified as President of the Warm Springs, Oregon Tribal Council, spoke to school staff about the “Tribal Habits, Customs, and Beliefs which Warm Springs Indian parents do not want their children to lose, and phases of the white way of life which Indian parents want their children to learn.”²⁵⁶ Such a meeting signals a willingness to at least listen to Native peoples’ views regarding their children’s educations as well as respect for Indigenous traditions.

Stewart officials also supported the sale of Indigenous crafts at the school through the establishment of the Wa Pai Shone Trading Post in 1936. In keeping with New Deal policies that advocated the respect and promotion of local Native cultures, Wa Pai Shone only sold items made by citizens of the Great Basin tribal nations or Stewart students, such as baskets, beaded items, and buckskins. According to the organization’s Articles of Incorporation, active members of the association would be composed “...exclusively of persons of Indian blood native to or residing in the Great Basin area, or any student of the Carson Indian School.”²⁵⁷ Indigenous women made

²⁵⁵ Gladys Rowley. “Reno Review.” (April 25, 1939) *Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries*.

²⁵⁶ Don C. Foster to Marshall Woodward. (August 5, 1941). Box 8, Folder 15. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

²⁵⁷ “Articles of Incorporation of Wa-Pai-Shone Craftsmen Incorporated.” (November 21, 1936) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

many of these items, though male Stewart students also sold carvings they created in a stone and wood-carving program at the school.²⁵⁸ Three additional Wa Pai Shone Trading Posts were added in subsequent years, one in Crystal Bay, near Lake Tahoe, and one each in Death Valley and Bishop, California. This cooperative network grew to include 155 Native artisans, and over the first five years of its existence, its members received a total of nine thousand dollars.²⁵⁹

Stewart School faculty were closely involved with the management of Wa Pai Shone; art teacher Jane Jones supervised the posts and taught students and craftspeople about the financial and commercial aspects of running a business. The “inactive” members of Wa Pai Shone, which included Jones and other school administrators and teachers, collectively managed the Trading Post and worked directly with craftspeople.²⁶⁰ School officials also maintained detailed records of expenditures at each of the posts, including the profits and their operating costs. Figures for the fiscal year 1940 show expenditures in excess of \$7,000, and the following year sales of Indigenous crafts that totaled \$5,562.²⁶¹ Though the Wa Pai Shone Trading Posts were, in part, designed to instill Native artists with an entrepreneurial spirit, they also promoted Indigenous arts and served as an important

²⁵⁸ Wa Pai Shone. “Shops (Carpentry).” *Stewart School Walking Trail*. (Accessed December 8, 2017). <http://stewartindianschool.com/walking-trail/>.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Articles of Incorporation of Wa-Pai-Shone Craftsmen Incorporated.

²⁶¹ “Financial Report of Wa Pai Shone, Inc, Prepared for the Annual Meetin[g] Held October 10, 1940. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco); 1941 figures are detailed in: *Sierra Redskins*. “Wa-Pai-Shone News.” (November 3, 1941). *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

source of revenue for Great Basin peoples in the midst of poor economic conditions in Nevada.

“I couldn’t believe what I had gotten myself into”²⁶²

At the same time, however, the Stewart School also retained many aspects of its assimilationist past, including the imposition of white, middle-class gender norms, as reinforced through educational activities and vocational training. For example, in 1935 Superintendent Bowler outlined a series of daily training events for Indian schools throughout the region. On Mondays, according to Bowler, women and girls would focus on clothing, including its cost and the durability of fabrics, along with sewing and mending. These activities would include “academics” as well: Bowler asserted that students would learn how to spell the names of different types of fabrics and solve “simple arithmetic problems” related to the number of yards required to make a piece of clothing.²⁶³ Wednesdays were devoted to “handcrafts of all kinds, with an emphasis on Indian crafts,” and female students were encouraged to weave baskets, bead, or make items for the home, including “curtains, rugs, and pillows and bedspreads.”²⁶⁴ Friday, writes Bowler, was devoted to food, and female students learned about prices, canned goods, how to cook inexpensive cuts of meat, and how to prepare and serve food in the home.

²⁶² Daisy Smith. “Auditorium.” *Stewart School Walking Trail*. (Accessed December 8, 2017). <http://stewartindianschool.com/walking-trail/>.

²⁶³ “Memorandum to Day School Teachers From Miss Bowler and Mr. Wiley. Subject: Educational Activities in Connection with Day Schools.” Box 6, Folder 19. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco), 1.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 1-2.

The activities in which boys would participate on these days were dramatically different. For male students, Monday was devoted to carpentry, repairing barns and other structures, furniture building, and learning how to conduct home repairs. As she did with the instruction received by female students, Bowler extolled the educational opportunities inherent in this type of work: boys would have the opportunity to learn spelling and math in conjunction with picking out different types of wood and determining the cost of various materials. Wednesdays were devoted to “agricultural problems,” and male students learned how to care for livestock and raise feed during the winter, and studied irrigation.²⁶⁵ On Fridays, boys engaged in “farm mechanics” training, which consisted of caring for and operating farm machinery.²⁶⁶

These “education activities” were closely connected with the gendered vocational training students received at Stewart. In a 1938 letter on the enrollment of the boarding school, Bowler wrote that students in grades seven through twelve spent roughly half the school day on vocational training. For boys, this included “industrial” work, as well as “shop work and agricultural instruction.”²⁶⁷ Bowler referred to girls training as “prevocational” and focused on “homemaking and allied subjects.”²⁶⁸ These gender-segregated activities continued into the 1940s as well, as

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 2.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Alida C. Bowler, Superintendent, Stewart Indian School, to Ellsworth E.R. Wallace, Director of Counsel, Guidance and Research, March 23, 1938. Box 6, Folder 19. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

demonstrated by the establishment of a “practice cottage” in which female students took turns residing to learn more about homemaking. For periods of one month at a time, female students would live in and care for the practice cottage as if it was their own home.²⁶⁹ In February 1942, a baby doll named Patricia was added to the practice cottage so female students could learn “to care for the baby’s bathing, feeding, [and] laundering for it as would its mother.”²⁷⁰ Spending half of a school day on these types of tasks reinforced white, middle-class gender norms, perpetuated the assimilationist policies of previous years, and reversed the school’s previous policy of reducing the number of hours student engaged in vocational and industrial labor.

Religious instruction also continued to be an important component of student life at the Stewart Indian School in spite of federal officials’ statements about religious liberty. Students recall attending weekly church services, and were also involved in fundraising activities and annual Christmas pageants.²⁷¹ Missionaries remained stationed at Stewart, openly taught Christianity to students, and were even provided with a column in the *Sierra Redskin* newsletter. Former students also recall their forced participation in religious events. According to Albina Redner, “We had to go to church on Sunday or else we had to scrub the latrines...If you don’t want to go to church you don’t have to. But if you don’t, you have to scrub the dorms. That

²⁶⁹ *Sierra Redskins*. “Practice Cottage.” (February 21, 1942). *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

²⁷⁰ *Sierra Redskins*. “Our Baby Project.” (February 2, 1942). *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

²⁷¹ “The Birth of Christ,” (1945). Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

forced us to go to church.”²⁷² JoAnn Nevers similarly recalled church as a mandatory activity for the student body. “We had to go to church, I think it was twice a week...I know everyone would be there.”²⁷³ Nevers didn’t mind going to church, however, because the missionaries were kind and always gave the students snacks. Paiute alumna Beatrice Allen, who entered Stewart in 1940 as a fifth grader and remained at the school until she graduated in 1948, attended the Baptist Church on the school campus and noted that, in addition to church services, students were required to take Bible Study classes and perform in the church choir.²⁷⁴ Roger Sam also attended church as a Stewart student in the 1940s, and recalled “...everybody – no matter what denomination you were – you all end up goin’ to the Baptist. That was the only one there.” And Florence Frances Hooper became Catholic while attending Stewart after a nun told her she must be Catholic because of her middle name. Hooper then formally became Catholic because, as she remembered, it meant that she “belonged somewhere.”²⁷⁵ These accounts suggest New Deal reformers’ attempts to ensure religious liberty for students largely failed at Stewart.

Students who attended Stewart during this period also describe a regimented environment remarkably similar to that of previous decades. Militaristic marching continued to play a prominent role at the school throughout the 1930s and 1940s,

²⁷² Redner, 43.

²⁷³ Nevers, 4.

²⁷⁴ Beatrice Allen. “Natural-Born Care Giver: An Interview with Beatrice Allen. (2017), 7. Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 21, 2017) <https://ia802805.us.archive.org/29/items/BeatriceAllenFinal/Beatrice%20Allen-final.pdf>.

²⁷⁵ Hooper, *Under One Sky*.

despite the efforts of federal officials to end such practices. Daisy Smith was six years old when she arrived at Stewart from Tonopah, Nevada, in 1939, and was initially excited to attend the school along with her brothers and sisters. The school was not what she expected, however, and she recalled thinking, “I couldn’t believe what I had gotten myself into.”²⁷⁶ Smith was issued a “GI uniform,” and quickly learned that students “had to march everywhere.” Florence Frances Hooper also recalled marching to the dining hall and to classrooms every day. Delbert Holley recalled being issued a uniform and being marched around the campus from building to building:

They’d march us over there to watch a movie, or, like each class, they’d put on a play and you’d go over there and watch the play. Then they’d march you to school; they’d march you to eat. Then we had some older boys that would make you walk like you was in the service.²⁷⁷

For Holley, the regimented environment at Stewart proved useful when he went entered military service; he described himself as “pretty well at home” in the military because of his experiences at Stewart.²⁷⁸ And Hilman Tobey, whose time at Stewart bridged the pre- and post-New Deal periods, recalled a morning bugle call and having to wear a uniform. According to Tobey, “We’d drill like soldiers – just like soldiers.”²⁷⁹ Albina Redner likened the campus to a “military base,” and Nevers recalled having to march at the school, wearing “government issue” clothing, and

²⁷⁶ Smith, *Stewart School Walking Trail*.

²⁷⁷ Holley, 2.

²⁷⁸ Holley, 8.

²⁷⁹ Hilman Tobey. Nevada State Museum, *Under One Sky Exhibit*.

having her hair cut short.²⁸⁰ She further described the environment at the Stewart School as, “Real rigid. Cold. Unloving.”²⁸¹

Stewart students experienced this strict, regimented order in other ways that were reminiscent of the school’s earlier years as well. Hygiene remained an issue of continued importance to Stewart faculty and staff, with the underlying message to students being that they were unclean and required constant training and supervision with regard to caring for their bodies.²⁸² In 1935, for example, school officials drafted a conference outline at which a discussion of personal and group hygiene was described as contributing to the creation of a “Happy Adult Life” for students of all ages.²⁸³ Individual student experiences confirm this continued focus on personal hygiene. Florence Frances Hooper shared her experience with Alice Finch, who supervised the girls’ dorm, and had female students line up so she could check them for dirt on their wrists and hands. Hooper recalled that Finch would rub the girls’ wrists until they hurt in an effort to look for dirt, and if she found any, the child would be sent away to re-wash. On one occasion, Hooper was sent back to wash multiple times before she was permitted to march toward the dining hall for breakfast.²⁸⁴ School officials similarly seemed to believe that washing students’ mouths out with

²⁸⁰ Redner, 46; Nevers, 3.

²⁸¹ Nevers, 3.

²⁸² In her 2013 dissertation on the Stewart Indian School, scholar Bonnie Thompson examines the connections between assimilation and Native bodies in detail. See Bonnie Thompson. *Student Bodies: A History of the Stewart Indian School, 1890-1940*. (Arizona State University, 2013) (Accessed December 20, 2017)

https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/125895/content/Thompson_asu_0010E_13545.pdf.

²⁸³ “An Outline of Subject Matter for Education Activities Designed as a Preparation for Happy Adult Life” (February 15, 1935). Box 6, Folder 20. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

²⁸⁴ Hooper, Nevada State Museum, *Under One Sky Exhibit Interview*.

soap might cleanse them of their Indigenous languages. When Delbert Holley and his friends were caught speaking in their Native languages, school employees washed their mouths with lye soap in an effort to force them to stop, a painful experience that belied federal officials' pledges of respect for Indigenous languages and the students who spoke them.

Additionally, while corporal punishment was supposed to be banned from Native American boarding schools beginning in 1931, a number of students recall physical violence as a form of punishment. Hilman Tobey recalled that students "got a whippin'" for running away during his time at the school, similar to what might have happened to students in previous decades. Other former students provided additional accounts of disturbing incidents at the school perpetrated by Stewart staff and students. When Holley attended Stewart, a male employee who took care of boys at the school beat students with a board. Recalled Holley,

If you'd get caught doing something, he'd grab you and take you and bend you over the barber chair. They had a great big old, I don't know what you'd call it, a two by four, and he'd hit you with that thing right on your butt, two or three times. He was a pretty rough guy.²⁸⁵

This same advisor made male students fight one another for extra food. According to Holley,

On the weekend they'd have...extra lunch. If you wanted that lunch, you had to box with a bigger boy. You're little and you're fighting with a bigger boy, boxing, and the bigger boy would knock you around...over a lunch bag. A sack lunch.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Holley, 3.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

Given these events, it is perhaps unsurprising that some older, male students adopted violent tactics with younger boys during Holley's time. In one incident, an older student punched him, knocking his breath away, while another time he was abused by a group of school athletes. Holley recalled of the latter incident: "...if you got caught doing something...you'd crawl between their legs and they had a paddle. Some of them would drill a hole in there. Your butt would be nice and sore when you'd get out from there."²⁸⁷

Joanne Nevers also recalled incidents of corporal punishment while attending Stewart. Though never disciplined herself, she indicated that students were forced to participate in the physical punishment of their peers:

If you did something wrong, what you'd have to do is, everybody would go into the big room, the entrance to the – on the east side there's a big room there, in the office there, if you got into trouble and you did something, you had to go through the paddle line. Everyone, you'd have to get down and crawl through their legs and they'd hit you...with their hand. Yeah, they did that to people. I don't think I went through there. I probably hit some girls, but I don't know. Probably.²⁸⁸

The abuse of Stewart students took other forms as well. During Beatrice Allen's vocational training in the kitchen at Stewart, she and her fellow female classmates were forced to contend with a male cook who routinely engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior by looking up young girls' dresses while they stood on ladders and stirred large pots of cocoa. Recalled Allen, to reach into the pots, "you have to get on this ladder to stir the thing and we wore dresses, and he would stand

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Nevers, 9.

there and look [up] at us like this.”²⁸⁹ Rolling her eyes upward as she described the cook’s actions, Allen added, “...he must of known ...you have to stoop over to do that,” meaning to stir the large pots, “and I didn’t like that.”²⁹⁰

Whether Stewart administrators were aware of the instances of abuse described by these former students is unclear, though they did know about and report on other incidents that occurred on campus. In October 1935, school social worker Lucile Hamner reported on two troubling incidents. After noting the many runaways from the school that month, Hamner noted the “serious emotional repercussions among the girls” that resulted from the marriage of a female student to a “white missionary.”²⁹¹ The ages of these two individuals was not provided, though Hamner observed that their relationship was “an affair of longstanding.” She similarly relayed that, “after a series of behavior problems and temper tantrums” were observed in a 13-year old female student, the child was discovered to be pregnant. Hamner relayed no further details regarding this case, writing, “Necessary arrangements for her care have been made.”²⁹² Tellingly, these incidents were listed under the heading “Student behavior problems,” suggesting that school administrators were not at fault for permitting either of these situations to occur.²⁹³

Even when school officials did respond to abuse at Stewart, however, their actions were problematic and occurred only in response to the complaints of Native

²⁸⁹ Allen, 5.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Lucile Hamner. “Monthly Report.” (October 1935) General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

parents. In February 1940, Ross Wiley, then the acting superintendent at Stewart, informed Willard Beatty, the Director of Education at the Office of Indian Affairs, that a Shoshone teacher named Bert F. Williams had been removed from the Stewart School and transferred to the Reese River day school after he “rather severely manhandled” a female student.²⁹⁴ Astonishingly, after noting that Williams had confided in him his belief that women and girls were “a somewhat inferior portion of the human species,” Wiley referred to Williams as “a young Indian man of real ability and promise,” and suggested that his troubles likely stemmed from his absent mindedness and the general difficulty of working with middle-school aged children.²⁹⁵ The solution to this situation, as devised by Stewart administrators, was to move Williams from Stewart to the Reese River Day School, where he would still be working with children.

Unsurprisingly, two months later Wiley wrote a second letter to Carson Agency Superintendent Don C. Foster concerning Williams’ behavior toward students at his new post. At the Reese River Day School, Williams had apparently taken it upon himself to institute a “regular system of bodily inspection” on female students after one female student had developed sores on her body.²⁹⁶ Williams forced at least two young women to undress and lay upon a table, where he searched for impetigo sores on both of them, and attempted to determine whether one of the

²⁹⁴ Ross B. Wiley to Williams W. Beatty. (February 7, 1940). Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ross B. Wiley to Don C. Foster. (April 18, 1940) Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

young women suffered from gonorrhea.²⁹⁷ After determining that the young woman was menstruating and not suffering from a sexually transmitted disease, he allowed the young women to dress.²⁹⁸ According to Wiley, Williams “stated very emphatically that so far as he was concerned the fact that they were females meant absolutely nothing whatsoever,” and, appallingly, that he (Wiley) and social worker Lucile Hamner took him at his word.²⁹⁹ The parents of the girls involved disagreed, however, and levied a formal complaint regarding Williams’ behavior. At a meeting between school officials and members of local Native communities, most of which was conducted in Shoshone and thus unknowable in its content to the school officials, it was decided that Williams’ inspections of female students would cease, but that he would remain in his position at the school.³⁰⁰

These incidents suggest a broader pattern of abuse at Stewart in which school administrators were complicit, and which may have had deeper impacts on the school in other ways as well during the 1930s and 1940s. Students who attended the school during this period do not describe a protective relationship with older children as students did in decades’ past, instead depicting older students as their tormentors. This may have resulted from the examples set by abusive staff members who set the tone at the school, but could also have been impacted and intensified by the types of students sought out for enrollment by school administrators. According to a mid-

²⁹⁷ Marshall Woodward, Farm Agent, Fallon Reservation to Don C. Foster, Superintendent, Carson Agency (April 14, 1940). National Archives at St. Louis. Bert F. Williams Personnel File.

²⁹⁸ Bert Williams, Teacher to Don C. Foster, Superintendent, Carson Agency. (April 17, 1940). National Archives at St. Louis. Bert F. Williams Personnel File.

²⁹⁹ Ross B. Wiley to Don C. Foster. (April 18, 1940).

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

1940s informational report on the school, Stewart primarily enrolled “children from broken homes, orphans, and children who lived in isolated districts, or where vocational training is not available.”³⁰¹ Each of these groups of children was vulnerable to predatory behavior, based on their family situation or the distance from family members who could advocate on their behalf. It is therefore unsurprising that school officials only intervened to address an abusive situation at the behest of parents who lived in close proximity to the Reese River Day School and had ready access to their children.

These enrollment patterns were also impacted by the work of social workers at the school, particularly that of Lucile Hamner, who worked at Stewart throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Hamner traveled frequently throughout Nevada and neighboring states, visiting and evaluating Native families to determine which children should attend local public schools and which should enroll at Stewart. She kept detailed reports on these families, many of which perpetuated the notion that Native children would be better cared for in schools like Stewart or in foster homes. Often, Hamner’s judgments were based on the notion that Native children who did not live within an idealized nuclear structure should be removed from their families and placed at Stewart. Reflecting on her experiences in a 1981 letter to the Nevada State Museum, Hamner recalled her tenure at the school as a “very busy and exciting time” when the employment of social workers at the school reflected “a change of philosophy

³⁰¹ “Location and Tribal Origin of Pupils.” (1940s) Box 6, Folder 19. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

regarding Indian affairs.”³⁰² Her attitudes also, however, perpetuated erroneous notions about the inferiority of Native parents and thus justified the removal and assimilation of Indigenous children.

Such assumptions are found throughout the records she maintained on students who enrolled at Stewart. Hamner included information about all pupils on a master list of current students that featured their names and a sentence or two about their family lives, and also separate, detailed analyses of students themselves.³⁰³ Hamner created these lists as a means of maintaining a “quick reference” guide to enrolled students, and added to or subtracted from them throughout the year as students arrived and departed.³⁰⁴ The entries on these lists are rarely positive in their assessments of Native families, rely on rumors in their appraisals of parental fitness, and do not consider how socio-economic factors or U.S. governmental policies might have negatively impacted those she evaluates. Entries like these represent the general nature of the descriptions included on these master lists:

[Female Student] – parents separated and each remarried. Usually lives with father or father’s parents under fairly good conditions at Mina, occasionally with mother, who is now in Schurz and having trouble with present husband. Mother’s reputation is not particularly good, and sometimes neglects children.

[Male Student] – father is not a good provider, has been known to desert family. Large family of children. Mother a poor housekeeper and no force of personality. Two children have died of TB, one about two weeks ago. Next older brother is in Elko school after holdup in Lovelock. Children in family

³⁰² “Lucile Hamner to Edward C. Johnson, Research Associate,” Nevada State Museum, February 17, 1981. Nevada State Museum Collection.

³⁰³ Hamner did not, however, record the tribal affiliations of Stewart students, though she did list the specific cities and towns in which their families resided.

³⁰⁴ “Enrollment.” (undated) Box 6, Folder 19. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

have considerable artistic ability but are so self-conscious and retiring that they do not respond well in school.³⁰⁵

This disdain for Native American families – down to the alleged failings of their personalities and reputations – is prominent in Hamner’s assessments. In her lengthier descriptions of students’ family backgrounds, she chronicles the supposed mental and moral deficiencies of Native parents whose children attended the Stewart School. In some of the cases Hamner reviewed, this made sense, particularly when she was writing about parents who were incarcerated for committing crimes and were thus unavailable to care for their children. But in others, her focus on the failings of Stewart parents seems grounded in long-term stereotypes about the supposed sexual promiscuity, laziness, and lack of intelligence of Native peoples, as well as the impacts of these flaws on Native children. In writing about a set of siblings, for example, whom she described as “rather slow mentally,” Hamner emphasized the multiple marriages of their mother, her inability to care for her children during the summer, as well as accounts of her alleged heavy drinking.³⁰⁶ In passing, she mentions that the children’s mother works out of town and cannot leave her job for the entire summer, presumably because she needed the money to care for her family, and laments that the children could not be placed in the custody of a white man and his family, who, in contrast to the children’s biological mother, “seemed to be

³⁰⁵ “Confidential Information for Advisors About Home Situations of New Students.” (undated) Box 6, Folder 19. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco). The names of these students are withheld due to privacy concerns.

³⁰⁶ “Male Student, (May 25, 1940),” Box 6, Folder 19. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco). The names of the children and their mother are withheld for privacy concerns.

reliable, steady people.”³⁰⁷ Based on this account, which is similar in tone to numerous others written by Hamner, the siblings’ mother was unsuitable because of her multiple marriages, need to work, and alleged alcoholism. Her “rather slow” children suffered because of her failings, and would thus be better off under the care of a white family that could provide a more stable environment for them. Assisting the mother or finding a way to reunite her family, was not, according to these notes, viewed as a viable option worth pursuing.

Further, while Hamner on at least one occasion expressed concern about the negative impacts on students who stayed at boarding schools for long periods of time without seeing their family, she also prevented students and parents from being reunited over students’ summer breaks. In June 1934, she lamented that many of the children who had gone home that summer had not left the school for many years, and that they would likely have some “rather acute problems of adjustment” that could have been avoided had they “kept in touch with one another through the years.”³⁰⁸ She further relayed that one female student could not find her home when she returned to her local community, and was “embarrassed and unhappy” at the joy her mother expressed upon having her home.³⁰⁹ Nearly a year later, however, Hamner seemingly reversed herself regarding the importance of parent-child contact. Writing in May of 1935, she argued, “It has been necessary to refuse several parents the right

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Lucile Hamner. “June 1934 Social Worker Report.” Box 11, Folders 1 and 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

to take their children home for vacation because of the especially bad home situations.”³¹⁰ The circumstances surrounding Hamner’s refusal to allow some students to return home is unclear, but this incident seems to undermine her commitment to ensuring that Stewart parents and students remained in contact.

“To tell you the truth, I don’t like you”³¹¹

It is important to note, however, that Indigenous parents did fight back against efforts to remove children from their homes during this period, and also expressed their frustrations with other OIA policies as well. Much to Hamner’s annoyance, some parents continued to hide their children from school officials or refuse to permit them to return to the school. In 1934, after an outbreak of polio in which one student died from the disease, school officials found it difficult to enroll children at Stewart. Some prospective students, according to Hamner, were enrolled in local public schools by their parents, while others refused to send their children to school out fear that they, too, might succumb to the disease.³¹² In 1935, she faced a similar enrollment problem, and noted that she was able to bring five missing children back to the school, though others remained at large.³¹³ In another, racially tinged example, Hamner raised the case of “an attractive thirteen year old girl” who was enrolled at

³¹⁰ Lucile Hamner. “May 1935 Social Worker Report.” Box 11, Folders 1 and 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³¹¹ Beatrice Allen, 5.

³¹² Lucile Hamner. “October 31, 1934 Report.” Box 11, Folders 1 and 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³¹³ Lucile Hamner. “October 1935 Report.” Box 11, Folders 1 and 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

Stewart and whose stepfather sought custody of the child and to dis-enroll her from the school. Noting that the reputation of this student's mother "has never been good," she asserted that the girl's stepfather, "a negro man about whom there are very unpleasant reports" and "who claims to be three-fourths Blackhawk Indian," had asked that the school "turn the girl completely over into his care."³¹⁴ Hamner did not specify why this man was an unsuitable parent or provide details about his alleged unpleasantness, only that he was fighting the school in court and that a U.S. attorney was "enlisted" to aid school officials.³¹⁵

Great Basin tribal nations also used their voices to oppose the OIA's removal of Alida Bowler from her position as Carson Agency Superintendent in 1939. Bowler, who was in charge of the Stewart School and administering federal policy in sections of Nevada and California, was a popular figure among Native nations in these regions; she traveled frequently to reservations and smaller Native communities and advocated for Indigenous political rights. In 1939, however, Collier removed Bowler from her position after she sided with the Pyramid Lake Paiute tribe in its effort to evict white settlers from its land, against Nevada Senator Pat McCarran.³¹⁶ In response to this decision, three tribal councils sent letters to John Collier opposing her removal and praising her abilities. The seven council members of the Walker River

³¹⁴ Lucile Hamner. "April 1935 Report." Box 11, Folders 1 and 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Collier apparently took these steps under pressure from Senator McCarran, who wanted the land in question taken from the Pyramid Lake Paiute and officially granted to white Nevadans. See Thompson, 43.

Paiute Tribe of Nevada signed a letter stating that Bowler “has always been a friend of the Indians,” and “has done everything she can to help us make use of the new deal for the Indians.”³¹⁷ The membership council of the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone tribe also sent a letter in which it shared its “regret” in losing Bowler, writing “Her work as our leader for the past five years will be long remembered by the people of this reservation.”³¹⁸ The Bishop Indian Community Council in Bishop, California, requested that Bowler remain in her position, noting that they would “hate to lose her because she has done so much for the Indians...and has grown very dear to us.”³¹⁹ Though Bowler was replaced, these letters from tribal communities that provided Stewart with the majority of its student body during the 1930s are an important form of protest.

Stewart students also found ways to register their displeasure with school policies and rules during this period, and were adept at finding ways to change the situations in which they were placed. Because of the harassment she described while working in the kitchen at Stewart, Beatrice Allen pushed for a different detail to escape a potentially dangerous situation. When confronted by the abusive cook about why she took this step, Allen told the cook, to his face, “To tell you the truth, I don’t like you.”³²⁰ In response to this brave action, the cook chose not to oppose her

³¹⁷ Walker River Paiute Tribe of Nevada to John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. (December 5, 1939). National Archives at St. Louis, Alida Bowler Personnel File.

³¹⁸ Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe to John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. (December 8, 1939). National Archives at St. Louis, Alida Bowler Personnel File.

³¹⁹ Bishop Indian Community Council to John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. (September 25, 1940.) National Archives at St. Louis, Alida Bowler Personnel File.

³²⁰ Beatrice Allen, 5.

transfer request. Andy Allen, who entered Stewart in 1945, also switched his vocational training at the school, though not because of an abusive employee. While his father had requested that school officials train him as a butcher, Allen was interested in electricity, and after consistently requesting to be transferred, he eventually landed in the electrical shop where he learned the trade of his choosing.³²¹ Delbert Holley repeatedly ran away from Stewart to escape the brutality he experienced there, and eventually transferred to the Phoenix Indian School, which he preferred to Stewart because he had more opportunities to earn money there, which he placed in the school bank and spent as he wished.³²²

Students disobeyed the rules in other ways as well, sometimes in a playful or personal manner. For Florence Frances Hooper, jumping from bed to bed behind the back of the girls' matron was a delightful rebellion made all the better by the fact that she never got caught.³²³ Other students secretly invited members of the opposite sex into their dorm rooms. Madeline Anthony and Anna Rose Snooks were two students caught in such an incident in 1948 and were forced to make a statement on the matter, which made its way into their permanent student records.³²⁴ And still others found ways to reject Stewart through finding other opportunities that better suited their professional and economic goals. Writing on behalf of her daughter Ruby, Vina

³²¹ Andy Allen, Stewart School Walking Trail. "Agriculture." (Accessed December 8, 2017). <http://stewartindianschool.com/walking-trail/>.

³²² Holley, 2.

³²³ Hooper, Under One Sky.

³²⁴ "Statement of Anna Rose Snooks and Madeline Anthony." (May 10, 1948) Box 5. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

Williams informed Stewart officials in 1943 that Ruby did not like Stewart and planned to get a job in the defense industry instead of returning to school.³²⁵

Students also found ways to promote their cultures and capabilities, and in doing so countered the assimilationist practices that remained common at the Stewart School during this period. In 1936, class president John Henry delivered a commencement speech in which he detailed the future plans of that year's graduating class, and demonstrated that not all students planned to utilize the gender-based training to which they were subjected. Of the 30 students finishing their tenure at Stewart, he noted the following:

Fifteen of my class have decided to seek more advanced training in their chosen work...Ethel Andrews, Evalina Anthony, and Julia Harrison are to enter nurses training, Mae Knight to take a course in cosmetology, Rosa Steele to enter the University of Nevada to take teacher's training. Juanita Strozzi is to study art at the Santa Fe Indian School, Ralph Aquilar to take a commercial course in an Oakland Business College. Trinidad Dupree and Lester Gemill are to enter the San Jose teacher's College to train as teachers, Lester as a teacher of music and Trinidad as an instructor in mill and carpentry work. Woodrow Samalar and I are to continue training in automotive work. William Hunter is to take a civil engineering course at the University of New Mexico. Francis Shaw [is] to continue training in electrical work. Dick Wright [is] to enter Riverside Junior College to receive training as a director of physical education. Several boys will work on the P.W.A. [Public Works Administration] jobs next year following their chosen vocations of carpenters, plumbers, and painters. Four boys will be added to the staff of employees of

³²⁵ Vina Williams to Ernest C. Mueller. (September 1943). Box 11, Folder 3. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco). Ruby Williams was not the only student to take advantage of the new job opportunities open to women during the Second World War. Stewart officials were forced to inform individuals seeking domestic employees from the school that they were unable to place female students in the traditional domestic outing programs during the war years because many young women were able to find better paying jobs in defense-related industries. For example, see Ralph M. Gelvin, Superintendent to Mrs. William McNight. (May 16, 1944) Box 8, Folder 14. Records of the Educational Division. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

this school, Thomas Kniffen as one of the assistants to the farmer, George Wessel as an assistant plumber.³²⁶

Ethel Steele also delivered an address at the 1936 commencement, but rather than focus on the accomplishments of individual students, her speech emphasized the historical contributions of Indigenous peoples and demanded their recognition:

In listing the contributions of the Indians to civilization, perhaps the greatest of all is the American idea of government, which is distinctly Indian and which has taken possession of almost the entire world. The ideas of government for the people, by the people, and of the people, in addition to equality, liberty, and freedom are strictly ideas taken from the new world. All of these existed in America long before Columbus discovered the tiny islands of the Caribbean Sea.³²⁷

She continued,

Few people realize that the Mayan Indians were the first to use zero in mathematics. It is considered one of the most outstanding inventions of world civilization. The decimal system in mathematics was used as well as an intricate calendar system based on scientifically accurate astronomical knowledge, the latter being understood by the entire Maya, Aztec, and Inca nations, though it presents an involved puzzle to most people.³²⁸

And finally, Steele asserted,

Had it not been for the Indian trails and much used routes of travel, the occupation of the North American continent would have taken a much longer time. These trails along difficult places marked the routes of the westward moving pioneers, and the same is true of the portages connecting the natural waterways. The buffalo trails became Indian trails and they in turn became the trade trails...The trading posts reached by these trails were on the sites of former Indian villages and many of these have grown into some of our most modern cities...The Indians are as much a part of this great country as the rivers, the deserts, the mighty mountains. The Indian – if you seek his monument look about you.³²⁹

³²⁶ John Henry. "Commencement Address." (May 29, 1936) *Nevada State Museum Stewart Indian School Collection*.

³²⁷ Ethel L. Steele. "The American Indian's Contribution to Civilization." (May 29, 1936). *Nevada State Museum Stewart Indian School Collection*.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

These declarations regarding the value, expertise, and capabilities of Native peoples illustrate some of the ways Stewart students asserted themselves during the period between the late 1920s and the late 1940s, even as the school continued to engage in assimilationist practices. And while it is important to acknowledge that many Stewart students have fond memories of their time at the school, it is equally important to recognize that school officials remained tethered to the assimilationist policies initiated when the school opened in 1890, including a regimented, militarized environment, Christian religious instruction, gender-based vocational training, and the restructuring and reordering of Indigenous family life. Though a renewed appreciation for Indigenous cultures and crafts were also present during these years, the history of the Stewart Indian School challenges the notion that the reforms enacted during this era dramatically reshaped the assimilationist nature of individual boarding schools.

After the end of the Second World War, however, significant changes did occur at the Stewart Indian School, once again at the behest of the federal government. Worried about the financial burden of maintaining its treaty obligations with Indigenous nations, federal officials unilaterally decided to terminate all such responsibilities and to integrate Native peoples into cities and communities across the country. A problem with this policy, however, was that not all Native nations, most prominently the Navajo, were, according to the paternalistic reasoning of the U.S. government, prepared for such a change. As a means of rapidly preparing the Navajo

for termination, the Indian Bureau established the Navajo Special Program, which mandated the removal of Navajo children and teenagers from their homes and their transfer to select Indian boarding schools across the country, including the Stewart Indian School. The objectives of this program were clear: Navajo children would be forced to rapidly assimilate into modern American life by learning English and a vocational skill, and, in the process be forced to abandon their cultures and lands. In terminating the Navajo nations' treaty rights, the U.S. government thus abandoned any pretext of reform, and unabashedly advocated the assimilationist practices that drove the creation of the Indian boarding school system in the late nineteenth century.

Chapter Four: “We will tell you about our school at Stewart:”³³⁰

Assimilation and the Navajo Special Program, 1946-1959

In the fall of 1947, Louise Nez, a young Navajo woman, was sent by her father to purchase apples at a local trading post on their reservation. As Nez recalled in an essay she wrote several months later while attending the Stewart Indian School, “There was a school bus at the trading post. A man told me the children were going to school. They were leaving soon. Did I want to go to school?” After learning she required permission from a family member to enroll in school, Nez found her aunt, who was also at the trading post, and received her consent to leave for school that same day. Wrote Nez, “I got on the bus. I left the saddled horse there at the trading post and the apples.” Nez traveled first to a school in Fort Wingate, New Mexico, and from there to the Stewart Indian School. Of her reaction to Stewart Nez wrote, “I liked the school when I saw it first. After I stayed here a while I liked it better. I like school life very well.” She also added, “...I like home, too, and remember everyone there.”³³¹

For the administrators of the Special Navajo Program, which was established in 1946 to rapidly educate and assimilate Navajo children between the ages of 12 and 18, Nez’s story was viewed as proof that Navajo youth and their families enthusiastically embraced the educational program, even if it meant taking Navajo

³³⁰ Rose Williams. “My Story.” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 No. 1 (October 3, 1955), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³³¹ Louise Nez’s essay is quoted from, Hildegard Thompson. *The Navajo’s Long Walk for Education: A History of Navajo Education*. (Tsaile: Navajo Community College Press, 1975), 97.

children thousands of miles from home for years at a time. In fact, this story was used twice by one of the key architects of the program, Hildegard Thompson, to illustrate this point, in a 1948 report on the program at Stewart, and in her 1975 book on the history of Navajo education. However, there is more to this story than Louise Nez's short essay about her experience. Thompson's 1948 report on the implementation of the Special Navajo Program at the Stewart School reprinted Nez's essay in full and praised the new student for her progress in the program. Also noted, however, were the objections of Nez's immediate family, which had not authorized her departure or agreed to her placement at Stewart. Thompson wrote, "...her family is putting pressure on her to return home. I have taken up her case with Mrs. Tomlinson, social worker, and she says she [Nez] is not needed at home. I doubt if Louise can withstand family pressure."³³²

As this incident suggests, the relationship between Navajo families and boarding school officials was complicated, and, as in previous years, was built on the assumption that the latter knew what was best for Native children. The Navajo Special Program echoes previous chapters in the history of Native American boarding schools in other ways as well. Established to address the educational needs of large numbers of Navajo children with little or no access to schools, the Special Program was framed as a humanitarian endeavor designed to help Navajo children acclimate to modern American life. Its architects repeatedly, and incorrectly, suggested that

³³² Hildegard Thompson to Willard W. Beatty. (April 22, 1948). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 5. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

Navajo parents had prevented their children from obtaining educations, and that they only became interested in sending them to school following World War II, during which large numbers of Navajo men had joined the U.S. military. In their depictions of the Special Navajo Program, its administrators also ignored its connections with federal efforts to terminate the U.S. government's treaty obligations with all Native peoples and the simultaneous drive to relocate them from reservations to urban areas.

In reality, the Navajo Special Program, as administered at the Stewart Indian School and ten other Native American boarding schools between 1946 and 1959, was closely connected with the U.S. government's termination and relocation policies, as well as continuing settler colonial efforts to erase Native cultures and connections with tribal lands. In many ways, the implementation of the Navajo Special Program also mirrored the assimilationist practices undertaken at boarding schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Students were removed from their families and parents were forced to sign contracts permitting BIA officials to enroll children in schools located hundreds of miles from home. Students were required to learn and speak English, were placed into gendered vocational training, and guided toward career paths that focused exclusively on menial labor with little hope of advancement. Navajo Special Program officials also contemplated different ways to compel Navajo parents to send their children to the schools, considered lowering the age of prospective students who could enroll in the program, and consistently expressed low expectations regarding the intellectual capabilities of Navajo students. Special Program students were also put on display for local non-Native community members

and U.S. officials as a means of demonstrating their progress, and were placed in jobs in local cities upon graduation, rather than sent back to their reservations in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

However, as during previous decades, Navajo students and parents, along with the local BIA officials charged with implementing the Navajo Program, consistently surprised and irritated federal officials with their opposition to certain aspects of federal plans. As enrollment efforts expanded at Stewart and other schools throughout the 1950s, many parents simply refused to allow their children to return to school after the end of their summer vacations. Navajo students departed Stewart on their own as well during the school year, for work, to join the military, or simply to return to their homes and families. As in decades' past, other students pushed back against school officials' low expectations by stating their desire for further education, or by simply stating their dislike for the Navajo Special Program. Members of the Navajo Nation also showed their frustration with the program by building their own schools closer to home and establishing a college scholarship program to encourage young people to continue their educations on their own terms. Native Nevadan communities were also unhappy that the number of Navajo students at Stewart exceeded those from Nevada, and challenged school officials to find ways to direct more resources toward their children. And, while officials at the Stewart Indian School generally executed the Navajo Special Program as federal officials intended, there were exceptions that drew notice from officials in Washington, D.C.

This period also reflects the beginnings of other changes at the Stewart Indian School. Though non-Navajo students who attended the school between 1947 and 1959 were similarly impacted by the federal policies of termination and relocation, and continued to be subjected to the assimilationist rhetoric and low expectations of the past, there were also important differences in the ways this group of students experienced daily life at Stewart. Native Nevadan students were permitted to visit Carson City on weekends, where they could watch movies and visit local shops, and the student council administered some aspects of student discipline amongst the non-Navajo members of the student body. Further, Native Nevadan tribes requested that Stewart faculty revise school curriculum to meet state standards and called for the establishment an advisory board, comprised of school employees and Native tribal members, to make policy recommendations. These events foreshadowed further changes that occurred at the school during the 1960s and 1970s as Indigenous communities increasingly protested against federal policies and pressed for self-determination in the realm of Indian education.

*“The only questions are: What kind of assimilation and how fast?”*³³³

Following the end of the Second World War, relations between the U.S. government and Indigenous nations living within the United States changed considerably. Beginning in 1947, federal officials focused on reducing the size of the federal government, which had grown dramatically during the 1930s and 1940s, and cutting expenditures where possible. These changes were also influenced by the onset

³³³ Quoted in Prucha, *The Great Father*, 344.

of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and the perceived need by U.S. officials to focus federal monies on maintaining military superiority over its new rival. There was also a growing perception that the Indian New Deal was misguided and ineffective, particularly its efforts to bolster supposedly disappearing tribal cultures and outdated forms of Native self-governance. Additionally, as anti-Communist sentiment intensified in the U.S., Indian New Deal policies were increasingly framed as “collectivist” and un-American, and thus in need of dissolution.³³⁴ Each of these factors figured into the embrace of termination and relocation, and the development of the Navajo Program.

In 1947, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Zimmerman Jr. was the first to suggest that altering the relationship between the U.S. government and Native American nations was a way to save money and further integrate Native populations into mainstream U.S. society. In Congressional testimony that year, Zimmerman indicated that the cost of the services provided to tribes by the BIA could be dramatically reduced by limiting the number of Native peoples eligible for federal dollars. Based on their “degree of acculturation” and economic circumstances, he asserted that some tribes could be immediately denied treaty-mandated compensation, that a second group could stop receiving federal services within ten years, and that others required longer-term assistance before BIA support was withdrawn.³³⁵

³³⁴ Reyner and Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, 232.

³³⁵ Prucha, 343. During this same period, the U.S. government also established the Indian Claims Commission (ICC) to resolve disputes with Native nations over land, treaty violations, and property and economic issues. Active between 1946 and 1978, claims filed through the ICC pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into Native communities, but were also used in conjunction with termination efforts to reduce and erase federal treaty obligations. See Prucha, *The Great Father*, 341.

Zimmerman's ideas were further embraced by the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch, generally referred to as the Hoover Commission, which was established in 1947 to recommend cuts in federal spending. The Hoover Commission featured a task force on Indian affairs, which eschewed the Indian New Deal and embraced the erroneous notion that Indigenous cultures were vanishing and that assimilation was the only way forward for Native peoples. This taskforce therefore argued that because "Traditional tribal organization was smashed a generation ago" and "Americans of Indian descent who are still thought of as 'Indian' are...not three-tenths of one percent of the total population...Assimilation cannot be prevented."³³⁶ Accordingly, its members further asserted, "The only questions are: What kind of assimilation and how fast?"³³⁷ Such rhetoric, which parroted that of the nineteenth century U.S. officials who established the Indian boarding school system, was embraced in the Hoover Commission's 1948 report, which recommended that all Native communities throughout the United States be fully integrated into U.S. society, and that all social programs for Native Americans be placed under the control of state and local governments. Such an approach would thus absolve the federal government of the financial and administrative 'burdens' of managing Indian affairs and reduce the size of the BIA in the process.

³³⁶ Quoted in Prucha, *The Great Father*, 344.

³³⁷ Ibid.

Dillon Myer, appointed Indian Affairs Commissioner in 1950, readily advanced these ideas.³³⁸ And though Congress did not officially terminate U.S. treaty obligations until 1953, Myer pushed the BIA in this direction throughout his three-year tenure as Indian Commissioner by espousing rhetoric that connected the termination of federal treaty obligations with freedom and liberty for Native Americans, and relocation programs with reduced expenditures for the U.S. government. In a 1953 memo on these subjects, Myer asserted that relocation programs would “decrease the necessity for services in the way of schools, hospitals and other services now being provided mainly on reservations,” and thus save the federal government money.³³⁹ He further noted, “...I believe very strongly that time is past due when many Indians should be released from all types of federal supervision...I strongly feel that the trusteeship and other special forms of government services to the Indians are holding the Indians back politically, socially, and economically.”³⁴⁰

The termination of Native treaty rights and U.S. treaty obligations formally became law on August 1, 1953, through House Concurrent Resolution 108. The Resolution framed termination as an expansion of Indigenous rights, stating that

³³⁸ At the time, Myer was widely admired for his administrative skill in maneuvering through federal bureaucracies and rapidly executing policy changes: he was the individual charged with establishing concentration camps for Japanese Americans beginning in 1942, and rapidly dismantling them after the end of World War II. Kenneth R. Philip. “Dillon S. Myer and the Advent of Termination: 1950-1953,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 19, no. 1 (January 1988), 38-39.

³³⁹ Memo quoted in, Dillon Myer. “Oral History Interview with Dillon S. Myer.” (July 7, 1970), Chapter IX. Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum. (Accessed March 9, 2018) <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/myerds3.htm>.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

Native Americans were henceforth “entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States,” and that they were now “freed from Federal supervision and control.”³⁴¹ In practice, Resolution 108 began the process of nullifying almost two hundred years of treaties negotiated between the U.S. government and hundreds of sovereign Native nations.³⁴² Two weeks later, in a further abrogation of federal treaty obligations, Congress passed Public Law 280, which gave states jurisdiction “over offenses committed by or against Indians in Indian country” in California, Nebraska, and parts of Minnesota, Oregon, and Wisconsin.³⁴³

One year later, the BIA formally established a relocation program designed to resettle Native Americans into urban areas throughout the United States. U.S. officials described relocation as a plan designed to boost Native employment by encouraging individuals to leave their reservations for cities, where they would allegedly have better employment and housing prospects. Limited funds were provided to assist those who moved from their reservations and relocation offices

³⁴¹ Quoted in Francis Paul Prucha. “House Concurrent Resolution 108,” In *Documents of United States Indian Policy*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 233. In this initial legislation, five groups were singled out for immediate termination: The Flathead Tribe of Montana, the Klamath Tribe of Oregon, the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin, the Potawatomi Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and members of the Chippewa Tribe living on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota.

³⁴² One of the earliest examples of this nullification of treaty rights concerns the Menominee tribe in Wisconsin. Under pressure from the BIA, the Menominee General Council agreed to accept some aspects of termination in exchange for financial compensation. However, the U.S. Congress legislated the tribe’s rapid termination, based on the idea that its assimilation would occur quickly and serve as an example for future such actions. As a result of this legislation, the Menominee lost control of their land and were denied annuities the U.S. government had previously been obliged to provide. Nicholas C. Peroff. *Menominee Drums: Tribal Termination and Restoration, 1954-1974*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 52-55, 78-81, 163.

³⁴³ “Public Law 280,” *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 234.

were established in large U.S. cities, including Los Angeles and Chicago. In fiscal year 1954 alone, 2,163 Native Americans from around the country received relocation assistance.³⁴⁴ BIA-operated boarding schools also encouraged graduates to seek jobs in cities, rather than on their reservations, as a means of expanding the relocation program. And while this program was supposedly created to advance the economic opportunities of Native peoples, it was also part of the renewed assimilationist agenda of the U.S. government. By encouraging Native Americans to leave their reservations and integrate with non-Native populations, their connections to their lands, languages, and cultures decreased significantly. Relocation, combined with the termination policy, was thus another means for the U.S. government to pursue its settler colonial agenda. And, as with previous federal actions in this regard, these steps were taken without consulting the Native populations they affected.

The ideas that led to the termination and relocation policies also influenced the creation of the Navajo Special Program in the late 1940s. U.S. officials described the Navajo Nation as unprepared for termination, given the poor infrastructure on its reservations and the lack of adequate educational facilities for young people. That these situations resulted from federal removal and allotment policies were not acknowledged; rather, BIA officials blamed the poor conditions on Navajo reservations squarely on the Navajo. The Special Program was also connected by its administrators with the experiences of Navajo veterans who fought in World War II,

³⁴⁴ Prucha. "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1954," In *Documents of United States Indian Policy*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 237.

whom they described as suddenly realizing the importance of education for Navajo youth.³⁴⁵ This oversimplification erroneously casts the Navajo as anti-education, and ignores the failure of the U.S. government to establish adequate education facilities within Navajo territory. It further disregards the underlying mission of the Navajo Special Program, namely the rapid assimilation and integration of Navajo children into non-Native communities by removing them from their homes, teaching them English and non-Native values, and providing them with jobs in urban areas away from their reservations upon graduation. Once properly assimilated into broader U.S. society, the U.S. government could terminate its treaty obligations with the Navajo. From its foundations to its administration, the Special Navajo Program relied heavily upon these assimilationist practices, and utilized off-reservation boarding schools to accomplish its objectives.

“Evidence of our desire to progress as citizens of the United States”³⁴⁶

The Navajo Special Program was based not only on the educational needs of the Navajo Nation, but also on specific treaty obligations carried by the United States government. An 1868 treaty between the U.S. and the Navajo guaranteed that the federal government would educate Navajo children; specifically, that the U.S. would

³⁴⁵ Hildegard Thompson, who served as Director of Navajo Education for the BIA between 1949 and 1952, continued to espouse this notion in a book on Navajo Education she published in 1975. She further argued that the Navajo Special Program was partially a reaction to the closure of some schools during World War II, but did not address the failure of the U.S. government to provide adequate educational opportunities to Navajo students in previous decades. Thompson, *The Navajos' Long Walk for Education*, 74-75. The title of this work appears to be a horrific pun on the 1864 forced march and relocation of thousands of Navajo from their tribal lands by the U.S. government.

³⁴⁶ Peter Iverson. *Diné: A History of the Navajos*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 191.

provide one teacher and one classroom for every thirty Navajo pupils.³⁴⁷ Various church groups and a limited number of BIA-employed teachers ran the earliest schools on Navajo reservations. But, within just over a decade of signing the treaty, the U.S. government had shifted its emphasis from local educational opportunities to off-reservation boarding schools located far from Navajo lands.

Navajo parents, like other Native parents forced to contend with the off-reservation boarding school system, were reluctant to send their children to schools located far from their reservations, fearing fractures in their children's connections with their communities and religious traditions.³⁴⁸ Parents were further concerned about the brutal treatment of Native children and the frequent epidemics at boarding schools. Unlike some other Native communities, however, many Navajo were able to successfully resist the efforts of BIA officials to forcibly remove their children from their homes. Historian Peter Iverson recounts how Navajo communities actively opposed BIA officials who attempted to take their children to boarding schools, including one instance in which community members took an Indian Agent hostage for several days rather than allow him access to their children.³⁴⁹ In response, federal officials opened a limited number of local schools and established boarding schools closer to the Navajo Nation, though these institutions faced similar resistance.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ Alicia Ault. "The Navajo Nation Treaty of 1868 Lives on at the American Indian Museum." *Smithsonian.com*. (Accessed March 11, 2018) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/old-paper-navajo-nation-treaty-1868-lives-american-indian-museum-180968235/>.

³⁴⁸ Iverson, 86.

³⁴⁹ Iverson, 90.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 91-93.

This opposition to the removal of Navajo children and their placement in boarding schools did not, however, mean that Navajo communities opposed all efforts to educate their children. Rather, it signified an opposition to assimilation and the removal of Navajo children from their lands and families and a more localized reading of the educational obligations set forth in the 1868 treaty. In 1945, the Navajo Tribal Council passed a resolution designed to improve access to education, and highlighted the Navajo contribution to the war effort as proof of their nation's capabilities and value to the United States: "Our record of military service and war industry, together with our wish to be self-supporting, are evidence of our desire to progress as citizens of the United States." In terms of education, the resolution noted, "...our people are realizing that education like the white man's is needed to learn better farming, to learn how to improve livestock, to learn to improve health, and to learn trades."³⁵¹ Tribal Chairman Chee Dodge further testified before Congress in 1946 regarding the need for greater educational opportunities and asserted the need for Navajo children "to be educated to such an extent that when they are through with schools on the reservation they will be able to compete with the white people."³⁵²

As Dodge's testimony suggests, the initial expectation was that educational opportunities would come exclusively from the construction of new schools on Navajo reservations. And this did happen, in part. By 1950, federally appropriated

³⁵¹ Quoted in Iverson, 191.

³⁵² Chee Dodge. "Navajo Indian Education: Hearing Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, Seventy-ninth Congress, Second Session, on S.J. Res. 79, A Bill Establishing a Joint Congressional Committee to Make a Study of Claims of Indian Tribes Against the United States, and to Investigate the Administration of Indian Affairs." (May 14, 1946). (Accessed on March 28, 2018) https://archive.org/stream/navajoindianeduc00unit/navajoindianeduc00unit_djvu.txt.

funding supported the construction of new schools on reservations that were staffed by BIA teachers. These schools were exclusively for younger children, however, leaving a large group of young adults who had never attended school without educational facilities of their own. The solution developed by the BIA was for older children, ages twelve to eighteen, to attend off-reservation boarding schools for intensive instruction that would condense twelve years of education into just five. This idea formed the basis of the Navajo Special Education Program. Some members of the tribe, including Tribal Council Member Annie Dodge Wauneka, initially embraced this plan, as it would rapidly address the educational needs of the Navajo. She stated in 1950:

Scattered families and hogans many miles apart makes it hard for the children to attend classes. To attend a day school is very hard for the child. He learns how to keep clean, is told to learn the white man's language during the day. But he returns home to his hogan, he finds no conveniences, his parents are still clinging to the old ways of living, and the child is caught between the Indian way and the white way. Boarding schools are best for the Navajo children because they attend school nine months of the year. They learn fast, can keep clean, have a sufficient diet, good sleeping quarters and a good recreation.³⁵³

Overall, however, the Navajo Tribal Council made its preference for local educational opportunities clear even as the Navajo Special Program continued to expand, listing off-reservation boarding schools near the end of a resolution on education:

The Navajo Tribal Council hereby assures the Commissioner of Indian Affairs of its full support in any planning or action that he may take to provide the additional school facilities necessary to serve the total needs of our school-age

³⁵³ Quoted in Carolyn Neithammer. *I'll Go and Do More: Annie Dodge Wauneka, Navajo Leader and Activist*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 161-163. Wauneka later changed her mind about the benefits of off-reservation boarding schools as a result of her children's difficult experiences while attending them and due to improving conditions for children on the Navajo reservations.

population, including enlargement of existing reservation schools, establishment of trailer schools and/or other day schools wherever the operation of such facilities is feasible, the construction of dormitories in surrounding towns to permit Navajo children to attend public schools, the broadest possible use of off-reservation boarding schools, the encouragement of school construction or expansion under Public Law 815, and other approaches to the problem which the Commissioner considers feasible and desirable.³⁵⁴

Although Navajo officials voiced strong support for efforts to educate their children, the BIA failed to include the views of Navajo citizens in the development of the Navajo Special Program, and instead relied upon non-Native bureaucrats to develop its parameters. These officials routinely, and incorrectly, asserted that the lack of educational resources and poor living conditions on the Navajo reservations was largely the fault of the Navajo. Hildegard Thompson, who helped develop the Navajo program and later served as the Director of Navajo Education, described the population in a 1948 memo as “undernourished, poorly clothed, sick, and illiterate.”³⁵⁵ She further alleged that the Navajo were to blame for their situation:

Perhaps the Navaho’s satisfaction with his own way of life could be traced to his bitter and humiliating memories of imprisonment at Ft. Sumner...as contrasted with the joy and freedom of living on his own land after his return. Possibly he felt that isolation from the White man would be the only assurance against repetition of such an experience. To live in his own way, as long as he was free, was all he needed to be happy. Perhaps this accounts in large measure for his failure to insist upon the educational opportunities for Navaho children promised in the treaty of 1868. The treaty of 1868 provided for the education of every Navaho child that should be presented for

³⁵⁴ Navajo Tribal Council. “Resolution of the Navajo Tribal Council: Tribal Support for Educational Planning.” Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁵⁵ Hildegard Thompson. “Report on an Education Program for Navaho Students at Four Non-Reservation Boarding Schools, 1947-48.” (August 20, 1948). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 5. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

education, but Navahos never insisted upon their treaty rights with regard to education until recently.³⁵⁶

In making this point, Thompson ignored the fact that many Navajo did not want to send their children to assimilationist off-reservation boarding schools, and that the U.S. government did little after 1868 to fulfill its treaty obligations in a manner acceptable to the Navajo people. The connection between the federal government's sudden creation of the Navajo program and the move toward termination is similarly ignored in Thompson's analysis.

Despite these flaws, Thompson's views strongly influenced the creation of the Navajo Special Program. Its specific tenets were discussed at a 1947 BIA conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and summarized in a memo written by Willard Beatty, the Director of Indian Education for the BIA. In this memo, Beatty wrote that the Special Program was designed to provide "older Navajo students with little school experience an education which will equip them to earn a livelihood" over a five-year period, during which they would learn academic and vocational skills.³⁵⁷ During their first three years in the program, students would initially focus on "social skills, habits, customs, understandings, and attitudes," as well as "the English language and numbers."³⁵⁸ Students would also participate in gendered "pre-vocational" training during this time. For young women, this meant generalized courses in home

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Willard W. Beatty. Education Memorandum. (August 24, 1947) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 5. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁵⁸ L. Madison Coombs. *Doorway Toward the Light: The Story of the Special Navajo Education Program*. (Bureau of Indian Affairs: Washington, D.C., 1962), 33.

economics, and for young men, shop and mechanical classes.³⁵⁹ During their final two years in the program, students would continue their academic instruction while also engaging in vocational training in a field offered at their particular boarding school. Additionally, Navajo students could participate in social clubs and athletics, and would be required to attend assemblies that promoted good behavior and “poise, assurance, and good English-speaking abilities.”³⁶⁰ The first of eleven off-reservation boarding schools to enroll Navajo Program students was the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California.³⁶¹

Vocational training was deemed especially important to the program. A 1962 report issued after the discontinuation of the Special Navajo Program notes, “...one of the major purposes of the program was the providing of each pupil with a marketable vocational skill with which he could support himself and his dependents after graduation.”³⁶² For male students in the Navajo program at the Stewart Indian School, these vocations included farming, ranching, baking, carpentry, residential or commercial painting, basic mechanics, or working as a gas station attendant. For female students, vocational options included training as hospital attendants or home

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 79.

³⁶⁰ Norma C. Runyan, Supervisor, Indian Education to P.S. Danielson, Acting Chief, Branch of Education. (October 15, 1951) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 28. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁶¹ The eleven schools that participated in the Navajo Special Program were the Stewart Indian School; the Sherman Institute; Chilocco Indian School in Newkirk, Oklahoma; Phoenix Indian School in Phoenix, Arizona; Albuquerque Indian School, in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon; Concho Indian Boarding School, near Concho, Oklahoma; Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah; Haskell Indian School in Lawrence, Kansas; Fort Sill Indian Boarding School in Oklahoma; and Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Oklahoma.

³⁶² *Doorway Toward the Light*, 79.

nurses, “domestic assistants or [in] home service,” along with “waitressing and short-order cooking.”³⁶³ Navajo students also participated in outing programs, which were largely eliminated in the 1930s and 1940s, but were reinstated as a means of providing them with on-the-job training. At some schools, including Stewart, Navajo students worked over their summer vacations through this program, and many also maintained Saturday jobs to earn spending money for clothing and other necessities.

The Navajo Special Program also retained many other assimilationist practices that were, by this time, a hallmark of the Indian boarding school system. The program was based upon the assumption that, to be successful, Navajo children must abandon their cultures and languages and embrace the norms and values of white, middle-class Americans. Students were thus expected to learn and use English, and to accept and internalize new social, political, and economic values. And while Navajo parents were not required to accept that their children receive specific religious instruction while attending a boarding school, the BIA emphasized its deference to Christian religious groups by informing Navajo Program recruiters that students attending mission schools on Navajo reservations could not be enrolled in an off-reservation boarding school without permission from the head of the mission.³⁶⁴

Navajo Special Program employees also commented extensively, and disdainfully, on the hygiene of Navajo students, a topic of ongoing settler

³⁶³ Runyon, Supervisor, Indian Education to P.S. Danielson, Acting Chief, Branch of Education. (October 15, 1951).

³⁶⁴ Office of the Education Specialist, Branch of Education, Navajo Agency, Window Rock, Arizona. “Recruiter’s Handbook.” (June 28, 1956), 9. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

preoccupation, while also disparaging pupils' lack of domestic skills. In terms of hygiene, officials recalled having to teach Navajo children how to wash themselves properly, how to clean and press their clothes, and how to comb and brush their hair, which resulted in their publication of a guide entitled "Minimum Essential Goals for Everyday Living in Indian Schools."³⁶⁵ In relaying such instances, officials also sometimes ridiculed students' efforts to do as their teachers instructed. In one example, students attempting to follow instructions for caring for their feet caused Navajo Program teachers to "chuckle" and sent them "into stiches" as they watched while "barefooted Navajo youngsters soberly concentrated on the mysteries of washing and drying their feet and changing into fresh socks."³⁶⁶ Navajo children were further described by program officials as "culturally unsophisticated" because they had not previously slept in beds, eaten with silverware, or used vacuum cleaners or furniture polish.³⁶⁷

Additionally, and reminiscent of the early decades of the off-reservation boarding school system, Navajo Special Program officials ignored the wishes of Navajo parents and overruled their opposition to the removal of their children from Navajo territory. The case of Louise Nez, who was transported from to the Stewart School without her parents' knowledge, exemplifies such attitudes. Program officials also pressed parents to accept student absences beyond the five-year education period, informing them that enrolling their children in the Special Program gave boarding

³⁶⁵ *Doorway to the Light*, 55.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

school officials permission to place them in a job anywhere in the country upon their graduation.³⁶⁸ A 1953 pamphlet used in Navajo classrooms further emphasized that Navajo Program officials, not Navajo parents, knew what was best for students. The pamphlet acknowledged that while some parents asked boarding school personnel to send their children home after completing the five-year program, the majority, namely those who wanted what was best for their children, followed federal guidance. According to the pamphlet, these parents, as opposed to those who wanted their children sent home, understood that students needed "...to make a good life for themselves away from the reservation where there are not many jobs," and accepted that there were "not enough jobs on the reservations for all the boys and girls" returning from school.³⁶⁹

Assertions about the value of off-reservation employment were also connected with the federal push toward termination and relocation. By training Navajo students for jobs that were not plentiful on reservations, BIA officials attempted to ensure that students settled in urban areas where they could find employment in their specific fields. This process distanced Navajo citizens from their tribal lands and, by educating and 'modernizing' the Navajo population, created the circumstances in which their termination could occur. Off-reservation boarding schools also eased this process by working with graduating students to place them in jobs. The same 1953 pamphlet that encouraged students not to return to their reservations promised

³⁶⁸ *Recruiter's Handbook*, 8.

³⁶⁹ Norma Runyan, Florence McClure, Martha Hull, William Morgan. *The Special Five-Year Program: In English and Navajo*. (Brigham City: Intermountain Indian School, 1953), 11.

assistance in securing off-reservation employment and housing upon graduation: “All schools help pupils get jobs when they graduate...The school helps the pupils find good places to live.”³⁷⁰ By 1962, three years after the program ended, BIA officials estimated that a large proportion of Navajo Special Program students had “gone out into the world to live and make a living, far from the reservation,” with “great impact on the Navajo Tribe.”³⁷¹

The Special Navajo Program also incorporated some significant departures from the administration of previous off-reservation boarding school practices. Willard Beatty asserted that, because of the unique nature of the Program, the BIA was required to adopt new approaches toward Indigenous education, including “special techniques and procedures” it had previously eschewed.³⁷² Chief among these was the incorporation of the Navajo language into everyday instruction. The BIA hired Navajo-speaking teachers and interpreters to work jointly with English-speaking classroom teachers to ensure that, in addition to acquiring English language skills, students also developed a nuanced understanding of non-Navajo “attitudes and values in a limited period of time.”³⁷³ BIA officials characterized the use of the Navajo language as a form of “emotional support” for older children entering a new environment, but also underscored the importance of ensuring that Navajo students learned and spoke English as well.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 10.

³⁷¹ *Doorway to the Light*, 132-133.

³⁷² Beatty, Education Memorandum, (August 24, 1947)

³⁷³ *Doorway Toward the Light*, 18-19.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 20.

Another aspect of the Navajo Program that differed from that of previous boarding school policy was the inclusion of home economics programs for boys. Since young men were expected to obtain employment outside of their reservations upon their graduation, likely before getting married, Navajo Program administrators decided that they needed to understand the basics of running and caring for a home on their own. In a 1951 memorandum on the subject, Supervisor for Indian Education Norma C. Runyan asserted that young Navajo men “were failing on the job – not because they had not done the job well, but because they could not manage their own living arrangements outside of school.”³⁷⁵ Home economics training for male, fifth year Navajo Program pupils was thus authorized as a means of remedying this situation.

Each of these policies impacted the lives of the young men and women enrolled in the Navajo Special Program. Examining its implementation at the Stewart Indian School illustrates how it affected a specific group of Navajo students and their families, and also highlights their particular experiences and challenges. At the same time, it is also important to consider how Native Nevadan students and their families reacted to these changes at Stewart, and how the Navajo program, to some extent, led these communities to push school administrators for more resources and greater representation in terms of their educational needs. Such an assessment also

³⁷⁵ Norma C. Runyan, Supervisor, Indian Education. to Albert M. Hawley, Principal, Carson Boarding School. (June 12, 1951) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 28. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

demonstrates how, as in previous decades, Stewart students consistently found ways to express themselves or defy school officials, and repeatedly challenged federal assumptions about their capabilities and intelligence.

“Let’s all remember these things:” The Navajo Special Program at Stewart

The Stewart Indian School opened its doors to Navajo students soon after the program was established, enrolling 148 Navajo students for the 1947-1948 school year.³⁷⁶ Like other schools that participated in the program, Stewart’s overall enrollment had decreased in the 1930s and 1940s as more Native students enrolled in public schools, enlisted in the U.S. military, or went to work in the defense industry, thus creating space for Navajo students at the school. In 1947, Stewart officials gave

interviews explaining the program to local newspapers in which they embraced the BIA’s explanations regarding the necessity for the program, as well as its overall philosophy for educating Navajo students. Speaking with the *Reno Evening*

Table 5: Navajo Program Enrollment, Stewart Indian School, 1947-1959³⁷⁷

School Year	Navajo Enrollment
1947-1948	148
1948-1949	211
1949-1950	240
1950-1951	241
1951-1952	252
1952-1953	248
1953-1954	232
1954-1955	381
1955-1956	378
1956-1957	393
1957-1958	324
1958-1959	350
Total	3.398

Gazette in August 1947, school Principal Albert Hawley indicated that Navajo

³⁷⁶ *Doorway Toward the Light*, 48,

³⁷⁷ Thompson, *The Navajo’s Long Walk for Education*, 194.

students would receive limited academic instruction to teach “the heretofore neglected children how to speak, read, and write the English language.”³⁷⁸ He added that students who excelled in these studies would be prepared for higher education, but that “the majority will receive practical instruction in building trades, agriculture, home economics, and the like.”³⁷⁹ To the *Nevada State Journal*, Hawley added that the Stewart School had “eliminated all the frills and items which were not absolutely necessary” for its Navajo students, who were “given enough English to make their way, prepared for a vocation, and in the fifth year will be given a consumer education, along with instruction in civic affairs.”³⁸⁰

At the same time, however, Hawley was also responsible for attending to the needs of non-Navajo students attending Stewart. These students, primarily from the Native Nevadan Paiute, Washoe, and Shoshone nations, were described as attending the ‘regular’ program at Stewart during the Navajo Special Program period, and enrolled in different courses and operated under different rules than Navajo pupils, who were segregated into their own classes and activities. These students were registered in the first through twelfth grades, used state-approved textbooks, and participated in a more robust academic program that included four years of English, math, social science, and science, all of which met college requirements, as well as

³⁷⁸ Quoted in *Reno Evening Gazette*. “Navajo Youths Slated to Enter Stewart School.” (August 26, 1947).

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Quoted in *Nevada State Journal*. “Complete Education in Five Years if Government Plan for Navajo Indian Youth.” (January 24, 1948).

vocational training.³⁸¹ By the end of the 1950s, vocational training for these students had also expanded to include business management and a police cadet program. This student population had also changed in the years since the Stewart School first opened. They spoke English when they entered the Stewart School, and many had siblings or other family members who had attended Stewart, another off-reservation boarding school, or a local public school.

Non-Navajo students also had more involvement in the management of the school and enjoyed more freedom than their Navajo peers. Beginning in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the school operated on a lettered pass system, with an 'A' pass distributed to those with the best behavior, and then 'B,' 'C,' and 'D,' passes moving downward in terms of behavior. Those with 'A,' 'B,' or 'C,' passes were permitted to visit Carson City on Saturday mornings to shop or go to a movie, while those with 'D' passes had to stay back at the school. Interestingly, elected student council members made determinations about the pass system, and were also placed in charge of adjudicating disciplinary infractions at the school and investigating student complaints. Student council minutes from this period indicate the seriousness with which students took these responsibilities, and record some of the specific issues student officers confronted. These students worked to improve the music at school dances, defended cheerleaders harassed by unruly crowds, and

³⁸¹ *Nevada State Journal*. "Stewart Indian School Teaches Children From 23 Tribes the Business of Living." (January 1, 1955)

successfully lobbied for food servers to stop eating food while they were serving it.³⁸²

The student council also encouraged proper student behavior at school-wide events.

In minutes from the November 14, 1955 meeting, for example, the student council turned its attention on students who arrived late to a Memorial Day event on

Veterans' Day and disrupted the program that was already in progress:

Did you understand that this was a memorial service honoring veterans both living and dead who had rendered great service to our country? Would you think it fitting that you be seating yourselves as the Color Guard was presenting the flag of our country? Would it be proper to be coming in while the Pledge of Allegiance was being given by the audience? Would you wish to disturb others during the minister's invocation? Was it fair to keep those, who had come from Carson City and from the campus to help with the program, waiting while tardy individuals were seated? The Council reminds students that there is by far too much tardiness at all activities. But there are some that you do not attend if you are late. The Memorial Service is in that group.³⁸³

However, assimilationist practices also remained part of everyday life at the school. Christian baptisms still occurred at the school, and religion still played a role in important school events.³⁸⁴ School enrollment policy also maintained continuity

³⁸² Student Council Minutes (November 3, 1952); Stewart Indian School Student Council Minutes (February 9, 1953); Student Council Minutes, Stewart, Nevada (April 12, 1954). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 13. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁸³ Student Council Meeting Minutes, Stewart Indian School, Stewart, Nevada. (November 14, 1955). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 13. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁸⁴ Hopi Alumna Reynese Peterson, who attended the school between 1955 and 1962, recalled attending the Baptist Church adjacent to the campus and being baptized there while a student at Stewart. Reynese Peterson. "She had School Spirit! An Interview with Reynese Peterson." (2017), 7. Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed December 12, 2018) <https://ia902808.us.archive.org/5/items/PetersonReynese/PetersonReynese.pdf>. Additionally, a 1954 program includes a performance of the song "May the Good Lord Keep and Bless You," sung by Stewart Students. "Eighth Grade Promotion – Exercises of the Stewart Indian School." (April 23, 1954) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

with previous decades by focusing on particular students. As Principal Hawley noted in 1948, “Stewart is a non-reservation boarding schools for Indians with entrance priority on a basis of need.”³⁸⁵ Specifically, the following groups of students received priority admissions: “first, orphans; second, children from families of homes broken by death, divorce, or other cause; third, those who have no school facilities at home; fourth, special rehabilitation cases.”³⁸⁶ Stewart also continued to rely upon student labor to keep the school running on a daily basis, for example in the school kitchen, where students served food, handed out trays, and cleaned up after meals. Vocational work also remained largely gendered during this period, with female students focusing on domestic chores or care giving jobs, while male students farmed and worked in mechanic and woodworking shops. And, as in previous decades, school officials maintained low expectations of those enrolled in the school. Hawley’s description of the school and its students illustrate this attitude: “This is primarily a vocational school. We make no pretense of preparing youth for college.”³⁸⁷

Further, students also faced continued violence and abuse at the hands of school officials. Carlene Burton, a Western Shoshone woman who attended Stewart in the late 1950s, recalled one particularly brutal math teacher, Mr. Tyler, who beat students for not completing their work:

I went in and Mr. Tyler said, “How many of you guys didn’t do your homework?” So half the class didn’t do their homework...Ask you why I

³⁸⁵ *Nevada State Journal*, “Complete Education in Five Years if Government Plan for Navajo Indian Youth.”

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.* As noted in the previous chapter, the enrollment of students in these categories, many of whom had limited parent involvement with the school, may have encouraged an environment in which abuses against students were ignored or improperly handled.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

didn't do my homework. So, you had to tell him why. So, you get, wham, wham, wham...It was a big paddle, like this [shows roughly three feet between her hands] and that thick [shows roughly one-half inch between her fingers.] On your hands, wherever he could...Just not one hit, neither. It'd be different if it was one hit, but that's the way I was treated over there. So, when I go into his room, you gotta be prepared.³⁸⁸

Daily life for Navajo Special Program students at the Stewart Indian School was in many ways similar to that of students in the 'regular program.' Navajo students spent time in the classroom and in vocational training, and were also engaged in the industrial labor required of the student population. Students attended church, some participated in sports and other extracurricular activities, and found ways to have fun or express themselves when possible. Navajo accounts of experiences at Stewart are few in number, and mostly come from *The Sherman Bulletin*, a Navajo Program newspaper published by the Sherman Institute, which featured articles, letters, jokes, and stories written by students enrolled in each of the eleven off-reservation boarding schools that housed Navajo students.³⁸⁹ The articles written by Navajo students in the *Sherman Bulletin* illustrate how students spent their

³⁸⁸ Carlene Burton. "Blocking the Stewart Experience Out: An Interview with Carlene Burton." (2017), 3. Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project. *University of Nevada, Reno Oral History Archive*. (Accessed March 19, 2018) <https://ia902807.us.archive.org/8/items/BurtonCarlene/BurtonCarlene.pdf>.

³⁸⁹ According to *Doorway to the Light*, *The Sherman Bulletin* was a tool used to "stimulate interest in learning to read and write English" among Navajo Program students. It is almost impossible to determine the specific circumstances under which each article, speech, or other work was written, or how much faculty members edited, encouraged, or otherwise interfered with the aims of student authors. According to those working with Navajo students, "The pupils' writing was printed pretty much as it was written, except for correcting the most glaring errors, and this greatly appealed to the pupils for they recognized it as genuine and it rang true them." Though there is always the chance that program administrators might have altered or edited the content of these articles, they are one of the few remaining sources that reflect the experiences and attitudes of Navajo students enrolled in the Navajo Special Program and provide key insights regarding student experiences and reactions to the program. *The Bulletin* printed 6,000 copies each month. *Doorway to the Light*, 61-62.

days, what they experienced, and what lessons their teachers wanted them to learn.

Annie Marie Brown, for example, described what a student might experience upon

their arrival at Stewart:

I am with the first year at Stewart. I went to school at Sanders, Arizona, for two years. We came to Stewart on August 23, 1955. The first thing they did was to check suitcases and mark our clothes. Then they gave us a room. We didn't go to class for three days. We went to class Monday. We stayed in our classrooms all day. On Tuesday we had a test in our classroom. We got through testing the next day. Wednesday through Friday we had an orientation in the auditorium. Every morning and afternoon we went over for an hour. They taught us how to fix a bed, sweep the floor, clean our locker, how to sit at the table, and other things.³⁹⁰

In another article, 'What we do in the Classroom,' Mae Joe wrote about her

experiences as a first-year student:

This morning I would like to tell you about my classroom. The first thing we did was to get our pills at the hospital.³⁹¹ Next we read our reading books. We read in groups. We have five reading groups in our classroom. One group read with Miss McGill, our teacher. Another group read with Mrs. Kahn, our instructional aid. One group free read, another group listened to the Soundscriber, and the last group wrote the Sherman Bulletin... On Tuesday morning at 9:30 we went to the library. We read some books. I like to read books. I read many books in the classroom and library books, too. We are learning about the torso. We started with the brain and how it works. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday we go to our clubs. My club is play acting. On Thursday we go to assembly.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Annie Marie Brown, "First Year at Stewart," *The Sherman Bulletin* 48, No. 3 (December 1, 1955), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁹¹ According to a 1952-1953 Report on the Navajo Special Program, Navajo Students in their first through third years at Stewart were given vitamins to improve their overall health. This may be what Mae Joe was referring to. See Bureau of Indian Affairs. *Report to Schools on Progress of the Special Program at Eight Off-Reservation Indian Schools, 1952-1953*. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 6. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁹² Mae Joe. "What we do in the Classroom," *The Sherman Bulletin* 49, No. 6, 14. (March 1, 1957). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

First-year student Scotty Hudson wrote the following about how he spent his days at the Stewart School:

In the afternoon I go to shop at 1:00 p.m. I am making a box at the shop. I go to school every morning at 8:45 a.m. We go to the hospital at 9:00 a.m. I like my school at Stewart because I learned many things. My club is woodcarving. I listen to my teacher Mrs. Alexander. My home is Prewitt, New Mexico.³⁹³

Navajo students also wrote about the extracurricular clubs they joined, their holiday parties, and field trips to Carson City for special events, like visits to the movie theater. Peter Castillo wrote about learning to cook in his home economics club, and discovering that he actually liked it, while Thomas Morris described having fun with the swimming club at Carson Hot Springs and learning different ways to float and how to tread water.³⁹⁴ Students played games at Valentine's Day parties and celebrated the birthdays of teachers and fellow students. They also found time to have a "toast party," at which everyone was served hot, buttered toast, and created a play house in the classroom.³⁹⁵ Navajo students also drew illustrations to accompany various articles, shared self-deprecating stories, and wrote jokes, all of which were published in *The Sherman Bulletin*. Among the jokes published was the following:

Kee: "Will you please get me a hot dog."
Freddie: "With pleasure."

³⁹³ Scotty Hudson. "My School," *The Sherman Bulletin* 48, No. 7 (April 2, 1956), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁹⁴ Peter Castillo. "My New Club," *The Sherman Bulletin* (March 1, 1957), 14, and Thomas Morris. "Swimming," *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 No. 5 (February 1, 1956), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

³⁹⁵ Mrs. Creech's Class. "Our Toast Party," and Allen Morez. "The Funny House," *The Sherman Bulletin*, (March 1, 1956), 14.

Kee: “No Freddie, with mustard.”³⁹⁶

Each of these events suggests students found moments of fun and laughter while attending the Stewart Indian School, and ways to express their creativity and personalities in the midst of an assimilationist program that sought to erase their identities. Such moments also underscore student resilience and adaptability.

Navajo pupils also wrote about their industrial work at Stewart, which emphasizes the school’s continued need for student labor to run the campus. Student Tony Tunney wrote about farm work at the school ranch, and noted that every day before and after his academic classes he and his classmates traveled to the farm to care for the school cows. “We have to clean the calf pens every morning,” he wrote, and listed other student duties, which included providing clean straw for the cows and feeding them.³⁹⁷ Student Dan Seimy also wrote about his experiences at the school ranch. In the spring of 1956, he and ten classmates cleaned ditches and dug twenty smaller irrigation ditches connected to a water pipe at the ranch over the course of one afternoon.³⁹⁸ For some students, these experiences translated into paid jobs over the summer or on Saturdays, when some students secured employment as a means of paying for essentials, such as clothing and shoes. Howard Smith, for example, worked in sugar beet fields in Utah during the summer of 1955, and used the money to buy new clothes for the school year, while Bessie Chee secured a domestic position in

³⁹⁶ Author not listed, *The Sherman Bulletin* (March 1, 1957), 14.

³⁹⁷ Tony Tunney. “Farm Work,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48, No. 3 (March 1, 1957), 14.

³⁹⁸ Dan Seimy. “Farm Work,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48, No. 6 (March 1, 1956), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

Lake Tahoe.³⁹⁹ Alice Begay worked for a woman named Mrs. Manning in Carson City on Saturdays, earning seventy-five cents an hour for domestic chores and indicated that she enjoyed such work in a 1957 article she wrote for *The Sherman Bulletin*.⁴⁰⁰

Students in the Navajo Program also wrote extensively about their vocational training, and emphasized the importance of choosing the right vocation as a third-year student. Prior to selecting their vocation, students enrolled in “exploratory courses” to give them a better idea of what they could expect from different positions. Ben Chischilly, a second-year student in the Navajo Program, expressed uncertainty about his future vocation in a short article in the April 1956 edition of *The Sherman Bulletin*, but noted that he could choose from farming, baking, carpentry, or painting, while female students could train in domestic work, waitressing, or working as a hospital ward attendant.⁴⁰¹ Harvery Morgan provided students with a detailed guide on how to select a vocation that best suited their interests and abilities:

Choosing a vocation is very important to us students who are new in the third year of the Special Navajo Program. It is very important that we should choose the jobs that we think we can do when we go out on our own. First, let’s ask ourselves these two questions before we make our decision. First, can I do that job? Second, am I interested in that job? If we are not interested or cannot do it, we had better choose a job that we are interested in or that we

³⁹⁹ Howard Smith. “My Story” and Bessie Chee. “A Summer Job,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48, No. 1 (October 3, 1955), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁰⁰ Alice Begay, “Saturday Job,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 49, No. 7 (April 1, 1957), 17. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁰¹ Ben Chischilly. “Exploratory Course,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48, No. 7 (April 2, 1956) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

think we can do. If your friend wants to choose auto mechanics and you think you want to go with him and you choose the same vocation just because he is your best friend, that is not a good thing to do...So you had better think before you make your choice. Maybe it will help you a lot. So, let's all remember these things.⁴⁰²

Students in the midst of their vocational training also commented on their experiences. In a letter to his parents published in *The Sherman Bulletin*, Frank Billy wrote about laying a floor in a house on the school campus. He told his parents that he was “working hard” and “doing my best to learn everything that I can.”⁴⁰³ John Chischilly, a fifth-year student, wrote that he and others in his year had spent six to nine weeks working off-campus in paying jobs, both to gain more experience and to learn how to save and spend their money. He also relayed that he had learned to build a house and how to repair furniture and other items made from wood in the Stewart program. According to John, he and his classmates were “very happy about our training and schooling” and hoped to be “very good carpenters” upon graduation.⁴⁰⁴

Each of these accounts helps explain what Navajo students experienced at the school in terms of the academic and vocational programs federal officials created for them. They also underscore the Navajo Special Program's connections to the decades-long effort to assimilate Indigenous populations and place them in the same types of menial professions as previous generations of boarding school graduates.

⁴⁰² Harvery Morgan. “Choosing a Vocation,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48, No. 6 (March 1, 1956) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁰³ Frank Billy. “A Letter Home.” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 (December 1, 1955), 14.

⁴⁰⁴ John Chischilly, “Training for Carpentry,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 44, No. 7 (April 1, 1952). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

Other aspects of the assimilationist curriculum at Stewart are clear in student articles published in *The Sherman Bulletin*. Several students comment extensively on the need for students to speak English, for example, about the value of education, the importance of personal cleanliness, and also recount activities designed to show the benefits of accepting settler norms. The students who wrote these articles may have sincerely believed what they wrote. However, without the influence of their lessons at the Stewart School, it seems unlikely that they would have made such arguments on their own.

With regard to the importance of using only English at school, some students were particularly insistent in their assertions. Student Jimmy Ayze, in a 1955 article, emphasized the importance of Navajo students speaking English as much as they could, even if they were only in their first year of school. He asserted, “Some of us are not using good English because we don’t try to use English,” an assertion he noted was also made by his bakery vocational teacher.⁴⁰⁵ After further encouraging his fellow students to use English more, he recommended that students “Just forget about the Navajo language and use English all the time.”⁴⁰⁶ Arthur F. Shirley implored his classmates to “talk English as much as you can and wherever you go,” while Sam Johnson John urged Navajo students to both learn English and finish all five years of the Navajo Special Program.⁴⁰⁷ John described learning English as a

⁴⁰⁵ Jimmy Ayze. “On Using English,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 (December 1, 1955).

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Arthur F. Shirley. “Use English Everywhere,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 No. 4 (January 2, 1956). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

“responsibility” for Navajo students, as the language was spoken “everywhere we go” and described the Navajo Program as a “good opportunity” for Navajo students.⁴⁰⁸

That John noted that English was spoken “everywhere” also suggests that Navajo Program teachers at Stewart were preparing students for work and life not back on the reservation, where not everyone spoke English, but rather for placement outside of their reservation after graduation.

Navajo students at Stewart also focused on hygiene and personal cleanliness at the direction of school employees. Three accounts published in *The Sherman Bulletin* underscore the extent to which school officials emphasized the importance of this subject. In one article, student Helen Woody wrote about personal hygiene and keeping a clean room: “I will write a story for you. I am at Stewart Indian School. I like my school very much. I learn many things I keep clean. I use soap and water. I wash my blouse. I clean my room too. We should keep clean. We can use soap and water.”⁴⁰⁹ Rose Williams published a similar account:

We will tell you about our school at Stewart. We have been learning many things. We have learned how to keep the room clean, and we learned how to keep ourselves neat and clean. We have new washing machines in our buildings. We have learned how to use them so we can wash our clothes. We have three new machines in our building.⁴¹⁰

Bud Dougi also wrote about the importance of cleanliness, and drew some heartbreaking conclusions about his personal hygiene and how it might have

⁴⁰⁸ Sam Johnson John “Five Year Program,” *The Sherman Bulletin*, (March 1, 1956).

⁴⁰⁹ Helen Woody. “I Keep Clean,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 No. 1 (October 3, 1955), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴¹⁰ Rose Williams. “My Story.” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 No. 1 (October 3, 1955), 14.

previously affected the way people treated him. He wrote, “My name is Bud Dougi. I like school. I am clean now. I know how to use soap and water. I use a washcloth too. [I] am clean and people like me. The people do not like me when I am not clean.”⁴¹¹

Other student lessons were similarly geared toward teaching Navajo Program students assimilationist lessons designed to help them live off-reservation and away from their communities. Franklin Johnson recounted a “fun” lesson connected with the Trading Post created in his classroom. The Trading Post sold groceries, and the students alternated between acting as customers and cashiers. Johnson emphasized that the customers “must pay for the things they buy,” and concluded that this lesson had taught students how to make change and “figure the sales tax.”⁴¹² On a different occasion, students had the opportunity to act in two different plays performed at an assembly program for Navajo students. Participant Ray Silver noted that he and his fellow students had practiced for days prior to the assembly. According to Silver, “One play was about green vegetables, and the other was about transportation.”⁴¹³ And while students were proud of their performances and the fact that they had to manage the plays by themselves when their teacher fell ill, it is hard to ignore that these plays seemed to have served as school platforms designed to tell students what

⁴¹¹ Bud Dougi. “I am Neat and Clean,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 No. 2 (November 1, 1955), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴¹² Franklin Johnson. “Our Trading Post,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 49 No. 6 (March 1, 1957), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴¹³ Ray Silver. “Assembly Program,” *The Sherman Bulletin* 49 No. 7 (April 1, 1957). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

they should eat and how they would get around once relocated to urban environments within the United States.

Admonishments about personal behavior in *The Sherman Bulletin* were also frequently published, and geared toward advising fellow Navajo students about their personal conduct and on how to be good employees. Student Willie Joe encouraged students on a number of topics, writing that they should save their money, put it in a bank, and “spend it wisely. Do not spend it foolishly.” Further, he emphasized to fellow students, “You should not forget your good manners wherever you go,” and “Be honest all the time. Tell the truth when you have done wrong...”⁴¹⁴ Henry Savage wrote about the dangers of alcohol in 1957, observing the following: “Drinking will cause us to run into trouble. Drinking liquors may cause us to get killed sometimes. If we drink liquors, it makes us look like a tramp.”⁴¹⁵ Students also repeatedly emphasized the need to be on time, particularly with regard to their jobs. Other student writings underscore the extent to which Navajo students were encouraged to accept menial or unwanted positions. Betty Baldwin, for example, wrote that students should gladly accept whatever job they were offered.

You should take the first job that is found for you because jobs are hard to find, especially for the boys. Have some appreciation for the people who have helped you with finding a job. You cannot always have a job that you like. There is always some dislike in every job you take. So try and like your job that is found for you.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ Willie Joe. “I’ll Remember Always,” *The Sherman Bulletin*, (April 2, 1956), 14.

⁴¹⁵ Henry Savage. “Strong Drinks,” *The Sherman Bulletin* (March 1, 1957), 14.

⁴¹⁶ Betty Baldwin. “OJT,” *The Sherman Bulletin*, (April 1, 1957), 17.

Such ideas were internalized in other ways as well, as expressed by Bessie Chee, who wrote in 1955, “We should all learn to work for people so we can help ourselves and help our mothers at home.” The idea of working for oneself, or enrolling in college as a means of creating a better life for students and their families, was not among the advice proffered by Navajo students.

In April 1956, Navajo Program students also wrote about a visit from members of the Navajo Tribal Council. These visitors were treated to a “family dinner” with students in the program, according to an article written by student Eva James, who described the meal as an opportunity for students to demonstrate their “good manners at the table” and ability to “set the table the right way too.”⁴¹⁷ The visiting members of the Tribal Council also seemingly affirmed the assimilationist objectives of the Special Program, while at the same time signaling their opposition to certain aspects of federal policy. Annie Wauneka, who had previously expressed support for the use of boarding schools to educate Navajo children, was particularly supportive of the program. At the same time, however, she made it clear that students should use what they learned to help their own communities. In *The Sherman Bulletin*, student Susie Yellowman recalled the following about a speech delivered by Wauneka at an assembly for Navajo students:

Most of her speech was about education. She told us that during the war the uneducated Indians could not go to war when they were called. Most of them could not get a job, either. She encouraged us to come back to school and finish school, so we could make good use of ourselves. She also mentioned about health among our tribe. She said that there is a tremendous group of our young people with tuberculosis in the hospitals in the various states. She said

⁴¹⁷ Eva James. “Family Dinner,” *The Sherman Bulletin*, (April 2, 1956), 14.

we must teach our parents how to take care of cooking utensils, water and food.⁴¹⁸

Ironically, the architects of the off-reservation Indian boarding school system similarly hoped that Native students would use their knowledge to encourage their parents' assimilation. For Wauneka, however, this argument may have been a way to express her opposition to the relocation of Navajo students upon their graduation and her desire that they return home instead.

Councilmember Roger Davies also spoke at the assembly. As reported by Susie Yellowman, Davies similarly encouraged Navajo students to take advantage of the educational opportunities currently available to them, while emphasizing that the Navajo Special Program would not be available to students indefinitely. He also informed students that many Navajo citizens were beginning to attend college, and encouraged them to do so as well, adding, "The tribal Council has loans to give to the students who are qualified." These statements suggest that, for Davies and the Navajo Tribal Council, education was a means for improving the prospects of Navajo Nation citizens, not a means for advancing the termination and relocation of the tribe.⁴¹⁹

"We are all here to learn something together"⁴²⁰

For Stewart School officials, administering the Navajo Special Program did not always go as federal officials imagined it would, which led them to make some changes in the ways they executed the program. The school also encountered some

⁴¹⁸ Susie Yellowman. "Visitors from Reservation," *The Sherman Bulletin*, (April 2, 1956), 14.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ *Student Council Minutes*. (November 17, 1953). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 13. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

logistical barriers in its efforts to house and educate Navajo students. In 1947, the first year Stewart participated in the Navajo program, school officials decided to separate the Navajo and non-Navajo populations at the school, even though federal officials wanted the latter to integrate with other Native students. An unidentified Stewart spokesperson told the *Reno Evening Gazette* in August 1947 that, because of concerns about “Navajo-Paiute relations,” Navajo students were placed in separate dorms.⁴²¹ The spokesperson also suggested this was done because the Navajo, unlike other students at the school, did not speak English. Navajo students were also placed in separate classrooms, understandably, since they did not speak English, unlike other members of the student body. However, Navajo students also had separate student government, clubs, and assemblies, and did not write in the Stewart School newspaper. Navajo students were also pictured separately from the rest of the student body in school yearbooks from this period.

This situation was not what federal officials had in mind. In a 1949 assessment of the Navajo Program at Stewart, Director of Indian Education Willard Beatty wrote to Stewart Principal Leon Wall that he understood that the needs of the Navajo and non-Navajo students at the school were different, and that each population required different educational approaches. However, he underscored the importance of following federal guidelines, lest the Navajo Special program

⁴²¹ *Reno Evening Gazette*, “Navajo Youths Slated to Enter Stewart School.”

“weaken...to a dangerous extent.”⁴²² He added that the BIA did not want the Navajo Program to “be apart from the school,” and that it should maintain “the same relationship to the school as do a high school and an elementary school...under the same administration.”⁴²³ Stewart Student Council minutes from November 1953 suggest that the separation between Navajo and non-Navajo students extended into the 1950s, and that tensions between other Native nations existed at the school as well:

We all know that Stewart is like a melting pot where we are descendants of all nationalities. It doesn't matter whether we are Paiutes, Navahos, Hopis, or any other tribe. We are all here to learn something together. Why can't we do it together? We have to learn how to live with each other. We should be able to work together in a pleasant atmosphere and enjoy each other's companionship during our recreational activities. Let's break this barrier and make a long joined chain of friendship among all Stewart students.⁴²⁴

Evaluations of the Stewart School also suggest that it lacked the personnel and facilities to properly train Navajo students. In a June 1951 letter to Principal Albert Hawley, Supervisor of Indian Education Norma Runyan indicated that female students in their first, second, and third years were not getting enough prevocational training hours in the realm of home economics.⁴²⁵ Additionally, the school did not have adequate equipment in its home economics training “laboratory,” and the school nurse was described as overwhelmed with the number of students she was expected to

⁴²² Willard W. Beatty to Leon Wall. (October 11, 1949). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 33. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ *Student Council Minutes*, November 17, 1953.

⁴²⁵ Norma C. Runyan to Albert M. Hawley. (June 12, 1951). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 33. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

train.⁴²⁶ Runyan instructed the school to hire an additional classroom teacher for Special Program students, and expressed concern about the lack of vocational facilities for female students again in 1952.⁴²⁷ These aspects of the Navajo Program are also reminiscent of the early years of the Stewart School, during which school personnel ignored federal rules to accommodate the realities of the school environment, or were forced to conduct classes in substandard facilities with unqualified personnel.

However, despite these issues, Stewart administrators largely adhered to the assimilationist script set forth in federal Navajo Program guidelines. As demonstrated in student accounts in *The Sherman Bulletin*, Navajo pupils focused on learning English and rudimentary math skills, and were encouraged to adopt non-Native social norms and behavior. Students' vocational training was mostly gendered, and female students in particular were encouraged to improve their domestic skills. In an account from a mid-1950s report on the Navajo Program, its leader, Donald J. Fosdick, described how third-year female students hosted a dinner for male students to demonstrate their abilities. He recalled, "The girls invited the boys to this party. The

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Norma C. Runyan to Albert M. Hawley. (July 21, 1952). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 33. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco). Federal officials also shouldered some of the blame regarding the quality and number of teachers available to schools participating in the Navajo Special Program. Hildegard Thompson noted in a 1948 report, for example, "Most of the teachers secured at the last minute [for the Navajo program] were teachers who were unable to meet the qualifications for public school work." Thompson. "Report on an Education Program for Navaho Students at Four Non-Reservation Boarding Schools, 1947-48." Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 33. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

girls had prepared a sumptuous meal and skillfully served it.”⁴²⁸ This type of instruction trained Navajo women both for domestic work and for their presumptive roles as wives and homemakers.

In addition to accounts such as these, Stewart officials also found ways to place Navajo students on display to illustrate the school’s assimilationist progress. On one occasion, female Navajo students were brought to a Carson City chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) meeting to speak about their experiences in the program. At this 1951 DAR meeting, a Navajo Special Program instructor identified as Mrs. G.M. King informed those in attendance of the difficult circumstances many children experienced on Navajo reservations, and several Navajo students spoke at the event. A newspaper article on the meeting also noted, “Records of the Navajo students were passed around for the DAR members to examine, as well as items made in the shop and samples of craft work.” This account suggests the extent to which these young women were treated as curiosities and objects of examination.

Stewart personnel also used Soundscriber recordings to exhibit their success in teaching Navajo children to speak English.⁴²⁹ In these recordings, which were generally made over the course of the months or years a Navajo pupil remained

⁴²⁸ Bureau of Indian Affairs. *Report to Schools on Progress of the Special Program at Eight Off-Reservation Indian Schools*. (1953-1954), 59. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 6. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴²⁹ The National Archives and Records Administration branch in San Bruno, California, maintain these recordings. There are hundreds of recordings from the Navajo Program at Stewart that were made on Soundscriber machines, which were manufactured between 1942 and 1960. Only a small selection was transferred on to CDs, but they are available to listen to in the San Bruno research room.

enrolled at Stewart, teachers asked students to repeat their names, ages, where they were from, how long they had been at school, and what they liked about school. Some students were encouraged to sing songs or discuss their vocational interests or training. None of the students were asked to talk about their families, their cultures, or their academic training. These recordings were also used, according to federal officials, to help students hear the differences in the ways they pronounced English in contrast with someone for whom English was their first language. The Director of Indian Education also used them to prove the success of the Navajo Special Program by playing them “before a Congressional subcommittee which had raised the question of whether the Navajo pupils were really learning to speak English.”⁴³⁰

Additionally, Stewart officials worked diligently to place Navajo Program students in jobs while they attended the school, both as a means of ensuring they received vocational training, and to accustom them to living and working in cities outside of their reservations. This program included jobs on Saturdays for some, on-the-job-training during the school year for students in their fourth and fifth years, and summer work for others. For students without enough funds to purchase shoes, clothing or other necessities not provided by the school, Saturday jobs in Carson City, as indicated by the accounts of Howard Smith, Bessie Chee, and Alice Begay in *The Sherman Bulletin*, were necessary.⁴³¹ A 1957 information sheet on Saturday jobs

⁴³⁰ *Doorway Toward the Light*, 61-62.

⁴³¹ For at least some of the children whom could neither afford to purchase these items themselves, nor work to afford them, Stewart officials obtained Save the Children sponsors and funding for them. I found multiple sets of such documentation in the Stewart Indian School collection at the National Archives and Records Administration in San Bruno, California, all from March 1954. In each case, local Navajo Program administrators indicated that the students were prohibited from working because

explained which types of jobs Navajo Program students were eligible for, how much they should be paid, and also provided a list of jobs in which Navajo students were already employed. The document noted that boys could do “yard work, farm work, wash windows, wax floors, and do general cleaning-up work,” while female students were relegated exclusively to domestic work.⁴³² According to information included in the document, all female students performed domestic chores within the homes of local residents, while several male students worked at the Silver Spur and Nugget casinos in Carson City, sometimes on Fridays and Sundays as well as on Saturdays. Further, to ensure that male and female Navajo students also learned the non-Native practice of undervaluing female labor, the minimum wage for male students was listed as seventy-five cents an hour, while the minimum wage for female students was sixty cents an hour. This document, seemingly prepared for prospective employers, also underscored that the program was part of students’ training and that they would likely require “careful instructing and guidance in the tasks assigned them.”⁴³³

For fifth-year students, on-the-job-training began by way of a nine-week training program during which they were sent from the school to work for prospective employers, most often to locations throughout western Nevada. After this period, the majority of students returned to Stewart where they graduated at the end of the year

of their respective physical conditions: malnourishment, physical disability, and eye growths that required surgery. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 27. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴³² “Saturday Jobs.” (September 1957) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 20. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴³³ “Saturday Jobs,” (September 1957).

and then begin working fulltime with the assistance of a placement officer. Stewart administrators hoped that students' on-the-job-training experiences would lead to fulltime employment offers, and even asserted that, if students were presented with a worthwhile opportunity before completing their education, the school's Guidance and Placement Committee would permit them to take the job.⁴³⁴ This illustrates the extent to which school officials viewed finding Navajo pupils jobs as more important than securing their educations, and also underscores their commitment to relocation: jobs found for Navajo students were local or in nearby cities, which advanced the agenda of permanently removing Navajo students from their reservations and settling them in urban environments.

An example of this philosophy from 1949 emphasizes the extent to which this type of thinking influenced Stewart School officials. With the assistance of a Navajo relocation officer who was specifically tasked with placing Navajo citizens in off-reservation jobs, Stewart student Jimmy Willard was sent to Placerville, California, during the spring of 1949 to work at a forestry camp. School officials had hoped he would secure fulltime employment at the camp upon his graduation, but were informed by the relocation officer that, unfortunately, neither Willard nor any other Navajo students could secure employment at the camp, which had cut its budget.⁴³⁵ Stewart officials who visited the camp were also informed that their

⁴³⁴ Norma C. Runyon to P.S. Danielson. (October 15, 1951). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 33. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴³⁵ California-Nevada Placement Officer to Albert M. Hawley. (May 20, 1949). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 16. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

students were ineligible for fulltime employment at this particular location because they were not “college trained in forestry.”⁴³⁶ Remarkably, rather than reflecting on the fact that the education offered at Stewart and other boarding schools rendered students unqualified for this type of employment, or discussing whether their students should pursue higher education in the field, they merely asserted that this type of work was, overall, “excellent,” because it helped students “adjust themselves to the environment to which they will soon be exposed.”⁴³⁷ School officials also met with local union representatives to determine whether the vocational and industrial experiences of students at Stewart might count toward apprenticeship credit for various trades.⁴³⁸ Education, according to these examples, was not the goal for Navajo Special Program students. Rather, they would receive minimal academic training and on-the-job experience, and then be sent on their way to work and live, preferably outside of their reservations.

⁴³⁶ Mr. Ayse and Mr. Tyler to Mr. Wall and Mrs. King. “Trip to the Forestry Camp near Placerville, California.” (August 8, 1949). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 16. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ *Nevada State Journal*. “Meeting is Held to Discuss Industrial Opportunities of Graduates at Indian School.” (September 14, 1950).

Summer program jobs were similarly geared toward finding Navajo students employment outside of their reservations. Though data is not available for each year of the Navajo Program, Stewart officials wrote that during the summer of 1951, the school arranged for summer jobs for 70 of the 241 students that had enrolled in the program the previous school year. These seventy students, almost thirty percent of the Navajo student body, were placed with employers throughout the state, and school employees hoped their summer jobs would eventually lead to “permanent placement.”⁴³⁹ Such opportunities were considered critically important by Stewart

personnel, who reasoned that their main job was not educating Navajo students or readying them for additional

Table 6: Navajo Employment Status, Stewart Students, 1953-1954 ⁴⁴⁰

Navajo Employment Status, Post-Stewart Graduation	Percentage of Student Body, 1953-1954
Armed Forces	8.42
Employed Off Reservation	60.11
Employed on Reservation	3.37
Attending School Off Reservation	.50
Housewives Off Reservation	5.05
Housewives On Reservation	3.37
Hospitalized	1.12
Unemployed on Reservation	1.68
Unknown	16.29
Total	100.01

educational opportunities, but “preparing them to leave the school, [and] go out on their own at the end of these short years.”⁴⁴¹

Such practices were also closely connected with efforts to relocate Navajo pupils from their reservations to cities across the United States. Stewart officials were

⁴³⁹ Norma C. Runyon to P.S. Danielson. (October 15, 1951). Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 33. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁴⁰ Thompson, *The Navajo's Long Walk for Education*, 196.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

largely successful in these efforts, at least according to BIA data about the Stewart School graduates of the Special Navajo Program. Of the students who graduated from the program between 1953 and 1957, sixty percent secured employment in jobs located outside of Navajo reservations, while another five percent of female Navajo Program graduates reported working as fulltime housewives in homes located outside of Navajo Nation reservations. Just over three percent of graduates took jobs on the reservations, while the remaining approximately thirty-two percent of students joined the military, worked in the home on their reservations, or were unemployed or unaccounted for. Based on these figures, approximately sixty-five percent of Stewart School Special Navajo Program students were successfully relocated from their reservations after graduation, three points ahead of the total percentage of Navajo students who moved off-reservation as a result of the program that same year.⁴⁴²

However, while Stewart officials were successful in their efforts to encourage a significant number of Navajo Program graduates to live away from the reservation, Navajo students and parents also found ways to subvert the objectives of school officials. As with previous generations of Native students who attended Stewart and other off-reservation boarding schools, one of the most common ways of doing so was for parents to refuse to send their children to school. The minutes of a 1953 memo on this subject underscore the extent of this problem at Stewart and other schools participating in the Navajo Special Program. Noting that “appreciable

⁴⁴² All data from this paragraph is derived from Thompson, *The Navajo's Long Walk for Education*, 197.

numbers of pupils failed to return to school,” school superintendents, BIA personnel, and members of the Navajo Tribal Council met to discuss the situation and how to remedy it.⁴⁴³ A key theme repeatedly discussed at the meeting was the dissatisfaction of Navajo parents. Recruiters, for example, noted that many families “seemed to be away from the reservation,” when they attempted to enroll students in the off-reservation schools, while in other cases “parents did not want, or refused” to send their children back to the schools after they returned from summer break.⁴⁴⁴ Students themselves also refused to return to the schools on several occasions, and recruiters commented that both parents and students seemed “disgruntled” or had expressed “dissatisfaction” with the Special Program, which they criticized as too challenging, not challenging enough, and not properly organized for students’ needs.⁴⁴⁵

BIA officials failed to recognize that so many parents’ refusal to send their children back to the Navajo Special Program might signal legitimate problems in its administration, or Navajo frustration with its connection to the relocation policy. Instead, they suggested that parental and student opposition stemmed from a “lack of understanding of the educational program,” and the failure of local recruiters to effectively “sell” the benefits of the program.⁴⁴⁶ To resolve these problems, meeting attendees suggested working more closely with Navajo families and leaders to help

⁴⁴³ “Minutes of Meeting on Recruiting, Processing and Shipping Navajo Children to Off-Reservation Schools.” (1953) Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 4. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

them understand the benefits of the Special Program. They also recommended that, in order to increase enrollment, that the program be expanded to include children as young as ten, or that, somewhat sinisterly, parents be “compelled” to return their children to school once enrolled.⁴⁴⁷ Though Navajo Special Program officials did not adopt the latter two suggestions, such notions are reminiscent of previous off-reservation boarding school approaches toward reluctant Native parents and students.

At the Stewart School, this problem is reflected in the number of Navajo students who failed to return to the school after leaving for their summer break. At the start of the 1952-1953 school year, thirteen percent of the Navajo Program students enrolled at Stewart neglected to return, while ten percent did not return when classes resumed during the 1953-1954 school year.⁴⁴⁸ Some students did not return due to illness, and others found paying jobs, enrolled at other schools, or joined the armed forces. The majority of Stewart students who did not return, however, were labeled as “unknown,” which suggests they evaded Navajo Program efforts to track them or their families down to pinpoint the reasons for their absence. This problem was even greater when averaged among each of the schools that participated in the Navajo Special Program: overall, eighteen percent of Navajo students did not return

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ *Report to Schools on Progress of the Special Program at Eight Off-Reservation Indian Schools, 1952-1953; Report to Schools on Progress of the Special Program at Eight Off-Reservation Indian Schools, 1953-1954.* Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 6. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

to the program at the beginning of the 1952-1953 schools year, and twenty percent did not return to school for the 1953-1954 school year.⁴⁴⁹

Navajo program students enrolled in classes at the Stewart Indian School also found ways to challenge school officials' low expectations. One of the most engaging examples of this is a 1953 Soundscriber recording of Charley Begay. In this session, an unidentified female asked him whether he liked the Stewart Indian School. Charley replied with an emphatic, "No!," which caused the apparently surprised interviewer to pause before continuing.⁴⁵⁰ She then asked the question again and got the same answer before moving on to other topics. Other students expressed discontent by stating their desire for greater educational opportunities. Student Peterson Herder expressed this wish emphatically in a January 1956 article in *The Sherman Bulletin*: "I want to get more education. I try hard this year because I want more education. All of us should try hard in school. Try hard and we learn everything we can. I want more education."⁴⁵¹ Graduating student Frances Notah shared similar sentiments in an article published the following year: "Soon the Fifth Years will be leaving for our permanent jobs. Maybe some of us are very happy to go out on the job. Some of us are unhappy to leave our school. For me, I don't really know what to say about it. But I do know that I need more education."⁴⁵² That Navajo Tribal

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Stewart Indian School Navajo Program Recordings. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁵¹ Peterson Herder. "More Education," *The Sherman Bulletin* 48 No. 4 (January 2, 1956), 14. Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 1, Folder 26. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁵² Frances Notah. "Our Jobs," *The Sherman Bulletin*, (March 1957), 14.

Council members encouraged and supported students in pursuing their academic objectives was also demonstrated earlier in this chapter, through their offer of loans for qualified students who wanted to pursue higher education opportunities.

During this same period, Stewart School officials also drew criticism from Native Nevadan communities who wanted more resources directed toward local families, as well as educational reforms that would provide greater opportunities to those students enrolled in the so-called ‘regular’ program. At an intertribal planning committee meeting in April 1950, Native Nevadan nations called for dramatic changes in the curriculum and administration of the Stewart Indian School. According to the *Nevada State Journal*, tribal members passed resolutions calling for the school’s curriculum to be revised so it could pass state accreditation standards, asked that a two-year postgraduate course in unspecified vocational subjects be established, and pressed for the creation of a tribal advisory board that would provide the school with academic and administrative recommendations.⁴⁵³ Another resolution asserted that the size of the Special Navajo Program should be reduced, presumably to allow school officials to focus more resources on Native Nevadan students.⁴⁵⁴ Though the number of regular students versus Navajo students for each year the Navajo Program operated at Stewart is unknown, for those years it is available, Navajo students dramatically outnumber the rest of the student body. During the 1954-1955 school year, there were 381 Navajo students and 270 regular program students. Two years

⁴⁵³ *Nevada State Journal*. “Changes in Stewart Indian School Considered as Part of Many Tribal Proposals.” (April 4, 1950).

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

later, during the 1955-1956 school year, Navajo students outnumbered regular program students 378 to 246.⁴⁵⁵ These comments also illustrate the evolving relationship between Native Nevadans and the Stewart School. Whereas parents once hid their children from school officials, these communities seemed to increasingly view the school as an important resource for the education of their children.

Native Nevadans who shared these concerns had to wait nearly a decade for the end of the Special Navajo Program at Stewart, which was formally concluded in 1959.

Table 7: Percentage of Navajo Program Students Who Graduated from the Stewart School, 1947-1959⁴⁵⁶

Stewart School Year	Enrolled Students	Total Number of Graduates	Percentage Graduated
1947-1948	148	--	--
1948-1949	211	--	--
1949-1950	240	--	--
1950-1951	241	2	.08%
1951-1952	252	47	18.6%
1952-1953	248	48	18.6%
1953-1954	232	20	8.6%
1954-1955	381	21	5.5%
1955-1956	378	41	10.8%
1956-1957	393	48	12%
1957-1958	324	32	9.9%
1958-1959	350	34	9.7%
Total	3,398	293	8.6%

While in place, over 50,000 Navajo students enrolled in the eleven schools that participated in the program, including nearly four thousand students at the Stewart School alone.⁴⁵⁷ These numbers, however, do not tell the whole story about the Navajo Program. Students enrolled at Stewart and each of the other schools departed from off-reservation boarding schools every year, often not to return. In some cases,

⁴⁵⁵ Jane Atwater. "Stewart Indian School Offers Two Programs of Education." *Nevada State Journal*. (February 27, 1955); "Roster: Regular Program, Stewart Indian School, Stewart Nevada, 1955-1956." Navajo Program Administrative Records, 1948-1957, Box 2. Records of the Stewart Indian School. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives - Pacific Region (San Francisco).

⁴⁵⁶ Thompson, *The Navajo's Long Walk*, 199.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 194.

this may have been with the approval of school officials, as the Stewart administration's willingness to let some students with unique job opportunities drop out of school, indicates. But the sheer number of students who left the program before graduating suggests a more complicated situation. According to BIA figures, of the 50,249 students who enrolled in the Navajo Special Program, only 3,362, or six percent, actually graduated from the program.⁴⁵⁸ At Stewart alone, only 293 of 3,398 students enrolled in the Navajo Program at the school actually graduated.⁴⁵⁹

At a time when Navajo leaders supported educational programs and encouraged students to attend college, it seems unlikely that students and their families rejected such ideas en masse and simply gave up on obtaining an education. Instead, it seems more likely that they rejected an education system that required students to abandon their culture and travel hundreds of miles from home to go to school. In his history of the Navajo, Peter Iverson underscores this point, writing that many students in the Navajo Program missed their homes and families, and complained that years spent at boarding schools had negatively impacted their connections with tribal elders, damaged their language skills, and rendered them unprepared to care for their children.⁴⁶⁰ Iverson is quick to note, however, that other Navajo students, particularly those who were orphaned or who lived in abusive family situations or extreme poverty, were grateful for their experiences.⁴⁶¹ What

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, 198.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Iverson, 195.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

seems clear, however, is that the actions of Navajo children and their families did not signify a rejection of academic education, as Navajo leaders continued to focus on improving educational opportunities for their citizens during the 1960s. In 1965, for example, the Navajo Nation established the Rough Rock Demonstration School, later called the Rough Rock Community School, which continues to focus on academic education and cultural preservation for Navajo students.⁴⁶² Three years later, the Navajo Community College, now called Diné College, was founded with the objective of providing Navajo students the opportunity to attend college within Navajo Nation boundaries.

With regard to termination and relocation, it is difficult to measure the impact of these policies as they relate to the Navajo Special Program in general or the Stewart Indian School in particular. Overall, before these policies were dismantled in the 1960s, they reshaped Native communities and their connections with tribal lands, and resulted in the relocation of over 100,000 Native Americans from reservations to cities throughout the United States, creating demographic shifts that continue to impact Native populations.⁴⁶³ Stewart student records from this period are largely inaccessible due to privacy concerns, as are the records of the relocation offices that

⁴⁶² *Rough Rock Community School*. “Welcome.” (Accessed March 27, 2018)

<http://www.roughrock.k12.az.us/Welcome.htm>.

⁴⁶³ The National Council of Urban Indian Health documents the difficulties Native peoples experienced as a result of relocation, asserting that the top three challenges faced in urban areas were a general lack of information about life in cities versus on the reservation, few opportunities for meaningful, well-paying work, and inability to access social services due to language and cultural barriers. *National Council of Urban Indian Health*. “Relocation.” (Accessed March 28, 2018) https://www.ncuih.org/action/document/download?document_id=120.

operated in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁶⁴ It is therefore unclear how many Navajo students who attended the school permanently left their reservations for jobs in urban areas. Based on a review of limited information included in Stewart School files, however, it seems that vocational training and relocation to urban areas did not necessarily lead to long-term employment, as evidenced by at least one student who wrote to the school in the 1970s seeking copies of transcripts to enroll in a continuing education program.⁴⁶⁵

As the Navajo Special Program came to a close, and tribal nations across the United States grew increasingly frustrated with the impacts of termination and relocation, Native Nevadan tribes also expressed their desire for reform. At a 1961 caucus attended by tribal delegates from Walker River, Fallon, Reno, Carson City, Pyramid Lake, McDermitt, and the Western Shoshone nation, Native Nevadans pressed for reforms in the management of the BIA, an end to the termination of tribal rights, and Indigenous participation in creating the policies and plans that impacted their lives.⁴⁶⁶ The delegates also renewed calls for changes to the Stewart Indian School, which they wanted to be transformed into a “technical school” operated jointly by federal and state officials with greater input from the Indigenous communities that provided its student body.⁴⁶⁷ As the age of Indigenous self-

⁴⁶⁴ The National Archives restricts these records to protect the personal privacy of the individuals mentioned in these files.

⁴⁶⁵ Though this student’s correspondence was included in a student file currently open to the public, I have chosen not to identify them as a means of protecting their privacy.

⁴⁶⁶ *Nevada State Journal*. “Nevada Indians Hold Tribal Caucus on Bureau Overhaul.” (March 15, 1961).

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

determination began, Native Nevadan communities also insisted that their perspectives and interests be represented in the management of the Stewart Indian School. Students who attended the institution in the late 1960s and 1970s agreed, and worked throughout these decades to ensure that their voices were heard and that the school's curriculum addressed their needs in a more meaningful manner. They and their families met with some success, especially in the 1970s, but also encountered opposition from Stewart School officials who continued to embrace assimilationist practices and notions of Native inferiority, even as federal policy restored some aspects of Indigenous sovereignty.

Chapter Five: “Here at Stewart, we can all have pride in being an Indian:”⁴⁶⁸

Activism and Assimilation at the Stewart School, 1960-1980

In the fall of 1968, Rupert Steele traveled from his home in Ibapah, Utah, to enroll in seventh grade at the Stewart Indian School. A citizen of the Goshute nation, Steele had attended a BIA elementary school close to his home and family. There was no junior high or high school in Ibapah, however, and traveling daily to attend school in another town was not an option. The solution devised by BIA officials was for Steele to attend Stewart, which was located almost five hundred miles from his home, so he could continue his education and secure gainful employment after graduation. Steele, recalling his experiences almost fifty years later, noted that he had no idea what he was in for when he arrived in Carson City. He soon discovered that he and his fellow students were forbidden from speaking their languages and prohibited from exhibiting any aspects of their cultures. Steele described Stewart as “militaristic” and a “culture shock” that deeply affected his “welfare” and “well-being.”⁴⁶⁹ He missed his parents and his home environment and found the adjustment mentally and physically challenging. Reflecting on his experiences later in life, he came to understand the rationalization behind the BIA’s recommendation to send him, and eventually all of his siblings, to an off-reservation boarding school: “They had to get

⁴⁶⁸ ⁴⁶⁸ Marty Bibb. “An Open Letter: Nevada Students Tell Why They Prefer to Remain in Stewart Indian School.” *Nevada State Journal*. (October 31, 1969). Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno. Box 12, Folder 28, Stewart Indian School.

⁴⁶⁹ Rupert Steele. “From the Ranch to Carson City: An Interview with Rupert Steele.” Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project, 2. (Accessed September 7, 2018) <https://ia802900.us.archive.org/6/items/RupertSteeleFinal/Rupert%20Steele-final.pdf>.

us away from the reservation setting and from our parents and to make it easier to assimilate into their major society, including learning the English language.”⁴⁷⁰

Rupert Steele’s account of life at the Stewart Indian School in the late 1960s and early 1970s runs counter to what one might expect during a period associated with Red Power activism and the emergence of the Indigenous self-determination movement in the United States. To be sure, these efforts did impact life at the Stewart School, and resulted in changes to the school’s curriculum that permitted a deeper exploration of Native cultures and histories and the establishment of new programs to bolster students’ academic performance. Further, federal legislation passed in the 1960s and 1970s guaranteed the rights of Native students and parents to provide input regarding federal Indian education policy. These changes created new opportunities for Stewart Indian School students, particularly during the 1970s. At the same time, however, Stewart employees continued to characterize Native families as inferior, and deemed students as less intellectually and professionally capable than their non-Native peers. Students who attended Stewart in the 1960s and 1970s therefore experienced some new programs, but also a regimented system in which officials offered a watered-down academic program and increasingly outdated forms of vocational training that failed to acknowledge student potential and ambition, or Native communities’ desire for improved educational opportunities.

In this chapter, I argue that in the 1960s and 1970s, the final two decades the Stewart Indian School remained open, school officials pledged to institute reforms

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

pursued by Stewart students and parents, while also continuing to embrace the assimilationist mission of the off-reservation boarding school system. This resulted in a series of seemingly important reforms at the school, which included updated vocational courses, efforts to include parents and students in curriculum planning, the establishment of a mental health program, and the creation of new Native American history courses and extracurricular clubs at the school. While these changes impacted students' daily lives, the fact that officials remained firmly wedded to previous ways of thinking about and dealing with the student population simultaneously undermined efforts to reform the boarding school system. Students' days thus remained highly regulated by school officials who continued to underestimate students' intelligence and ambitions and shaped academic and vocational programs accordingly. Further, new programs instituted at Stewart continued to denigrate Native families and blame them for students' perceived shortcomings, rather than acknowledging the impacts of colonization or the generational trauma unleashed by the boarding school system. Ultimately, while a number of reforms were enacted at the Stewart Indian School during the 1960s and 1970s, the settler colonial mission of remaking Native families and replacing their values with those of the dominant society remained central to the objectives of Stewart Indian School officials.

Unsurprisingly, during this same period Stewart students, parents, and alumni continued to voice their concerns about the school, and to pressure administrators to reform Stewart's academic and vocational programs. Students voted with their feet, either by running away or by formally dropping out of the school. Others spoke to

investigative reporters, collaborated with activist groups, or voiced their opposition to school and federal policies through editorials written for school publications or in interviews with local newspapers. Native Nevadans, some of whom were Stewart alumni, formed an advocacy group and lobbied for reforms at the school and to refocus Stewart's enrollment on Native Nevadan students, who comprised a minority of the student body throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Despite their differences, however, these populations also united with school officials to try and keep the Stewart Indian School open when the federal government announced its possible closure in the spring of 1980. Though these efforts failed, they, along with other Indigenous plans to reform the Stewart Indian School, underscored Native communities' desire to educate their children, albeit on terms that recognized students' needs, abilities, and aspirations.

“A Failure of Major Proportions”⁴⁷¹

Throughout the 1950s, Native tribes and their allies vehemently protested the termination of their treaty rights. In 1961, the newly elected Kennedy administration stated its opposition to termination and a desire to increase Native peoples' involvement in planning federal Indian policy. As opposition to termination mounted, an increasing number of investigations and conferences addressed the policy and connected it with other issues related to Indigenous poverty and education.⁴⁷² By the

⁴⁷¹ Report of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, U.S. Senate, Special Subcommittee on Indian Education. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, November 3, 1969). Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 253.

⁴⁷² Reports on U.S. policies toward Native peoples from this period include a 1961 report written by the Commission on the Rights, Liberties, and Responsibilities of the American Indian that called for Native American involvement in all levels of policy decision making; the Declaration of Indian

mid-1960s, the U.S. Congress had informally ended the program. A new Indian Affairs Commissioner, Philo Nash, was directed to work closely with tribes on issues related to poverty and economic development. These efforts were closely connected with the Great Society programs established during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, and continued throughout the 1960s as the U.S. government waged a “war on poverty” across the United States.

Education was declared critical in supporting these efforts, and the BIA pledged to resolve “accumulated deficiencies” in education programs by improving school facilities, alleviating overcrowding, and modernizing classrooms, labs, libraries, and vocational programs.⁴⁷³ Given the lack of resources historically directed toward the boarding school system, these efforts were characterized in dramatic terms. A 1965 report on Indian education, for example, noted that it cost \$1,178 per pupil at a boarding school “to meet problems of isolation and transportation, and also to fill the gap left by inadequate health care, food, shelter, and clothing in the home environment.”⁴⁷⁴ This spending, however, did not keep up with inflation, which meant that “\$11 less is being spent annually per student today than 8 years ago.”⁴⁷⁵

Purpose, produced by the American Indian Chicago Conference at the University of Chicago in June 1961, which called for the end of termination and a reorganization of the BIA, among other things; and a report by the Task Force on Indian Affairs, led by Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall, published in July 1961, which called for economic development for tribes and greater federal collaboration with Native people. See Prucha, *The Great White Father*, 358.

⁴⁷³ Indian Programs – The Relationship of Achievement to the Level of Effort,” 6. Entry 837A: Records Relating to Appropriations, 1937-1966. Box 7, Folder 4. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁷⁴ “Bureau of Indian Affairs – Budget Review Before the Secretary’s Task Force, 1965. Entry 837A: Records Relating to Appropriations, 1937-1966. Box 7, Folder 4. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

Additionally, the report noted that BIA schools were also lacking in the following areas: “(a) playground supervision, (b) teaching materials, (c) specialized courses, (d) quality of teachers, (e) counselling (*sic*) services, (f) overtime pay for teachers.”⁴⁷⁶

Pessimistically, the report concluded the following: “At the present rate of improvement, it will take about 100 years to bring the median educational level of Indians up to the national median.”⁴⁷⁷

A 1969 report prepared by a Special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education also underscored the extent to which BIA programs were negatively affecting Native students. The Committee described Indian education policies as a “failure of major proportions” that denied Native children educational opportunities that were “anywhere near equal to that offered to the great bulk of American children.”⁴⁷⁸ The report criticized the BIA practice of sending young children to distant boarding schools, rather than building more schools near students and their families, and cited the traumatic nature of such separations on parents and children. The Committee further cited the inferiority of school textbooks and course materials at BIA schools, along with dilapidated facilities and school buildings in many locations, describing them as “shocking in quality.”⁴⁷⁹ The report also featured sobering statistics about the ineffectiveness of Indigenous education in the U.S. The average level of education achieved by a Native student attending a BIA school was

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 253.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, 254.

just five years, while one in five Native men attended school for less than five years. Eighteen percent of BIA school students enrolled in college, whereas the national average was fifty percent, and just three percent of those who did enroll actually graduated, compared with a national average college graduation rate of thirty-two percent.⁴⁸⁰ In terms of parental involvement in BIA schools, only one of 226 schools had an elected school board comprised of Native parents and community members, even though a 1966 presidential directive had mandated their establishment.⁴⁸¹

Despite these shortcomings, the student populations of off-reservation boarding schools continued to grow across the U.S. throughout the 1960s and 1970s. According to a national study conducted by academics Estelle Fuchs and Robert Havighurst between 1969 and 1971, the number of children attending boarding high schools in the 1950s and 1960s had doubled, “rising from 5,600 to 11,600,” while an additional 23,000 children attended BIA elementary schools.⁴⁸² Fuchs and Havighurst attributed this increase in enrollment to the growing Native population, the increased number of Native children attending school, the continued isolation of many tribal nations, a federal “road and school construction program which has not kept pace with requirements for day school attendance,” and the fact that many of these schools provided social services where federal and local communities did not.⁴⁸³ As of 1972,

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Estelle Fuchs and Robert J. Havighurst. *To Live on this Earth: American Indian Education*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 228. Fuchs and Havighurst conducted the study from which this data was compiled and published all of their findings in this volume.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, 229. In conjunction with termination, federal authorities denied treaty-mandated social services to many Native communities during this period, leaving the burden on state and local governments. As a means of further reducing the so-called financial burden of providing services for

35,000 of the 52,000 children educated by the BIA, approximately 67%, were enrolled in boarding schools.⁴⁸⁴

In their analysis of the boarding school system, Fuchs and Havighurst questioned the continued emphasis on gendered vocational labor at these institutions, and criticized the fact that academics had generally remained secondary to such instruction. This was supposed to have changed in 1963, when the BIA decreed that schools should offer only “prevocational curriculum,” based on the idea that students would attend vocational schools after graduation and that this change would grant schools more time to focus on academic instruction. This did not, however, seem to happen at many of the schools, including Stewart. The study noted that, almost ten years after the new BIA rules, girls continued to take four years of home economics training and boys four years of “practical arts.” Further, according to Fuchs and Havighurst, female students at Stewart were permitted vocational training in just two fields; domestic science and nursing aides/attendants, the latter of which many of the young women considered to be glorified domestic training. The utility of this training was also questioned in the study, which concluded that, “Generally, this type of vocational training is not very useful to students if they return to their home communities, for few economic opportunities exist in the reservations.”⁴⁸⁵

Native peoples, federal officials also sought the removal of Native children from ‘broken’ Indigenous families and their adoption into non-Native families. For details of this program, see Margaret Jacobs. *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 228.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 238.

These reports highlighted the continuing problems at BIA schools across the nation, particularly with regard to academic and vocational programs. They also drew attention to other issues, including prohibitions on students returning home to see their families on school breaks, the regimented nature of students' days, and the failure of school personnel to adopt bilingual educational standards. Still, many Native peoples continued to support the boarding school system. The schools provided secure jobs for Native people, many of whom returned to their alma maters for employment after graduation. The potential closing of boarding schools was also negatively associated with termination and the abrogation of treaty obligations. Further, by the 1960s, boarding school was a familiar institution to many Native peoples, and the schools were increasingly relied upon to provide food and shelter to children who might not otherwise have it. This did not mean, however, that tribal communities were unaware of the problems at these schools; rather, based on their own and their family's experiences, they increasingly began to propose changes in curriculum, alternative training methods for educators, and ways to improve boarding schools and make them more beneficial to Native communities.⁴⁸⁶

More powerful than such reports, however, was the activism of Native Americans, many of whom were boarding school alumni who agitated for reforms to this educational system. Beginning in the early 1960s new, organizations dedicated to Indigenous rights emerged at the national and local level across the U.S. The National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) was an intertribal advocacy organization established in

⁴⁸⁶ See Fuchs and Havighurst, 242-243.

1961 by a group of young Native Americans who advocated on behalf of Indigenous treaty rights and sovereignty and encouraged Native youth to “question and challenge the government’s agenda of assimilation and acculturation.”⁴⁸⁷ In Nevada, the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada (ITCN) formed in 1964 to advocate on behalf of Native peoples throughout the state, while the following year the Nevada Indian Commission was created as a state agency to “study matters affecting the social and economic welfare and well-being of American Indians residing in Nevada.”⁴⁸⁸ In 1968, the American Indian Movement (AIM) emerged with chapters across the country.

Indigenous activists also worked diligently during this period to create new educational institutions designed specifically to focus on the needs and interests of Native families. In addition to the formation of the Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo reservation, other Native communities experimented with so-called “survival schools” for Native children. AIM established two such schools, Heart of the Earth and the Red School House, which enrolled children throughout the 1970s and 1980s in Minnesota. Historian Julie L. Davis, in her account of survival schools in the Twin Cities, notes that the curriculum in these schools emphasized the “...history of other marginalized minority groups America, as well as the struggles of Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world.”⁴⁸⁹ These schools offered Native students “Indian-oriented education” designed to strengthen their “Native identity”

⁴⁸⁷ Bradley G. Shreve. *Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Native Activism*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 12.

⁴⁸⁸ Nevada Indian Commission. “About the Nevada Indian Commission.” (Accessed August 2, 2018) <http://nvculture.org/indiancommission/about-the-nic/>.

⁴⁸⁹ Davis, 146.

and advocated “true self-determination.”⁴⁹⁰ Survival school courses further focused on sovereignty and treaty rights, and featured Indigenous speakers from the United States, Canada, and Central America.⁴⁹¹

Beginning in the late 1960s, the efforts of activists, both within the federal government and outside of it, resulted in a series of new laws intended to promote Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. Several of these laws focused on improving educational opportunities for Native children and ensuring that their civil rights, and those of their parents, were protected. The use of bilingual education for Native students was codified, for example, in Title VII of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, while the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act set requirements for “maximum Indian participation” to direct federal resources toward the development of educational programs for Native peoples.⁴⁹² The U.S. government also addressed the rights of Native students in a set of 1974 regulations that delineated the rights of all students across the country. In the “Student Rights and Due Process Procedures” document, federal officials guaranteed that all students attending BIA schools had the rights to education, privacy, religious freedom, speech, assembly, and decision-making, among others.⁴⁹³ The American Indian Religious

⁴⁹⁰ American Indian Movement. “Heart of the Earth Survival School.” John Thorne Collection. *University of California, Santa Cruz, Special Collections and Archives*.

⁴⁹¹ Davis, 147.

⁴⁹² Quoted in Prucha, 274.

⁴⁹³ Quoted in Prucha, 273.

Freedom Act of 1978 further guaranteed the right of Native peoples to religious expression without interference by the U.S. government.⁴⁹⁴

Each of these events in the 1960s and 1970s impacted life for Native peoples living in Nevada, and fostered local activism among tribal nations living throughout the state. In addition to the activities of the ITCN, Native Nevadans worked to combat racism and segregation, which impacted the Latinx, African American, and Indigenous populations living throughout the state in a number of different ways. This included protests against overtly racist practices, including the placement of signs in local businesses that read “No Indians, dogs, or Negroes allowed,” or by joining national advocacy organizations like the NIYC.⁴⁹⁵ The Red Power movement also led to a resurgence in traditional Native Nevadan activities, programs dedicated to teaching Native languages and cultures throughout the state, and the establishment of an Indigenous newspaper, the *Native Nevadan*, in 1965.

Nevadan tribes also benefitted from federal economic programs that focused on improving health and rebuilding homes and other structures on reservations, as well as programs designed help teens find employment.⁴⁹⁶ As part of these programs, water was also extended into some Native communities that were previously excluded from state services, including to a downtown Las Vegas Paiute colony, in

⁴⁹⁴ See Prucha, “Student Rights and Due Process Procedures,” *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, (1974), 271. The adoption of Native children into non-Native families as a means of assimilating them was also addressed during this period in the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. For additional information, see Margaret Jacobs. *A Generation Removed*.

⁴⁹⁵ Green, *Nevada: A History of the Silver State*, 314. One of the founding members of the NIYC, Mel Thom, was a citizen of the Paiute nation from Schurz, Nevada. Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 6.

⁴⁹⁶ Green, 324.

1962. This same colony wrote its first constitution in 1970 after being officially recognized by the U.S. government that same year, and later in the decade established a successful smoke shop that continues to be an important source of revenue to the tribe.⁴⁹⁷ As a result of the Native Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act, some Native Nevadan tribes, including the Duckwater Shoshone, established their own schools on their reservations.⁴⁹⁸

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Native nations and advocacy organizations such as the ITCN and Nevada Indian Commission worked to support these efforts and improve the lives of Native peoples living throughout the state. A key point of interest for them remained the administration of the Stewart Indian School, which had changed dramatically over previous decades, but not always in ways that benefitted Native Nevadans or considered their views with regard to the education of Native youth. During these two decades, Indigenous activists, parents, and students continued to pressure Stewart officials to involve Native communities in the management of the school, and to listen to their ideas. These efforts proved challenging to Native Nevadan communities, as Stewart officials were reluctant to embrace federal reform efforts or accept changes proposed by the Native Communities whose students attended the school.

⁴⁹⁷ Delen Goldberg and Jackie Valley. "Las Vegas' Smallest Sovereign Nation," in *The Las Vegas Sun*. (July 20, 2015) (Accessed August 17, 2018) <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2015/jul/20/las-vegas-smallest-sovereign-nation/>.

⁴⁹⁸ Green, 324.

“Why aren’t we ever asked about our feelings?”⁴⁹⁹

By the beginning of the 1960s, the Stewart Indian School had changed dramatically from the institution that opened in 1890 to educate Native Nevadan children. Though the Navajo Special Program was winding down, the school continued to educate large numbers of these students, as well as hundreds of other children from numerous tribal nations across the western United States. This resulted in the continuation of a trend from the 1950s: the enrollment of more Native students from outside Nevada than from inside the state. In 1963, for example, the Stewart School enrolled 625 students, with the following breakdown, according to state and tribal nation: over 100 Native Nevadans, over 100 Navajos, one hundred Pimas, and, from most to least, students from the Apache, Hopi, Tohono O’odam, Havisupai, Mojave, Hualapai, Ute, and Goshute nations.⁵⁰⁰ The number of students attending the school during this decade also increased radically. Most years for which data is available indicate an annual population of more than 600 students. The school also gradually began to focus on educating older students. By 1963, sixth was the lowest grade available for enrollment at the Stewart Indian School, and by 1968, the school only accepted students in the seventh through twelfth grades.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Marty Bibb. “An Open Letter: Nevada Students Tell Why They Prefer to Remain in Stewart Indian School.” *Nevada State Journal*. (October 31, 1969). Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno. Box 12, Folder 28, Stewart Indian School.

⁵⁰⁰ Bob Richards. “Stewart: Nevada’s All American Boarding School.” *Nevada Magazine*. (February 3, 1963) Nevada Historical Society Collection. Sources from this period refer to the Tohono O’odam nation as the Papago nation. However, since the Tohono O’odam reject this name, I have chosen not to use it in this dissertation.

⁵⁰¹ Lillian Ianni, “Courses in Typing, General Business New Wrinkle at Stewart Indian School.” *Nevada State Journal*. (August 25, 1963); Elisabeth Orr. “The Stewart Story.” *Nevada Magazine*. (Summer 1968). Nevada Historical Society Stewart Indian School Collection.

The Stewart School generally followed federal guidelines with regard to admissions, though school administrators sometimes bent the rules to enroll more students. According to a 1963 history of the school, students who had “at least one-fourth degree Indian blood,”

Table 8: Stewart Indian School Enrollment, 1960s⁵⁰²

Stewart School Year	Approximate Enrollment
1960-1961	700
1962-1963	625
1963-1964	625
1964-1965	600
1968-1969	633

or who were “an orphan, half-orphan” or living in “destitute circumstances” with “home conditions not good enough for his proper mental and social development” could attend the school.⁵⁰³ Students who had no other educational opportunities near their homes, or who had no access to secondary education in their regions could also apply to attend the school. Further, students in need of “medical care which cannot be had at home,” or who sought “vocational training which cannot be had in the region near his home” could also enroll at the school.⁵⁰⁴

In terms of school curriculum and vocational instruction, little at the school had changed from the previous two decades. A 1964 article in *Nevadan Magazine* noted that the school employed 84 academic and vocational instructors that year, and operated with a budget of \$184,000.⁵⁰⁵ According to school officials interviewed for

⁵⁰² These numbers were compiled from the following newspaper articles: “Indian School Draws 700.” *Reno Evening Gazette*. (September 14, 1960); “Ormsby Schools Show Increase in Enrollment.” *Reno Evening Gazette*. (September 14, 1962); Ianni. “Courses in Typing, General Business New Wrinkle at Stewart Indian School;” “Third Week of Classes for Stewart School.” *Reno Evening Gazette*. (September 9, 1964); Peg Ward. “You Should Know: More About the Stewart Indian School.” *Nevada State Journal*. (1968), Nevada Historical Society Stewart Indian School Collection.

⁵⁰³ The Stewart Indian School.” (1963) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid. These latter two criteria provided access to a broader student population than that stipulated in federal guidelines. Whether federal officials knew and approved of this is unclear.

⁵⁰⁵ Richards, “Stewart: Nevada’s All American Boarding School.”

the article, “basic academic subjects,” including English, science, math, and social studies were taught at the school, but “vocational training is stressed” above academic instruction.⁵⁰⁶ An important part of the school curriculum also focused on shaping the attitudes and outlook of Stewart students in a manner that encouraged their sense of belonging and ability to survive in non-Native society. In 1963, for example, school officials noted their focus on “social adjustment,” a topic they felt compelled to address to ensure that students felt comfortable in “the changing environment in which the young Indian finds himself.”⁵⁰⁷ These ideas were further affirmed in a 1968 article written by Peg Ward, an employee at the school, in which wrote that Stewart’s curriculum focused on “building good character, fine citizenship, and...helping the student live happily in his or her surroundings.”⁵⁰⁸ Teaching students to be self-sufficient, a term touted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs throughout the 1960s to describe its ultimate objective with regard to Native peoples, was also a goal of the administrators at the Stewart School. “The main purpose of the school,” according to an article chronicling Thanksgiving festivities at Stewart in 1960, was “to educate the young Indian for a life of self-sufficiency.”⁵⁰⁹

During the ninth and tenth grades, students rotated through different vocational courses, and in eleventh grade, male students chose to focus on one of several different fields: agricultural work, painting, arts and crafts, woodworking, or

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ The Stewart Indian School.” (1963) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁰⁸ Ward, “You Should Know: More About the Stewart Indian School.”

⁵⁰⁹ Stella Risebeck. “Thanksgiving Day at Stewart Indian School.” *Reno Evening Gazette*. (December 8, 1960), 36

carpentry. During the first half of the decade, female students focused exclusively on either home economics training, which included sewing, cooking, and housekeeping, or on nursing aide work, which incorporated many of the same skills offered in their home economics courses.⁵¹⁰ The practice cottages built in the 1940s were still available for female students as well, with the addition of courses in “small cottage living and modern cottage living,” the latter of which allowed female students to develop a familiarity with appliances and equipment found in “better homes,” presumably ones in which they might work.⁵¹¹ By the late 1960s, female students were also able to train as beauticians and teachers.⁵¹² Beginning during the 1963 school year, all students were eligible to participate in the new Business Education program at the school, which included typing and general business courses for sophomores and juniors, and an advanced business course to be added in the future.⁵¹³ The “business room” in which these classes were conducted was in a newly built structure that added space for 26 new classrooms to the campus.⁵¹⁴

Stewart students also continued to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities, many of which were established during previous decades. Students could join the student council, participate in a variety of sports, including basketball, football, and boxing, create tribal dance groups, and attend social events on campus. Students could also spend time in Carson City on the weekends, if they were not

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ “The Stewart Indian School.” (1963) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵¹² Ward, “You Should Know: More About the Stewart Indian School.”

⁵¹³ Ianni, “Courses in Typing, General Business New Wrinkle at Stewart Indian School.”

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

working or under restriction, where they might attend a movie or go shopping. Students continued to attend church and participate in religious events, often under the guidance of school officials, singing, for example, religious songs at Thanksgiving events, or performing hymns for the student body.⁵¹⁵ At the same time, however, some students also participated in Indigenous cultural events at nearby universities where they shared aspects of their cultures with local audiences. One of these events occurred at the University of Nevada, Reno in 1960, and featured Hopi and Apache students discussing their tribal cultures and performing dances.⁵¹⁶ The following year, Stewart students performed tribal dances at Hiram Johnson High School in Sacramento, California, and at Sacramento State College.⁵¹⁷

Despite changes in the student population in the 1960s, the addition of new vocational programs, and allowances for some forms of Indigenous expression, however, the overall mission of the Stewart Indian School remained wedded to many of the regimented, assimilationist practices that had been in place for over six decades. Academic training remained secondary to vocational training, and focused extensively on teaching Native children to be good American citizens. Vocational training remained strictly segregated according to sex and encompassed half of students' school days. Students marched quietly in lines, were expected to abide by strict campus rules, and had little communication with their families or tribal communities. And school officials made little effort to consult Native nations with

⁵¹⁵ Risebeck, "Thanksgiving Day at Stewart Indian School."

⁵¹⁶ "Students Review Indian Customs." *Reno Evening Gazette*. (May 4, 1960).

⁵¹⁷ "Nevada Indians to Dance for Students at College." *Nevada State Journal*. (January 7, 1961).

regard to the school's academic or vocational curriculum. Despite the emergence of the Civil Rights and Red Power movements during this era, in many ways, attending the Stewart Indian School in the 1960s was like attending the school during any period over the previous thirty years.

This continuity with the past is illustrated in the testimonials of Stewart School alumni. Rupert Steele, who attended the school between 1968 and 1971, was shocked by the conditions at the school when he first arrived. He was surprised not just by the militaristic environment on the campus and the many rules students were expected to follow, but also by officials' continued insistence that students speak only English at all times. Steele recalled school officials encouraging students to interact with different tribal nations as a means of enforcing this rule and to prevent students from speaking Indigenous languages with members of their own tribes. He was also forbidden from staying in the same dorms as his brothers and cousins for this same reason, which might otherwise have alleviated the homesickness and loneliness he felt while attending Stewart.⁵¹⁸

Former student Ron Wopsock, a citizen of the Ute nation from Fort Duchesne, Utah, began attending the Stewart Indian School as a seventh grader in 1967. Upon arriving at the school, Wopsock was also stunned by what he encountered. Before coming to Stewart, he described himself as living with his mother in an isolated area with no running water and no power, which made him wholly unprepared for the discipline that was expected of Stewart students. For the first time in his life, he was

⁵¹⁸ Steele, 3.

expected to wash and iron his clothes according to the school schedule, and recalled being penalized with extra work “hours” if he failed in these tasks.⁵¹⁹ Wopsock also confirmed that he and his fellow students were required to march “within student lines” to the dining halls for their meals, during which students were often prohibited from socializing.⁵²⁰ He also did not travel home to see his family during summers at the school because he instead worked in Truckee and the Lake Tahoe region.

Religious practice was also part of Wopsock’s experience at the Stewart School. Rather than attending the Baptist or Catholic churches that were close to the campus, however, he sometimes attended services at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) in Carson City, though mostly because he enjoyed playing football in the church gym.

Along with regimentation and religion, the low expectations of school officials also remained part of the Stewart School experience for many of its students. Throughout the 1960s, school officials emphasized that Stewart was designed primarily as a vocational school to train its students in menial forms of labor and to live in the United States as good citizens. They also frequently downplayed students’ desires to attend college. In 1963, an unidentified school official emphasized to *Nevadan Magazine* that vocational training was important because only a few Stewart graduates would go on to college, largely because of the students’ inability to pay for

⁵¹⁹ Ron Wopsock. “Bringing His Game to Life: An Interview with Ron Wopsock.” Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project, 5. (Accessed December 12, 2018) <https://ia902806.us.archive.org/10/items/WopsockRon/WopsockRon.pdf>. Though Wopsock did not detail the types of punishments these hours entailed, for Rupert Steele these punishments generally involved cleaning floors or toilets, a form of punishment that extended back to the 1930s.

⁵²⁰ Ibid, 5-6.

it.⁵²¹ That same year, however, Stewart's principle, William C. Whipple suggested that it was not money holding them back, but ability. In an article highlighting Stewart's new business program, Whipple emphasized that the school continued to focus primarily on home economics and agricultural vocation programs, and cautioned readers against expecting too much from students enrolled in business classes. "We are trying to set up a program which allows the students to become generally acquainted with basic business principles," asserted Whipple, "we are not attempting to put out well-polished office workers."⁵²² Thus, even in touting a new opportunity for Stewart students and a much-needed update to the school's vocational curriculum, Whipple managed to undercut students' abilities.

Students who attended the school in the 1960s, like their predecessors, were not always willing to abide by school rules, and defied them in a variety of ways. Running away remained an option for Stewart students who wanted to leave the school, and by the 1960s a variety of escape methods were utilized. In September 1962, five male students stole a car in an attempt to leave Carson City, but were caught by the Ormsby County Sheriff at a roadblock. That same day, two female students ran away on foot, but were later found by police in the Washoe Valley. All of these students were taken to Wittenberg Hall, a juvenile detention facility in Reno, where they were held overnight and then returned to the school. The news article in which these incidents were reported noted that all but one of the students were

⁵²¹ Richards, "Stewart: Nevada's All American Boarding School."

⁵²² Ianni, "Courses in Typing, General Business New Wrinkle at Stewart Indian School."

fourteen years old.⁵²³ Two years later, two more students stole a car in an attempt to run away from the school, leading sheriff's deputies on an 80-mile car chase that resulted in the death of one of the deputies.⁵²⁴

Other forms of resistance were less dramatic, but equally impactful. Rupert Steele found a way to maintain his Native language by sitting with his cousins during meal times, which gave them the opportunity to clandestinely and quietly have discussions. Noting that the school's "assimilation policy failed big time" in this regard, he asserted that school officials made a big mistake in letting members of the same tribal nations sit together while they were eating.⁵²⁵ "You know," he reminisced, "I'd go eat with my cousins and we'd go and sit at the table...and we'd talk."⁵²⁶ He and his classmates would also use their Native languages during basketball games as a way to keep their upcoming plays a secret. Noting that some teams did not like to go to Stewart because of this, Steel stated, "...nobody understood us. We talked to each other like that, just like the code talkers, you know? We did the same thing!"⁵²⁷

Native Nevadans also expressed their frustration with the direction of the Stewart Indian School repeatedly during the 1960s, and worked hard throughout the decade to engage federal and local officials on the topic of reform at the school. W.R. Abraham, an alumnus of the school who later became Chairman of the Pyramid Lake

⁵²³ "Roadblock Halts Stewart Youths in Stolen Car." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (September 26, 1962).

⁵²⁴ "Youths Held After Deputy Dies in Wreck." *Reno Evening Gazette*. (September 23, 1964).

⁵²⁵ Steele, 3.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

Paiute Tribal Council, wrote a letter to the *Nevada State Journal* in June 1964 detailing his dissatisfaction with multiple aspects of the school. With regard to vocational programs, Abraham criticized the school for not teaching trades that would actually help students get well-paying jobs. He wrote that, “In the old days, it was good. The Indian kids went to [the] Stewart school and learned a trade...We learned carpentry, plumbing, baking, painting, and so forth. But today, our kids go to school and learn little that will help them to earn a living.” Abraham further complained that Stewart was not being used to serve the Native Nevadan communities it was originally built to educate: “...down at Stewart now they teach the Navajo and the Pima, but seldom our own Nevada Indians.” Fixing this situation immediately was critical, according to Abraham: “My point is this: let us have education for our kids that fit their skills, and will fill the need of the modern world. Let us not wait, let’s start next fall.” He also appealed to non-Native citizens for support, and suggested that future vocational programs might include an even more diverse student body:

We would like to get help from our white brothers and friends. We would like to have the Stewart Indian School returned to our native Indian people, and have a four-year high school, trade school and junior college. We do not insist that it be all-Indian, but think a proportion of the students could be non-Indian, too.⁵²⁸

The Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada also pressured the Stewart Indian School to admit more Native Nevadan students during the 1960s, and similarly advocated the establishment of an integrated secondary trade school on the campus. In 1966, the ITCN released an eight-page document outlining proposed changes to the admissions

⁵²⁸ W.R. (Abe) Abraham. “Teach a Trade.” *Nevada State Journal*. (June 13, 1964).

policies and curriculum at the school. The group was particularly focused on persuading school administrators to accept more Native Nevadan students at Stewart, and complained that the only local students admitted to the school were “severe welfare” or “disciplinary” problems, which excluded many students who also wanted to attend the school. ITCN also proposed that, rather than continuing to have seventh and eighth grade classes, Stewart should have a high school program and a two-year secondary vocational training program that would help students secure gainful employment “in a rapidly changing world.” While the ITCN wanted this secondary program to focus primarily on training Native students, the organization echoed Abraham’s proposal that admission not be based on “race, social status or income,” but open to all interested Nevadan students.⁵²⁹

Native Nevadan nations also expressed frustration with the management of the school by lobbying elected officials to support their recommended reforms and to devote more money toward improving school facilities. During the spring of 1968, in an apparently coordinated effort, four Nevadan tribal nations wrote letters to members of the Nevada Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. demanding that more Native Nevadan students be admitted to Stewart. W.R. Abraham, writing as Chairman of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Council, reiterated his point that Native Nevadans needed access to vocational programs that could “qualify them for gainful

⁵²⁹ Len Crocker. “Stewart School’s Policy Protested by Nevada Indians.” *Nevada State Journal*. (December 17, 1966). The ITCN may have looked to the transformation of the Haskell Indian School, now the Haskell Indian Nations University, as a model in the late 1960s. In 1970, Haskell began offering a two-year community college curriculum to students before transitioning into a university in 1992. See “School History.” Haskell Indian Nations University. (Accessed November 1, 2018) <https://www.haskell.edu/about/history/>.

employment.”⁵³⁰ He further wrote that there were no other opportunities for Native peoples to attend vocational training programs in the state, and noted that a similar request sent to the Kennedy administration in 1961 seemingly “...fell on deaf ears.”⁵³¹ Abraham again reiterated his and the ITCN’s offer that Stewart be opened to non-Natives as well, as long as the school returned to its original mission of serving Nevadan students ahead of those from other states. Over the following two months, the leaders of the Ely Colony Council, the Shoshone Paiute Tribal Council, and the Moapa Business Council sent similar letters to their representatives.

The responses to this series of letters was disheartening and seemingly incongruous with federal officials’ assertions about listening to and including Native peoples in deliberations about educational programs. To their credit, Nevada’s Congressional representatives responded to each of these letters by asking the BIA how and whether Native Nevadan concerns regarding the Stewart School might be addressed. In response, a series of high-ranking BIA officials thanked the Nevada members for their letters and for bringing the matter to their attention, and then explained why Native Nevadan concerns could not be substantively addressed. Acting Assistant Commissioner for Education John P. Sykes cited the 1934 Johnson-O’Malley Act to justify Native Nevadans’ limited enrollment at Stewart, while a second Acting Assistant Commissioner for Education, Robert E. Hall, conveyed the

⁵³⁰ Tribal Chairman W.R. Abraham to Honorable Walter S. Baring. (March 1, 1968). Central Classified Files – Carson, 1957-1975. Box 53, Folder 1. General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; National Archives and Records Building, Washington, D.C.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

BIA's "regret" that it could not at that time provide a "definite answer" regarding the future establishment of a larger vocational program at the school. None of these letters indicated that Native Nevadan perspectives would shape federal plans, discussions about admissions policies, or vocational programs at the Stewart School.

Each of these instances underscores the extent to which Native Nevadans were committed to education, as well as their desire to shape the programs offered at the Stewart School. Many of these activists were intimately familiar with the school, having attended themselves, and were committed to improving and utilizing it to develop more opportunities for the students enrolled there. Because of their history with the school, much of the tribal advocacy during this period came from Native Nevadan alumni who, based on their personal experiences, understood how reforming the school could improve student's experiences. However, though much of the student body was orphaned, had parents who spoke little English, or lived in remote areas, there is also evidence that they too advocated on behalf of their children. Ron Wopsock noted that during the 1968-1969 school year, life at Stewart became less severe than in years past because of increased tribal interventions. According to Wopsock,

The parents were complaining about how you're treatin' my children or this, and you see some of the Council people from other places comin' in to check just to make sure no one was getting abused, you know, beat up, things like that...and it got more lenient. You know, when I first got there, it was...pretty tough on you!⁵³²

⁵³² Wopsock, 12.

The 1968-1969 school year seems to have been watershed year in terms of activism within and around the Stewart community. In March of 1969, Lakota activist and educator Lehman Brightman visited the Stewart campus and later gave a talk about the school at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). Brightman referred to Stewart as “one of the worst in the country” and a “total flop,” and detailed a number of student complaints about the school. According to Brightman, the girls’ counselors were too old to give them helpful advice, students were forced to scrub floors and shovel snow as alternatives to corporal punishment, and they were forced to clean faculty quarters as part of their “work details,” a likely reference to the industrial labor Stewart students had been forced to supply since the school opened in 1890. Additional complaints he shared included the fact that the school library closed at 4:00pm and its lack of books that focused on Native culture or history. Referring to the school’s curriculum, Brightman asserted, “Most of the courses are the equivalent of house painting and brass polishing.” He added that his comments were meant to elicit anger not just among Native Nevadans, but also among white populations because, in his words, “white people need to get angry to do anything about the problem.”⁵³³

Brightman’s plan seemingly worked, because the *Nevada State Journal* newspaper, in collaboration with Native students attending UNR, examined circumstances at the school in the weeks following his presentation. Investigators

⁵³³ William Kroger. “State’s Stewart Indian School ‘Nation’s Worst.’” *Las Vegas Sun*. (March 9, 1969); “Stewart One of ‘Nation’s Worst’: Calls Indian Education Inadequate.” *Nevada State Journal*. (March 8, 1969)

questioned Stewart students, administrators, faculty members, and staff, and uncovered a series of problems at the school. In one instance, a female student who ran away had her long hair cut off by a counselor as a punishment upon her return, an act described by school superintendent Jose A. Zuni as “barbaric.” Stewart students affirmed that this case was not unique, and that it was actually a common punishment for students who misbehaved. Multiple students also confirmed acts of corporal punishment at the school through a system known as the “Hot Line.” According to students, this punishment consisted of “a big student in one of the shop classes taking an offender to a room and beating him with a wooden paddle,” presumably at the behest of Stewart staff.⁵³⁴

Complaints about food and conditions during mealtimes were also shared with investigators. Students were frustrated that they were given just thirty minutes to eat, and indicated that if they arrived in the cafeteria any later than ten minutes after lunch started there was no food left. Students further shared that they were forbidden from having a second portion of food, and that they were punished with extra hours of work for even asking. Concerns about the cleanliness of the food at the school were also examined, and both a cafeteria worker and an athletic coach confirmed the presence of weevils in a batch of noodles served to the student body. This revelation came in response to a student joking with the cafeteria worker about maggots living

⁵³⁴ Mike Nash. “Indian School Conditions Investigated.” *Nevada State Journal*. (March 23, 1969).

in meat served in the cafeteria. Each of these issues were referred to Superintendent Zuni, who pledged that no students would be punished for speaking out.⁵³⁵

Despite such problems, students did have some positive experiences at Stewart during the 1960s. Rupert Steele appreciated his interactions with members of other tribal nations at Stewart, which was a new experience for him. He developed an appreciation and “respect” for other Indigenous languages and cultures at Stewart, and found solace in the fact that he and his fellow students were all going through the same thing together.⁵³⁶ Wopsock was grateful for the discipline he learned at Stewart, noting, “...that work ethic was kinda installed in you at Stewart. You couldn’t be lazy and not do something.”⁵³⁷ A group of 72 Native Nevadan students also explained their support for the Stewart School in a 1969 letter to the *Nevada State Journal*, which was written in response to rumors that the school might be closed in the aftermath of the damning 1969 report on the failures of the Indian education system. In the letter, students questioned the benefits of integrating Native students into public schools, largely because of the racism they experienced within these institutions:

There can be advantages in going to an Indian school. Most, or rather all of us have had some experience in public schools. We know the problems of being a minority and find it a struggle to do two different things – cope with prejudice and stay in school. You’ll find that in the Indian schools the Indian drop-out rate is much lower, and of course there is no prejudice.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Steele, 8-10.

⁵³⁷ Wopsock, 12.

⁵³⁸ Bibb, “An Open Letter: Nevada Students Tell Why They Prefer to Remain in Stewart Indian School.” In her study of Ojibwe students who attended the Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota and the Haskell Institute in Kansas, scholar Brenda J. Child found similar views among some students. She writes, “There is little doubt that government boarding schools, although often antagonistic toward

Further, these students underscored their desire to go to school in an environment in which they could explore their heritage, and emphasized their desire to have input regarding their education:

Here at Stewart, we can all have a special pride in being an Indian. We learn about different tribes and about the contributions Indians have given to America. Whereas, if we were still attending public school, we would only be learning about the Anglo's culture, and most certainly would spend no time on our own history.... The problem is that too many well meaning non-Indians are always telling us what's best for us. Why aren't we ever asked about our feelings?⁵³⁹

Stewart may not have been perfect, but these students viewed it as a space in which they could explore their histories and cultures.

Despite these students' support, however, circumstances at the Stewart Indian School were in many ways bleak for students throughout the 1960s. The fact that the student population during this decade was comprised largely of orphaned children and those whose family members lived far from campus or who did not speak English almost assuredly impacted the lack of reforms at the school during the 1960s. The descriptions of life at the school offered by Steele and Wopsock, and in the accounts detailed in local newspapers, also suggest that, aside from minor changes to vocational programs and the addition of the LDS church as a new option for student worship, the school had remained largely unchanged since the 1940s and 1950s. As officials openly acknowledged, Stewart continued to emphasize vocational work over

tribal cultures in many ways, also provided a friendly environment because of the intertribal composition of the student body." Brenda J. Child. *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940.*" (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 25.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

academic instruction, and did so in a gendered manner that mirrored that of the early days of the school. School administrators and faculty members also continued to foster a highly-regimented school environment in which students maintained little autonomy over their lives.

These and other problems were highlighted in devastating detail in Fuchs and Havighurst's study of Native American boarding schools in the U.S. In addition to the school's ongoing focus on vocational training, the study found the academic program at Stewart lacking. According to Havighurst, while many Stewart students did come to the school behind their grade level or in need of extra academic assistance, they did not actually receive the type of support they required. Rather than engaging in "intensive remedial work" with students, teachers instead focused on "a watered-down, easy curriculum," which did not correct students' academic deficiencies.⁵⁴⁰ As a result, students became progressively more behind the longer they stayed at the school. A Title I program that provided assistance in math and reading for students behind in their grade level was established at Stewart in 1969 as a long term solution to this problem.⁵⁴¹ In the meantime, the grave nature of the academic situation was, according to the study, demonstrated by the results of the over one hundred students from each grade who took the California Achievement Test in the late 1960s: "students in grades eight and nine were approximately one and one-half grade levels behind, students in grades ten and eleven were about two and one-half grade levels

⁵⁴⁰ Havighurst and Fuchs, 240.

⁵⁴¹ Ed Johnson. "Stewart Indian School Has Progressed." *Apple Tree*. (March 13, 1977) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

behind, and students in grade twelve were approximately three and one half grade levels behind.”⁵⁴²

Though the study credited Stewart administrators for allowing students two hours of leisure time each evening, it also criticized their restrictions on certain aspects of student life. One of the areas school officials were particularly strict about were interactions between male and female students. The report stated that “The sexes are pretty well kept separate most of the time, and even casual contact between them is looked on with some suspicion by school officials anxious about possible scandal.”⁵⁴³ Havighurst suggested that that these policies might actually cause students to get in trouble more than they otherwise might, because they forced students to conduct all heterosexual relationships secretly. Additionally, out of state students indicated that they were largely prohibited from visiting their homes over school breaks, including Christmas. The study described this policy, which was reminiscent of the early days of the school, as particularly harmful to students and families, and largely driven by school officials’ concerns that if they permitted students to leave they might not return.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² Robert J. Havighurst. *The National Study of American Indian Education Final Report*. U.S. Department of Education. (November 1970), 32. (Accessed September 28, 2018) <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED043425.pdf>. Much of the data from this report, though not all, was included in the volume published by Havighurst and Fuchs.

⁵⁴³ Havighurst and Fuchs, 241.

⁵⁴⁴ By 1979, this policy had been reversed, according to the Christmas edition of the school newspaper, the *Warpath*, which noted that students would leave for their homes on December 19th and return to the school on BIA buses by January 4th. “Christmas Vacation. *Warpath*. (December 15, 1979), 17. Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection.

By 1970, the combination of Indigenous activism and incendiary reports detailing the systematic problems at off-reservation boarding schools began to have an impact on the management of the Stewart Indian School. For the first time, parents were invited to participate in a round table about the school, efforts were made to modernize academic programs and equipment, and funds were allocated to help students address mental health and substance abuse problems. However, even amidst these dramatic changes at the school, assimilationist rhetoric remained part of these programs, and incidents of physical violence continued to be reported.

“Will the BIA take our suggestions and will anything come of it?”⁵⁴⁵

The critiques levied against the school throughout the 1960s began to be addressed just four months into the new decade, when the Stewart School reached a major milestone in its efforts to involve Native peoples in the management of the school. Between April 22 and April 30, Stewart officials convened a workshop entitled “Tribal Involvement in Curriculum,” and, for the first time in the school’s history, administrators invited tribal officials from the communities that enrolled their children at the school to attend. Parents and tribal members discussed proposed reforms to school curriculum, new vocational opportunities, forms of discipline, and students’ daily lives. This meeting represented the Stewart School’s first attempt in its eighty-year history to truly engage with Native communities and to solicit their feedback about their children’s educations. Native students and community members

⁵⁴⁵ Stewart Indian School. “Tribal Involvement in Curriculum – Workshop.” (April 22-30, 1970), 8. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection.*

responded passionately throughout the workshop sessions, undermining the persistent myth that Indigenous communities were disinterested in education or unwilling to participate in reforming the boarding school system. Rather, these students and parents advocated extensively for improved academic and vocational programs, more positive views of Native communities and their needs, an acknowledgement of problems at the school, and the establishment of enhanced lines of communication between tribal nations and Stewart School officials.

Nevada Agency Superintendent Jose A. Zuni and Stewart principal William Whipple organized the meeting, and were almost immediately confronted with long simmering parent and community frustrations. In his opening remarks, for example, Zuni, a citizen of the Pueblo of Isleta tribal community, stated that the “Indian people are always trying to catch up. We are always behind,” which angered some of the participants who felt this assessment was pessimistic and counterproductive.⁵⁴⁶

Alexander Ami, a Hopi Education Coordinator from Polacca, Arizona, protested that Zuni’s words made him question the purpose of the workshop. “Are we not here to work something out so that we can manage to catch up?” he asked. Ami added, “Is this not the reason we are here, so that we can work out something and agree on something?”⁵⁴⁷ Echoing these questions, White Mountain Apache educator Wesley Bonito opined, “Will the BIA take our suggestions and will anything come of it?”⁵⁴⁸ Zuni’s comments were not what workshop attendees wanted to hear, and Ami made it

⁵⁴⁶ Tribal Involvement in Curriculum Workshop,” 2.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 8.

clear that he and others expected Stewart administrators to listen to their views and take action.

Similarly, Native attendees also confronted Stewart officials about ongoing communication problems with the school. In his introductory remarks at the conference, Whipple asserted that it was often “difficult” for school officials to contact tribal members, and that he was pleased they had attended the workshop because “tribal involvement in the curriculum is something we have wanted for a long time.”⁵⁴⁹ Bonito quickly pointed out the seeming disingenuousness of these remarks. He relayed that when members of his community called Stewart, they were often passed around to different people or were unsure with whom they needed to speak. He asserted, “Before we know it, we are talking to ten different people to get to the right one.”⁵⁵⁰ This suggests that Bonito’s community did try to communicate with Stewart officials, and, as with previous generations of Stewart parents, wanted to provide feedback or be more involved with the school. His statements also suggest that officials did not provide parents or tribal nations with clear information about how and whom to contact at the school. To correct this problem, LeRoy Rupert, a member of the Indian Commission Educational Committee in Carson City, called for the establishment of a school board that incorporated individuals from all states and tribal nations from which Stewart students were enrolled. Rupert also underscored the

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, 27.

importance of Native nations providing feedback at the workshop, and emphasized that “this was the first time a thing like this was being done” at Stewart.⁵⁵¹

Tribal members also urged Stewart officials to reexamine their assumptions about Native students and their families, and to consider how school officials’ actions impacted student behavior. Bonito pressed for more Native employees at Stewart, and suggested that some students might be more comfortable confiding in another Native person. In response to Principal Jim Simpson’s request that tribal members visit the school to prevent students from dropping out early in the school year, Bonito countered that while this might address part of the problem, school officials had to examine their own policies and actions to determine why students annually dropped out at such high rates. He further suggested that school officials blamed parents for these students’ actions, and relayed that these parents are often characterized as “drunks.” Bonito asserted, “I just hate the word “drunk.” Drinking is a national problem. Not just with the Indians.” With regard to Stewart he added, “Maybe it’s the teachers, guidance, or the matrons. Maybe it’s the way they [the students] are received here,” and not the solely the fault of Native families.⁵⁵² Ami squarely blamed the BIA for its “failure to educate” Native children, declining to hire teachers who understood and respected Native cultures and history, for “disregarding Indian values,” and trying to force Native students to “conform to the standards of middle class white society.”⁵⁵³ He further called upon Stewart officials to acknowledge that

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, 21, 34.

⁵⁵² Ibid, 6.

⁵⁵³ Ibid, 9

“the quality of courses is not challenging enough” for many students, and advocated that an accelerated curriculum be adopted to correct the situation.⁵⁵⁴

Current students were equally unhappy with the curriculum at the school, and were incensed that they were excluded from attending the workshop. Dorothea Nasby shared that she had heard about the meeting “quite by chance,” when students were making name cards for the workshop and mistakenly listed on the program. Nasby critiqued the academic curriculum at the school, declaring it was not up to standard, and asserted that, based on an investigation she and her colleagues had conducted, only four of the teachers at the school were qualified to teach. She also recalled her experiences attending Carson High School stating, “I really learned something there. Here I don’t do anything and I am really disappointed.” Carol Wright, a representative of the ITCN from Reno, agreed with Nasby, and pointed out problems with teachers’ attitudes toward Stewart students. She described some teachers as willing to “cut down on [a] student’s ego,” by telling them they should “appreciate” whatever they got from the school and to “not complain because it is free.”⁵⁵⁵

Surprisingly, the one point on which each of the parties attending the workshop could agree was the need for stricter student discipline, potentially including corporal punishment. School counselor Barbara Neuneker, during an explanation of the dormitory system, indicated that students who misbehaved by drinking or running away could only be punished with extra hours of work, which

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, 23.

usually entailed cleaning school buildings and bathrooms. She noted that it was the only form of punishment available to school employees, “as we are not allowed to lay a hand on them.”⁵⁵⁶ Underscoring the extent to which Stewart officials still considered corporal punishment an effective disciplinary strategy, Simpson countered Neuneker’s assertion that physical violence against students was not an option, astonishingly admitting that he did not think he “would be working here if I could not lay a hand on a child.” He further asserted that, in some cases, there was no other way to deal with a child than “physically,” and then relayed a recent incident with a student in which Simpson “just took him over my knees and spanked him,” despite the fact that corporal punishment was officially banned in BIA schools in 1931. Simpson noted that he had, however, ended the use of the “hot line,” the punishment whereby students were hit by other students, because he considered it “degrading.”⁵⁵⁷ Student Jerle Johnson criticized this decision, because he felt the hotline was an effective deterrent on student misbehavior. Two other Native participants, Wesley Wyatt and Carol Howard, similarly supported the continued use of the hotline to keep students in line.

The extent to which student and tribal feedback was incorporated into the administration of the Stewart School is unclear, though the school did announce major changes to its vocational programs at the beginning of the 1970-1971 school year. On September 8, 1970, the *Nevada Appeal* reported that school principal Jim

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, 32.

Simpson had announced a new curriculum that was unique to Stewart and designed to provide students with more modern vocational choices. Beginning that year, students had the choice between studying commercial services, in which they learned about sales, food services, where they explored cooking and nutrition, along with health services, which focused on medical and dental assistant programs, pre-forestry, and agricultural work, such as ranch management, social services, and unspecified technical trades.⁵⁵⁸ According to Simpson, students selected the vocation they were most interested in and took exploratory courses in the field with the understanding that they could switch occupations at any time. Students could also enroll in business English, typing, and office courses. Notably, changes to the curriculum during this 1970-1971 school year focused on vocational opportunities, not academic instruction, and did not address the strict social rules that governed the school or students' lackluster performance on achievement tests.

Revisions to the academic curriculum at Stewart did occur later in the decade, but even these updates often remained steeped in assimilationist ideals and attached to the notion that Indigenous families and ways of life required correction. A list of course descriptions from the 1970s underscores these sometimes contradictory efforts to engage Native students and teach them about their cultures, while simultaneously sending the message that they required modification. Indian history courses explored “problems facing tribal governments” and resource management, and were designed

⁵⁵⁸ Nevada Appeal. “Simpson Discusses Stewart Curriculum.” (September 8, 1970) *Nevada Historical Society, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

for students to “develop a positive self-image through the study of cultures, family, languages, folklore, arts and crafts, music, dance, and Indian values.”⁵⁵⁹ Alongside these classes, however, all students were still enrolled in gender specific home economics courses. For male students, this course was called “Bachelor Living,” taken over the course of one semester, while female students continued to be subjected to years of training that focused on cleaning, cooking, and sewing.⁵⁶⁰

Stewart administrators also considered modernizing media facilities at the school, and in August 1970 collaborated with the University of Nevada, Reno, to develop a plan for an instructional media center at the school. This center would create a space for multi-media courses at the school to help students navigate the “rapidly changing and complex society” to which they were increasingly exposed.⁵⁶¹ In developing the curriculum for such a program, the specific needs of Stewart students were considered by the school and the authors of a study on the program. The study proposed bilingual instruction for students who did not grow up speaking English as their first language, and suggested that students coming from isolated communities might need additional assistance based on their experiences. At the same time, however, the study also described Stewart students in a manner that reflected negative attitudes about Native families and students. Noting that a large number of Stewart students came from “broken homes,” the authors of the study asserted that

⁵⁵⁹ “Stewart Indian High School Course Descriptions.” (1970s), 16. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

⁵⁶¹ Greene and Associates and the University of Nevada, Reno. “Implementing an Instructional Media Center at the Stewart Indian School.” (August 1970), 1. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

they also were unlikely to have had “close associations with parents who were concerned with their development.”⁵⁶² The majority of the students at the school were further described as “emotionally and socially handicapped,” prone to “delinquent behavior,” and lacking “meaningful contact with non-Indian life.”⁵⁶³ Whether or how a media center would correct these perceived problems is unclear. However, it seems unlikely that the tribal representatives who attended the workshop at the Stewart School four months prior to the presentation of this study would agree with the above characterizations or that each of these issues stemmed from the alleged isolation and inferiority of Indigenous families.

These competing impulses are also on display in a plan outlining the ‘Model Mental Health Program’ established at the school in 1978. This program was developed by BIA officials to address the abuse of drugs and alcohol at Stewart, and the behavioral problems that stemmed from it. According to a document outlining the program, the objective of the program was for students to “achieve responsible adult decision making processes” that would end students’ “dependency and reliance on other people,” improve their mental health, and make them less likely to engage in illicit or illegal behavior.⁵⁶⁴ According to the BIA officials who designed it, the program was necessary because of the large number of “behavioral and social problems at Stewart during the past four years,” which included drug abuse,

⁵⁶² Ibid, 25.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 25-26.

⁵⁶⁴ Phoenix Area Indian Health Service. “Stewart Indian High School Model Mental Health Program, FY-79, Second Year Component.” (July 1978) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*, ii.

shoplifting, and underage drinking.⁵⁶⁵ These incidents peaked during the 1977-1978 school year, during which there were 460 student-related substance abuse incidents. Because of this situation, school officials conducted “educational and emotional assessments” of 165 students, presumably those who were involved in the substance abuse incidents, and found that 124 of these students required “an intense educational and counseling program that does not presently exist at Stewart.”⁵⁶⁶ School officials further judged that eighty-five percent of Stewart students required mental health counseling and instruction in “homeliving” to develop the skills necessary for living in a “multi-cultural society.”⁵⁶⁷

The destructive behaviors exhibited by Stewart students were not viewed through the lens of adolescence, connected with centuries of colonization experienced by Native peoples, their economic status, or their possible frustration at being enrolled in an unfamiliar boarding school far from family and friends, however. Rather, Stewart officials blamed these behaviors solely on “environmental causes, emotional deficiencies, and extensive social problems” that were unique to Native peoples, despite the facts that drug and alcohol abuse among all high school students in the U.S. peaked in the late 1970s, and that motivations for shoplifting are connected with a variety of different factors.⁵⁶⁸ The school instead blamed these

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, 1.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, iii. According to academic and federal studies, drug use among all U.S. high school students peaked in the late 1970s, the time when the ‘Model Mental Health’ program was established at Stewart. Though these studies were published decades later, the data on which they rely was collected throughout the 1970s. Further, it stands to reason that Stewart School officials could have contacted other Nevada high schools to determine whether the problem at Stewart was unique or something other

incidents on the pressures of living in a “dual society” and students’ “serious deficiency in social skills...perpetuated by coming from dependency situations.”⁵⁶⁹ In other words, Indigeneity itself was responsible for student behaviors, along with Native communities’ expectations that U.S. treaty obligations be fulfilled. Reservation life was also blamed for substance abuse and emotional problems among Stewart pupils: “The reservation situation simply compounds existing problems within the youth’s lifespan. It is there the problems surfaced, and it is likely to be reinforced and sustained there.”⁵⁷⁰ The solution to these problems, therefore, was the continued removal of Native children from their homes and families, and their assimilation.

One way the school had attempted to treat substance abuse problems was with the establishment of a campus crisis center, formally called the Awareness Center, in the mid-1970s. Though this space was originally intended to offer activities focused

facilities had experienced as well. They seemingly did not do this, and instead characterized substance abuse as an Indigenous problem. See the following studies for more information: Stephanie T. Lanza, Sara A. Vasilenko, John J. Sziak, and Nicole M. Butera. “Trends Among U.S. High School Seniors in Recent Marijuana Use and Associations with Other Substances: 1976 to 2013.” *Journal of Adolescent Health*. August 2015) 57 (2): 198-204, Accessed September 10, 2018 on <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4629476/>; Lloyd D. Johnston, Patrick O’Malley, and Jerald G. Bachman. “Drug Use Among American High School Students, College Students, And Other Young Adults: National Trends Through 1985.” *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. (1986) Accessed September 10, 2018 on <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/118212NCJRS.pdf>. With regard to shoplifting, social scientists attribute this behavior in adolescents to a number of different factors, including a lack of parental involvement in children’s lives, the want of necessities, and the desire to protest unfair circumstances. Whether any of these factors motivated Stewart students is unknown, though each of them is applicable to their experiences at the school. See the following for more information: George P. Moschis, Dena Saliagas Cox, and James J. Kellaris. “An Exploratory Study of Adolescent Shoplifting Behavior.” *Advances in Consumer Research*, eds. Melanie Wallendorf and Paul Anderson. (Provo: Utah, 1987), 526-530. Accessed September 10, 2018 on <http://www.acrwebsite.org/search/view-conference-proceedings.aspx?Id=6757>.

⁵⁶⁹ Stewart Indian High School Model Mental Health Program, iii.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

on encouraging “student growth,” it instead served as a “detoxification center” for students, and an alternative to their incarceration in the local jail. However, in taking on this purpose, the Awareness Center began to resemble a jail in which intoxicated or mentally troubled students were placed for observation. The Awareness Center, according to the mental health study, functioned as a holding facility that utilized “control” techniques on intoxicated students. A description of the Center underscores this impression: There were “two secure holding facilities where staff can observe students intoxicated, or in severe crisis so that they cannot hurt themselves,” and no furniture, which in “recent years” had “all but disappeared.”⁵⁷¹ The use of the Awareness Center to deal with substance abuse and student mental health crises may have protected students from harm in the short term. However, it is also an example of school officials’ failure to treat or understand student behaviors within the broader contexts of adolescence, the pain of separation from their families, or the trauma of colonization.

The architects of the model mental health program did suggest that certain school practices negatively impacted student behavior. The new student orientation, according to the program, “can be likened to military boot camp” where students were greeted in an “impersonal and non-individual manner” due to personnel limitations.⁵⁷² The orientation was further described as a “very intense process” during which students attended a general assembly, registered for classes, took an

⁵⁷¹ Stewart Indian High School Model Mental Health Program, 16.

⁵⁷² Ibid, 24.

academic placement test, toured the local community, were informed of school rules, and attended their initial class meetings.⁵⁷³ Because of the overwhelming nature of this situation, "...many students turn to substance abuse as a way of avoiding frustration" and "coping with homesickness, despair, and minimal recognition/attention, in the perceived absence of alternative activities."⁵⁷⁴ The correlation between this process and the large number of students who annually departed from the school during the first four to six weeks school was in session was also raised, bolstering the claims of tribal members who suggested in 1970 that the school was at least partially responsible for this situation. Despite pointing out these problems, however, the model mental health study ultimately concluded that, "...a boarding school placement is normally a last chance effort at salvaging a youth."⁵⁷⁵

Even in this challenging environment, Stewart students and alumni continued to pursue reforms during the 1970s, and repeatedly questioned the actions of Stewart officials. More so than in previous decades, many of these complaints were acknowledged and addressed. The editor of the *Native Nevadan* newspaper, Bob Shaw, complained to Nevada Indian Commission Chairman Russ Morres in May 1972 that Stewart students did not have access to quality healthcare, their instructors were unqualified, and that school officials had tried to cover up the drowning of a student the previous year. In response, Morres drafted a memo and sent it to Nevada Governor Mike O'Callaghan, who then scheduled a meeting between Shaw, Morres,

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, 18.

and Stewart Superintendent William Whipple. Each of Shaw's concerns were addressed to his satisfaction, and he expressed his pleasure that he had brought "people together" and made them "aware that there are problems."⁵⁷⁶ The following year, the Stewart Indian School hosted a meeting of the National Indian Youth Council, which featured between 300 and 500 delegates and the participation of the Nevada State Indian Youth Council. Among topics of discussion at the August 1973 meeting were educational services as federal treaty obligations, and a proposal to have the Stewart School contracted to the Intertribal Council of Nevada, which would manage the facility. Students also pledged to support their peers who faced discrimination, such as a male student from Mineral County High School in Nevada who was denied a graduation diploma for wearing his hair "Indian style."⁵⁷⁷

Student activism and varied forms of expression were also prominently featured in the pages of the Stewart School newspaper, the *Warpath*, throughout the 1970s. Pupils also expressed disagreement with school policies in the publication. In one such case, students wrote to the newspaper to express their disagreement with school officials' announcement that students in the police cadet training program would be paid \$100 per month for their work. Sonia Stone wrote that while it was a good to have more paying jobs for students on campus, it was unfair that the police cadets, rather than other student workers, were paid for their activities. Stone asserted,

⁵⁷⁶ Gazette Carson City Bureau. "Indian School Hearing Ends on Good Note." *Reno Evening Gazette*. (May 29, 1972). Newspapers.com.

⁵⁷⁷ Journal Carson City Bureau. "Young Indians Gather in State." *Nevada State Journal*. (August 8, 1973) Newspapers.com.

“...being a cadet isn’t really hard,” and argued that their activities were similar to those in student aide positions, the latter of which received a grade rather than a salary.⁵⁷⁸ Judy Morgan wrote that paying student cadets was unnecessary because they were there to help their fellow students, not to provide an actual law enforcement presence. She suggested they earn course credit for their efforts instead. Students also protested changes to the Awareness Center that occurred at the beginning of the 1979-1980 school year. Students Lois George and Valerie Jefferson wrote in the October 5, 1979 edition about several students recently in trouble for running away from the school and drinking alcohol. The student authors noted that, because the school detox space was recently closed, these students were sent first to the Carson City police station, where they were booked for their offenses, and then sent to the Wittenberg Hall juvenile detention facility in Reno. George and Jefferson felt it unfair for students to have such offenses noted on their permanent records, and advocated that the detox area be reopened to deal with such incidents.

The *Warpath* was also a forum for critiques of colonization and appeals for tribal unity. An article published in October 1978 addressed the conclusion of Indian Claims Commission activities, and referred to its efforts as trying to resolve the “unconscionable dealings” between the U.S. and Native peoples. The article further expressed opposition to the transfer of remaining claims to the U.S. Court of Claims, which was described as a “hard bargainer” and unlikely to side with Native

⁵⁷⁸ Stewart Indian School. “We Get Letters.” *Warpath* IX, no. 2 (September 8, 1978): 2. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

plaintiffs.⁵⁷⁹ Other critiques were inspired by a film on Spanish and French colonization in the Americas shown in an English class. In the December 12, 1978 edition of the *Warpath*, student Daniel Velasco wrote that, if not for colonization, “...we, the so-called “Indians” would still be living the same lives as we did back then,” and that any changes would have been “our concern.”⁵⁸⁰ He further expressed frustration at outside efforts to control Native life, and subverted notions of Indigenous inferiority in the process: “The white man tries to run everything for everybody when they can’t even run their own lives. I can’t understand this of the inferior whites.”⁵⁸¹ Another student, Arnold Rios, wrote an editorial in February 1980 in which he called for Red Power and Indian unity on campus. He praised the existence of tribal clubs at Stewart, but suggested that a more inclusive ‘Indian Club’ would allow students to “start standing up with each other” and “unite.”⁵⁸² He added that, although Native peoples were a minority in the U.S., if united together they could be a “powerful minority and we could determine our future for ourselves.”⁵⁸³

In addition to such criticisms, Stewart students who attended the school during the 1970s had positive things to say about their experiences, particularly with regard to the friendships they developed. Bill Turner, a citizen of the Paiute nation from Bishop, California, attended Stewart during the 1975-1976 school year. In a 2017

⁵⁷⁹ Stewart Indian School. “Claims Commission Goes to Archives.” *Warpath* IX, no. 5 (October 20, 1978): 1. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁸⁰ Daniel Velasco. “What I Don’t Understand.” *Warpath* IX, no. 8 (December 12, 1978): 7. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸² Arnold Rios. “For Red Power, Indians Must United as One.” *Warpath* IX, no. 11 (February 22, 1980): 2. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

interview, he recalled enjoying his time at Stewart, particularly the friendships he developed at the school. Turner recalled that coming to Stewart was also positive for him because he came to the school “not having much.” He became a star boxer and tried out for the U.S. boxing Olympic team in 1976. Though he was unable to box in the Olympics, he appreciated the skills he learned at Stewart, and enjoyed becoming a Letterman as a result of his athletic abilities. Importantly to Turner, he also fostered a diverse network of friends at the school that made the experience easier. He especially remembered the comfort of building friendships with students he felt were his true peers: “we were...from the same place,” he noted, “we aren’t all rich, as to where you see the rich white kids, they’ll always look down on you.” Turner further asserted that Stewart had “...an important role in the improvement of the [Native] children.”⁵⁸⁴

Hualapai tribal citizen Rudy Clark similarly praised the friendships he built at Stewart. When he first arrived at the school Clark thought, “Where the hell am I? What am I doing here?” but came to love Stewart once he became acclimated to the regimented nature of school life. Of particular importance were his friends. He recalled that these fellow students “...were like sisters and brothers,” and that an important lesson he learned at Stewart was working with and helping his fellow students. Like Turner, Clark was also a member of the Lettermen, served on the student council, and performed in a rock band with Apache students. He studied

⁵⁸⁴ Bill Turner. “Stewart Boxer Turned Pro: An Interview with Bill Turner.” (March 19, 2017) *Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project*, 3-4. Accessed September 10, 2018 on <https://ia801507.us.archive.org/32/items/TurnerBill/TurnerBill.pdf>.

business at the school, and credited his teachers with “showing me how to be a good citizen and a gentleman,” adding, “I carry myself that way today.” Clark also confessed to disobeying school rules on gender separation by sneaking into an abandoned dorm with his girlfriend, where they pretended it was their home and planned their future.⁵⁸⁵

School officials also worked to engage Native communities and alumni in new ways during this period. An Indian Day festival was established in 1969 and carried through the 1970s, and students and alumni were invited to select an “Indian princess,” attend a parade, purchase Native-made art, crafts, and student paintings, and watch baseball games and Stewart Tribal Dance Club performances.⁵⁸⁶ In 1971, this event also featured the first student reunion at the school, which all former alumni were invited to attend.⁵⁸⁷ In a further tribute to school alumni, the Athletic Hall of Fame was established in 1974 as a means of honoring former student athletes.⁵⁸⁸ This event occurred in the newly built school gym, which students and school officials affectionately referred to as “Moccasin Square Garden.”⁵⁸⁹ Similarly, school officials invited tribal representatives to speak to students at school assemblies. In one such event covered in the *Warpath* in October 1979, Mescalero Apache citizen Delmar Boney delivered a presentation on tribal history, Apache

⁵⁸⁵ Rudy Clark. “Making the Most out of School: An Interview with Rudy Clark.” (March 21, 2017) *Nevada Indian Commission: Stewart Indian School Oral History Project*, 4-6, 10-11. Accessed September 10, 2018 on <https://ia802807.us.archive.org/1/items/ClarkRudy/ClarkRudy.pdf>.

⁵⁸⁶ “Stewart Plans Indian Festival.” *Nevada State Journal*. (April 30, 1971).

⁵⁸⁷ “Stewart Student Reunion Planned During Festival.” *Nevada State Journal*. (April 23, 1971) Newspapers.com.

⁵⁸⁸ “Stewart Honors Former Athletes.” *Reno Evening Gazette*. (December 7, 1974).

⁵⁸⁹ Johnson, “Stewart Indian School Has Progressed.”

religion, and his family history.⁵⁹⁰ The presentation was part of “Indian Day” at Stewart, and also featured performances by Apache and Hopi students. In 1975, BIA officials also appointed the school’s first Native Nevadan administrator. Van A. Peters, a citizen of the Washoe nation, grew up in Carson City and attended the University of Nevada, Reno. He served as principal of the Owyhee High School on the Duck Valley Reservation prior to coming to Stewart, and may have been appointed to assuage Native Nevadan concerns about the large number of out-of-state students enrolled at the school.

Though students like Turner and Clark celebrated the positive aspects of their time at Stewart, many were also aware of the underlying mission of the school and its shortcomings. In contemplating its history, Clark underscored the need to “...reflect on the reason Stewart was built, which was “...mainly to acculturate the Native students into vocational training.”⁵⁹¹ Rupert Steele was similarly aware of the assimilationist objectives of Stewart, but in his view the school was failing in its mission by the time he attended in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Steele described Stewart as “stuck in the Industrial Age” and asserted that efforts to assimilate Native students were “dying” while he was at the school.⁵⁹² He further criticized the school for failing to keep up with changes in computer technology while he was there, and noted that in this regard, “Stewart was left behind.”⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ Eva Crozier. “Indian Day Assembly Held in Gym.” *Warpath X*, no. 4 (October 5, 1979): 1. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹² Steele, 10.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

These and other problems continued to plague the school during the final decade it remained open. In a 1979 *Carson Times* article, students and vocational faculty members criticized the antiquated equipment they were expected to use. At the Stewart ranch, this included a 1959 tractor and a welding shop built in 1925 that had previously been condemned.⁵⁹⁴ This lack of funding also impacted other school programs. According to an article in the October 19, 1979 edition of the *Warpath*, the art program at Stewart had not received money or supplies for three years and was “really in need.”⁵⁹⁵ Similarly, students enrolled in the school’s sewing class were unable to sew as much as they had the previous year because the program’s budget was “...too limited to buy the fabric.”⁵⁹⁶

School officials also continued to promote Christianity on campus throughout the 1970s, despite rules about religious freedom that emerged in the 1960s and the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978.⁵⁹⁷ Religious leaders from the Baptist, Catholic, and LDS churches delivered graduation blessings in 1973, 1974, 1978, and 1979, and in 1980, the graduation ceremony was held at the local LDS church with Baptist and Catholic representatives also attending.⁵⁹⁸ Christmas celebrations were also held at the school each year, though student Edwina Antone

⁵⁹⁴ Susan Manuel. “At the Stewart Indian Ranch, Learning Means Doing.” *Carson Times*. (May 2, 1979) *Nevada Historical Society Collection*.

⁵⁹⁵ “Classroom News: Art Class Sells Work.” *Warpath X*, no. 5. (October 19, 1979): 2. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁹⁶ “Classroom News.” *Warpath X*, no. 8 (December 15, 1979): 4. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁵⁹⁷ In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Establishment Clause of the Constitution prohibited prayer in public schools. *Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute*. “Engle vs. Vitale. (Accessed September 4, 2018) <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/370/421>.

⁵⁹⁸ These details were reported in the Senior Editions of the *Warpath* for each of the above stated years.

wrote in the *Warpath* in 1974 that the program for that year had undergone a “remarkable change” in that it no longer specifically mentioned the “birth day of Christ.” Antone added, however, that the Christmas songs performed at the school were, indeed, “inspired by the birth of Christianity.”⁵⁹⁹ The arrival of a new minister and his family at the Baptist Community Church also warranted an article in the *Warpath* in December 1976. David and Donna Anderson shared their excitement in “working with the students at Stewart” and outlined the programs and activities available to the student body through their ministry. The Andersons also used the school newspaper to invite students to Sunday services at the church. Whether Native parents or communities opposed these proselytizing efforts is unclear. Given school admissions policies, however, which targeted orphaned children or those from geographically remote areas, Stewart officials were seemingly able to incorporate Christianity into students’ lives with little protest.

Some students also criticized a ritual annually directed at newly enrolled freshman in which they were dressed as “slaves” and auctioned off to seniors. This initiation tradition dates to at least 1973, according to an account of the event printed in the Senior Edition of the *Warpath*, and took place with the knowledge of school officials who attended a picnic after the event. The author described the auction in the following manner:

Seniors dressed the frosh up as slaves and auctioned them off to the highest bidder...Following the sale of the slaves, the freshmen cleaned the campus and then both seniors and freshmen celebrated a picnic on the Carson River.

⁵⁹⁹ Edwina Antone. “Christmas Music.” *Warpath: Christmas Edition* V, no. 8 (December 18, 1974): 2. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

Employees were also invited to the picnic. This was a fun thing to create school spirit, and it had a good function: the campus is now clean for the graduation exercises.⁶⁰⁰

In an article published in the 1979 Senior Edition of the *Warpath*, student Edmund Jose further wrote that over the course of this event, students “had their faces blackened and they were auctioned off as slaves for whatever price they would bring. They cleaned the campus, and were then treated to pop, etc. by their masters.”⁶⁰¹ Jose described this event as the “funniest thing that happened” to his freshman class. However, not all students appreciated this event or found it humorous, as evidenced by a letter in the *Warpath*’s ‘Ask Aunt Mini’ column in October 1979. An unnamed student who wrote a letter opposed to this tradition asserted, “I think it is stupid for someone to dress you up like a stooge and sell you to let people order you around, even though it was just for one day.” The author further referred to the tradition as “childish” and asserted that freshmen should have the right not to participate in the event. The dismissive response written by ‘Aunt Mini’ barely acknowledged the racist nature of this tradition, and instead emphasized the importance of the funds raised by senior classes as part of the tradition:

Yes, selling frosh as slaves is a tradition all right. If this school were a black school instead of an Indian school, it could never happen. But until we can offer a better solution to the problem, we probably should not criticize...I heard the seniors earned over \$200 for their class funds by buying and selling the frosh. What is the purpose of initiation – to welcome freshmen or make money? When the real purpose is determined, maybe somebody will come up

⁶⁰⁰ See, “Frosh Initiated.” *Warpath*. (May 15, 1973): 4. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁶⁰¹ Edmund Jose. “Senior Class History in Part: Freshman Year.” *Warpath: Senior Edition IX*, no. 16 (May 1979): 18. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

with a different solution of making everybody happy. The ones I saw dressed up seemed to enjoy their stupid make-up.⁶⁰²

That school officials allowed this overtly racist event is unconscionable, and raises a number of questions about why this practice was permitted and whether freshmen and senior students were forced to participate. Events such as this might also explain the large number of freshmen students who left the school each year shortly after their arrival. This annual mass exodus, referenced by tribal communities in their meetings with school officials in 1970, and in the model mental health program report, apparently continued throughout the decade. According to the 1979 Senior Edition of the *Warpath*, only one student, Marvin Perkins, from the graduating class of 1979 had started at Stewart as a freshman and remained at the school for all four years.⁶⁰³

Conflict over the number of Native Nevadans permitted to attend Stewart also continued throughout the 1970s, with BIA officials remaining unresponsive to local tribes' requests for greater representation at the school. Though school officials did not comment

on this ongoing issue or share statistics

Table 9: Stewart Indian School Graduates from Nevada and Out of State⁶⁰⁴

School Year	Seniors from Nevada	Seniors from Out of State	No State Listed	Total Students
1972-1973	11	45	1	58
1973-1974	9	40	3	52
1977-1978	6	60	1	67
1978-1979	7	44	10	61
1979-1980	7	73	0	80

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ The data in this table was compiled from the senior issues of the *Warpath* published in 1973, 1974, 1978, 1979, and 1980.

about the school's student body, the *Warpath* published several Senior Editions in which graduating students' home states were listed. In sections entitled "Meet the Seniors," the students' names, tribal affiliations, and future plans were shared, along with the states they lived in prior to attending Stewart. In 1973, of the fifty-eight seniors listed, eleven came from Nevada, forty-five came from out of state, and one student did not list their home state.⁶⁰⁵ This pattern continued throughout the decade, according to data published in the *Warpath*, though by 1980, the number of Native Nevadans in the school's final senior class comprised an even smaller proportion of the Stewart study body: of eighty graduating seniors, just seven, or roughly nine percent of the senior class, were Native Nevadans.⁶⁰⁶

Despite these issues, when the possibility of Stewart's closure was raised in April of 1980, students, teachers, and alumni immediately voiced their opposition. That month, BIA Deputy Director of Education Gabe Paxton described the school's infrastructure as "outmoded" and in need of \$1.2 million in renovations to protect students in the event of an earthquake.⁶⁰⁷ An additional reason for the closure, according to Paxton, was because a majority of the school's students no longer lived in Nevada, but rather hundreds of miles from the school. Paxton apparently overlooked the irony of this statement, which ignored decades of Native Nevadan pressure to enroll more local students, as well as the fact that it was federal policy that

⁶⁰⁵ "Meet the Seniors." *Warpath*, (1973): 7-16.

⁶⁰⁶ "The Senior Class of 1980." *Warpath* X, no. 15 (May 15, 1980): 14. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁶⁰⁷ Bill O'Driscoll. "Indian School Closure Looms." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (April 3, 1980); Mike Grundmann. "Stewart Indian High School Closing after 90 Years." *Nevada Appeal*. (September 30, 1980).

created this situation. In response to this announcement, the Stewart Student Council began gathering signatures to oppose the closure, and a 'Save Stewart Committee,' comprised of students, school officials, and Carson City community members was established.⁶⁰⁸ Outside organizations also worked to prevent the school's closure. The U.S. Forrest Service, the Carson City Chamber of Commerce, the Humboldt County Board of Commissioners, the Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association, the Carson City School District, and the Carson Nugget each wrote letters supporting the school.⁶⁰⁹ Native organizations, including the National Council of American Indians, and the Intertribal Councils of Nevada, California, and Arizona also expressed their support for the school.⁶¹⁰

Students also articulated their opposition to the closure of the school in articles published in the *Warpath*, and expressed skepticism regarding the BIA's proposed action. Just after the possible closure was announced, student Debbie Dennis speculated about the federal government's ulterior motives regarding the closure. She wrote, "I think they want to close Stewart because the government is after the land...all they want is land."⁶¹¹ Another editorial written by student Ronnie Bircham in May 1980, in what turned out to be the final edition of the *Warpath*, opposed the closure of the school on the grounds that it would leave Stewart employees jobless and deny Native students their educations. Bircham was also

⁶⁰⁸ Kerry Swanson. "Students, Staff, Vow to 'Save Stewart.'" *Nevada Appeal*. (April 6, 1980) *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁶⁰⁹ Bill O'Driscoll. "Letters of Support for Stewart School." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (April 25, 1980).

⁶¹⁰ Ibid; "Stewart Indian School Backed." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (April 30, 1980).

⁶¹¹ Debbie Dennis. "They SHOULD NOT Close It!" *Warpath X*, no. 14 (April 18, 1980): *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

cynical about the motivations behind the potential closure. He wrote, "It's a case where Indians have something good going for them, and the white people want it."⁶¹² Bircham added that an unidentified teacher at the school had also expressed such sentiments.

Notwithstanding these appeals, the federal government informed Stewart Superintendent Mahlon Marshall in May 1980 of the school's definitive closure, scheduled for September 30, 1980. Though letter writing campaigns aimed at saving the school continued over the summer of 1980, the decision was final and students who had been attending Stewart were enrolled in other boarding schools or in public schools near their homes. Students, parents, and employees were frustrated with the way the closure occurred, and complained that federal officials did not discuss their decision with the Indigenous communities it affected. Further, Stewart's Parent Advisory Council did not learn of the potential closure until May 1980 when its members arrived at the school for a scheduled meeting.⁶¹³ Though this lack of consultation was a trademark of the administration of the Native American boarding school system, the decision to close Stewart came as a shock to its student body. And while Native communities were often critical of the school, many maintained hope that it would eventually represent their values and priorities. For others, including a student interviewed about his experiences in the aftermath of Stewart's closure, the school, for all of its faults, was home:

⁶¹² Ronnie Bircham. "I Don't Think It Should be Closed." *Warpath* X, no. 15 (May 15, 1980): 2. *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*.

⁶¹³ *Ibid*, 3.

I was attending Stewart Indian [School] when they closed it down...It was difficult when we heard they were closing the school. It was like losing a part of our family. We didn't want to lose our schools. Because they meant so much to us. It's hard for some people to understand the family environment we had together in those boarding schools. I remember the rallies and protest we had to try and keep them open. At the rallies I got a chance to meet other Indians who had gone to the boarding schools. We had some good times in the B.I.A. schools!⁶¹⁴

During its final two decades, Native students, parents, and alumni worked tirelessly to enact reforms at the Stewart Indian School. In the 1960s and 1970s, these groups allied with outside activists to push for changes that would improve the academic and vocational opportunities for students at the school, and create an environment designed to foster personal growth and economic prosperity for the student body. The improvements achieved during the final two decades the school remained open is a testament to Native peoples' efforts in this regard, especially since school officials were generally unwilling to abandon the assimilationist principles on which schools like Stewart were established. Stewart alumni have been similarly indefatigable in their efforts to create a meaningful space in which they could tell their stories about the school. Unsurprisingly, they have faced consistent resistance from state and federal officials in their efforts.

Soon after the school closed, Stewart alumni and Native Nevadan communities began to consider how they might commemorate their experiences at the school. Right away, however, they were met with opposition from Nevada state officials who sought to appropriate the school grounds for their own needs, without

⁶¹⁴ Benjamin Chavis. "Off-Reservation Boarding High School Teachers: How are they Perceived by Former American Indian Students?" *The Social Science Journal*. 36, no. 1 (January 1999): 44.

consideration of the experiences of generations of Native students who spent their formative years at the school. These actions amounted to the attempted erasure of both the positive and negative events that occurred during Stewart's 90-year history, and the perpetuation of settler colonial imperatives that sought to destroy and replace Native cultures and narratives with that of the dominant society. This situation is being remedied by the state of Nevada, in collaboration with the Nevada Indian Commission, which has been working with Stewart Indian School alumni, their families, and Native Nevadan communities for nearly three decades to ensure their stories and experiences are shared, on their terms, with as broad an audience as possible.

Chapter Six: “That was our home, and it needs to be remembered:”⁶¹⁵

Erasing and Reclaiming the History of the Stewart Indian School

On August 11, 2013, the *Nevada Appeal* published a story about an archaeological dig taking place at the Stewart Indian School. On this warm August day, Stewart alumni were invited to return to their former school for an event sponsored by the University of Nevada, Reno’s Department of Anthropology, which was excavating a portion of the school grounds. As university students and educators unearthed toys, school supplies, and building materials, Stewart alumni looked on. As she watched these items being recovered, JoAnn Nevers, who attended the school beginning in 1948, remarked, “It’s real. It really happened. They [the students] were real people.”⁶¹⁶ Nevers’ remark is significant, as it speaks to the complicated relationship between the federal government, state institutions, and Native communities regarding the history of Indian boarding schools like Stewart. This system, which sought to assimilate generations of Native children, is a topic rarely addressed in U.S. history, particularly in terms of its impacts on Native families. This is true for the Stewart School as well, with regard to the history of the institution while it was open, but also in the manner in which the school grounds were treated upon its closure in 1980. Once shuttered, the state of Nevada attempted to repurpose the campus in a manner that ignored the wishes of the Native communities who also

⁶¹⁵ Ruby Carillo, Stewart Indian School alumni, quoted in Jarid Shipley. “In Search of a Place for the Past: Nevada Indian Commission Kicks off Campaign for Museum Dedicated to the Stewart Indian School.” *Nevada Appeal*. (November 19, 2006). *Nevada State Museum Collection*.

⁶¹⁶ Terri Vance. “Pieces of History Lie Below Stewart School.” *Nevada Appeal*. (August 11, 2013). (Accessed February 7, 2016) <http://www.nevadaappeal.com/news/7647600-113/indian-dig-stewart-com>.

sought access to the grounds. Further, state and federal officials failed to support Indigenous efforts to establish a museum and cultural center on the school grounds, instead supporting an exhibit on the school's history at the Nevada State Museum that focused only on the supposed benefits of the Indian boarding school system.

This chapter examines the history of the Stewart School since 1980, and uses settler colonialism as a framework to explain federal, state, and local institutions' interactions with the Stewart campus and local Native communities in the decades after its closure. I argue that these institutions have consistently sought to erase Indigenous perspectives on the Stewart Indian School and replace them with a historical narrative that ignored students' experiences and obscured the U.S. government's assimilationist agenda. These efforts have focused primarily on the dispossession of the land on which the school was built, and, until quite recently, the failure to support Indigenous efforts to establish a museum dedicated to the school and its history on the campus. Nevada state officials further ignored the importance of commemorating Indigenous experiences at Stewart to its alumni, and attempted to repurpose the campus without recognizing the historic nature of the site. Additionally the Nevada State Museum has repeatedly presented an image of the school that celebrated the accomplishments of Stewart alumni, while ignoring the trauma created by the forced separation of Native children from their families.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁷ This willingness to ignore Indigenous perspectives and instead present a historical narrative that praised the settler state's assimilationist agenda is a common practice cited by scholars of settler colonialism. Wolfe writes, for example, that settler colonialism is a "structure, not an event" that continues to impact Indigenous peoples in the present, while Lorenzo Veracini points out the power of "settler colonial popular narratives," which remain firmly ensconced in culture, history books, and museums. Additionally, Falzetti argues that local history is particularly prone to "epistemic erasures of

It is also important to point out that the settler colonial objectives of the U.S. government did not disappear upon the Stewart School's closure. Department of the Interior officials worked in concert with the state of Nevada to ensure it was able to purchase campus land at a bargain price. Federal institutions, including the BIA, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR), have also maintained control over historic records related to the school, some of which have been lost or destroyed, or are exceedingly difficult to obtain. With regard to records held by the AIRR, an institution that was created to preserve and protect tribal records, alumni are forced to submit a notarized request form simply to gain access to their own academic transcripts.

At the same time, however, I illustrate how Stewart alumni and Native communities in Nevada have consistently worked to honor the history of the school and present their own accounts of life at Stewart in the decades since it closed. In examining these efforts, I describe how Stewart alumni and their families, local tribal leadership, the Nevada Indian Commission, and the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum have showcased a variety of Indigenous perspectives and presented a multifaceted history of the school that recognizes the positive and negative experiences of Stewart Indian School alumni. It is therefore essential to recognize that Indigenous communities have found ways to subvert, resist, and

Native people not completed in the initial violence of land dispossession.” See Patrick Wolfe. *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. (London: Cassell, 1999), 163; Lorenzo Veracini. *The Settler Colonial Present*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 71; and Ashley Glassburn Falzetti. “Archival Absence: The Burden of History.” In *Settler Colonial Studies*. 5 (2015): 129.

counter efforts to erase their experiences from the historical record in the decades since the school's closure and highlight their efforts in this regard.

“A huge significance to the Indians of the state”⁶¹⁸

During the 1980s, the fate of the Stewart School campus was the subject of intense debate between officials in the Nevada state government, local citizens in Carson City, and Native Nevadans, each of whom had different visions about how the grounds should be utilized. Soon after the school's closure in September 1980, Nevada officials moved to transform the campus into a state-controlled space that ignored both the ninety-year history of the school and Indigenous claims on the land. Throughout 1981 and 1982, the Nevada State Legislature worked with the Department of the Interior in this regard. The state's plans for the site varied: officials suggested turning the campus into a prison, housing low-risk inmates at the site, using it to conduct hazardous materials training, establishing a police training center, or simply using it for storage. The Nevada legislature sought to fund its proposed initiatives with grants from the federal government, an untenable plan, since it had previously declared the Stewart campus too costly to maintain, and later with funding from a federal jobs bill.⁶¹⁹ The Federal Emergency and Management Agency (FEMA) also considered renovating buildings on the campus, which it planned to lease from

⁶¹⁸ Robert Frank quoted in ⁶¹⁸ “Governor to Apply for 50 Core Acres of Stewart School.” *Nevada State Journal*. (November 13, 1981) Nevada State Historical Society Collection.

⁶¹⁹ Reno Gazette-Journal. “Senate Panel Cool to Assembly's Tax-Hike Proposal.” (May 16, 1983); “Jobs Bill May Aid Stewart Conversion.” *Nevada State Journal*. (March 30, 1983) *Nevada Historical Society Collection*.

the state rent-free for twenty-five years.⁶²⁰ The state of Nevada made no plans, however, to support a museum or memorial at the school, and seemed disinterested in working with Native communities that had ideas about the future of the site.⁶²¹

The question of why the Nevada state government lobbied federal officials so diligently to acquire the Stewart grounds is connected with settler colonial views on land and its ownership. In a 1983 legislative report on the campus and its potential uses, the history of the land on which the school was built was described in detail. This document emphasized that the Nevada state government had donated the original land on which Stewart was built to the federal government in exchange for its construction of an off-reservation boarding school, and that later campus expansions were accomplished through purchases from private land owners.⁶²² State officials cited this history to bolster their claims on the Stewart campus and to make the point that this land, along with all of its water rights and resources, had originally belonged to Nevada and should therefore be returned to the state now that the federal government was no longer using it. What this analysis ignored, of course, was the removal of Native people from this same land in the 1850s and 1860s, the Indigenous

⁶²⁰ According to this agreement, if FEMA decided to cease operations at the Stewart campus prior to the end of this lease, the buildings, including all of their improvements, reverted to state ownership. Also, the fact that the federal government paid for at least some of the renovations that rationalized the closure of Stewart less than five years after it was shut down seems to illustrate the regard with which federal officials held Indigenous education. “Feds Don’t Like Idea of Paying State Rent for its Own Property.” *Reno Gazette-Journal* (May 28, 1985).

⁶²¹ “Watt Confirms Stewart Land Transfer in Works.” *Nevada State Journal*. (February 24, 1982) *Nevada Historical Society Collection*.

⁶²² Nevada Legislature: Research Division, Legislative Council Bureau. “Status and Potential Uses of Stewart Indian School Property.” (1983), 2. *Nevada Historical Society Collection*.

presence in Carson City that preceded that of white settlers by millennia, or the concurrent competing claims for the land by Native Nevadan nations.

Adopting this same settler colonial mindset, Carson City officials were similarly outspoken about the future of Stewart. After defeating state plans to build a prison on the campus, several different groups proposed alternate uses for the land.⁶²³ The Carson City Board of Supervisors wanted to allow their local community college to use buildings on the campus, establish a vocational school at the site, or use it as a local juvenile detention facility, which, for unclear reasons, was deemed more acceptable than housing another adult prison in the city.⁶²⁴ City Manager Don Hathaway thought the annual county fair could be held on the campus, while the Carson Police Athletic Boxing Club wanted to rent the facility to put on “boxing shows.”⁶²⁵ Also of interest to local officials were the water rights that came along

⁶²³. “Governor Seeking Transfer of Indian School Facility.” *Reno Gazette-Journal* (June 12, 1981); “Panel Pushes Use of School for Prison.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (June 25, 1981). Locals were adamantly opposed to building a prison on the former school grounds, a proposal that emerged in June 1981 at the urging of Nevada Governor Robert List. Facing a prison population that had doubled over the previous five years, both List and the state legislature characterized the site as an ideal location for a new prison. In response, Carson City residents established the Stewart-Carson City Community Association to oppose this plan, and argued that an additional prison, which would bring the total number in the area to four, would risk residents’ safety and cause their property values to decline. In mid-May 1983, the prison plan was abandoned because the federal Economic Development Administration, which had pledged \$1.1 million dollars toward the construction of the prison, withdrew its financial support because of the local opposition. Lee Adler. “Stewart Prison Locked Out of ’83 Session.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (May 12, 1983).

⁶²⁴ Reno Gazette-Journal. “Carson Supervisors Eye Indian School.” (November 23, 1981). The vocational school idea was formally rejected in January 1983 on the grounds that the population of Carson City was too small to successfully sustain enrollment. Pamela Galloway. “Dalton’s Status with Washoe School Board Still Up in the Air.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (January 12, 1983). In 1985, Western Nevada Community College did begin using a building on the campus. Pat Harrison. “High-tech Moves to Former Indian School.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (November 22, 1985). Additionally, in 1989, Nevada state first responders began using the campus for hazardous material training. John S. Miller. “Police, Firefighters Go Back to Class for Hazardous Material Training.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (December 2, 1989).

⁶²⁵ Reno Gazette-Journal. “Carson Supervisors Eye Indian School.”

with the property. City Supervisor Bill Burnaugh suggested that if the city owned the water rights associated with the school, it could use them to provide water to a prison in the area and generate revenue for the city.⁶²⁶ In the meantime, the city had already begun using the school's water supply in July 1981 to meet local demand "during peak use periods."⁶²⁷ Former school buildings were also used to house people experiencing homelessness, and the state considered, but decided against, bussing unhoused individuals to the campus from outside of the city.⁶²⁸ None of these proposals considered the historical value of the school campus, or its importance to the generations of Indigenous students who attended the Stewart Indian School. Further, in keeping with settler colonial ethos, this land was viewed by non-Native state and local officials as vacant and available to whichever party made the strongest ownership claim.

Though Native peoples were largely excluded from state and local government discussions, Native Nevadan leaders were vocal about their desire to acquire the former school grounds and use them in a manner that would benefit Indigenous communities. Tribal officials thus lobbied state officials and pursued legal avenues to demonstrate Stewart's importance to Native communities and secure ownership of the campus. In April 1981, the Intertribal Council of Nevada presented a plan for transforming the campus into a facility that would be managed and

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ "Indian School Tapped for Water." *Reno Gazette-Journal* (June 22, 1981)

⁶²⁸ Laura Meyers. "Carson Shelter for Homeless Faces May 31 Shutdown." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (February 13, 1986); Mark Lundahl. "Schilling Balks at Offer to Shelter Homeless in Carson City." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (January 27, 1988).

controlled exclusively by Native Nevadans. Specifically, the ITCN proposed that a portion of the grounds be used for housing, and that additional buildings be set aside for a vocational training program, a conference center, and a centralized tribal administrative center.⁶²⁹ In November 1981, Robert Frank, Chairman of the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, argued that the state, in its desire to occupy the Stewart campus, was overlooking the needs of local Native communities and ignoring the importance of Stewart to its alumni. Frank argued that the residents of the Stewart Indian Colony, who lived on land surrounding the school, faced serious overcrowding and could use the land for housing or even a juvenile detention center. But Frank also emphasized the sacrosanct nature of the Stewart grounds, which includes a school cemetery and the remains of students who died while in attendance. He further asserted that Stewart “has a huge significance to the Indians of the state,” and emphasized in testimony to the Nevada State Legislature that the land was “sacred to us” and that it had no business taking control of land “designed for Indian needs.”⁶³⁰

As state and local officials ignored these appeals and moved ahead with their own plans for the campus, Native Nevadans turned to the court system to prevent the state from taking control of the Stewart grounds. On June 29, 1982, the Intertribal Council of Nevada filed suit against Interior Secretary James Watt and Governor List to prevent the federal government from granting the state control over the former school grounds. Such a move, according to the lawsuit, would be “illegal” and

⁶²⁹ Mitchell Landsberg. “Indians Sue to Prevent School’s Transfer.” *Reno Gazette-Journal* (June 30, 1982).

⁶³⁰ “Governor to Apply for 50 Core Acres of Stewart School.” *Nevada State Journal*.

“immoral,” because federal and state officials “failed to gain consent from the Indians who historically used the property” and because neither party gave the state historic preservation board time to comment on the future of the grounds.⁶³¹ Further, according to the attorney for the ITCN, allowing “the federal government and the state of Nevada to turn a historic monument with so much meaning to Indians throughout the southwestern United States into a prison” was a “travesty of justice and an affront to Native Americans throughout the United States.”⁶³²

Less than a month later on July 21, 1982, the Interior Department, which oversees the BIA, issued the deed and title of the Stewart Campus to the state of Nevada, effectively giving it control over the land, even though the state’s formal purchase of the grounds would not occur for another eight years.⁶³³ As part of the transfer, the state agreed to reserve two buildings, out fifty-nine, in which “crafts, artifacts and memorabilia” connected with the Stewart Indian School could be displayed.⁶³⁴ The agreement did not stipulate who would manage these buildings or how their restoration or ongoing expenses would be funded. Unsatisfied with this outcome, the ITCN once again filed suit in September 1983, arguing that the Interior Secretary’s transfer of Stewart to Nevada was illegal because the state legislature had not formally voided its 1887 transfer of the land to the federal government.⁶³⁵

⁶³¹ Landsberg. “Indians Sue to Prevent School’s Transfer.”

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Nevada Legislature: Research Division, Legislative Council Bureau, “Status and Potential Uses of Stewart Indian School Property.”

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Ken Miller. “Nevada Indians Renew Attack to Regain Stewart School.” *Reno-Evening Gazette*. (September 1, 1983).

Through this lawsuit, which was pending throughout the rest of the decade, Native Nevadans demonstrated their desire to maintain a connection with the Stewart campus that extended beyond the display of “memorabilia” and underscored their desire to transform the school grounds into a space designed to provide Native communities with educational opportunities and access to improved housing.

As the debate over ownership of the Stewart campus continued, Non-Native figures and institutions alternately scorned or ignored tribal efforts to acquire the school grounds, and in doing so also advanced settler colonial myths about the alleged disappearance of Native peoples and their interests. Most local news articles that addressed the competing plans for the future of the campus, for example, failed to mention Indigenous claims on the campus at all. The few newspaper articles specifically dedicated to Native Nevadans’ plans for the campus, however, sometimes expressed outright hostility toward their efforts. In an article announcing the ITCN’s second lawsuit to halt the transfer of the school grounds to Nevada, the headline read “Nevada Indians Renew Attack to Regain Stewart School,” which suggests that their efforts to obtain control over the campus were illegitimate compared with those of state or local officials, or somehow violent in nature. Within the body of the article the lawsuit is further described as “attacking the legality of the transfer” of the land from federal to state authorities, while the Native plaintiffs were depicted as interested in the land because of its monetary value.⁶³⁶ Such sentiments were echoed by Republican State Senator Lawrence Jacobsen in a 1987 article in the *Reno*

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

Gazette-Journal in which he expressed frustration with Native Nevadans for refusing to cooperate with state authorities on a number of issues, including the ownership of the Stewart campus. Asserting that Native groups were constantly “fighting us,” Jacobsen suggested that such attitudes were “common” among Native peoples, and that such behaviors were part of their “heritage, or aboriginality.”⁶³⁷ He further described Native communities as trying to “taunt” the state government because they refused to abandon their claims to the Stewart campus.⁶³⁸

Other articles that referenced the school grounds and its history repeated settler colonial tropes about the alleged extinction of Native peoples and the emptiness of the Stewart campus. In a 1985 article on the occupation of a Stewart building by Western Nevada Community College, the author describes the campus as having “an eerie, ghost town-like setting,” which markedly contrasted with the “high-tech facility” operated by the college.⁶³⁹ The following year, an article about an exhibit on the school erroneously asserted that “American Indian heritage is becoming as extinct as the condor.”⁶⁴⁰ That these articles were published while the ITCN lawsuit to gain control of the Stewart campus remained in the courts, and less than a decade after the closure of a school that housed hundreds of Native American students on a yearly basis, illustrates the extent to which settler colonial ideas about

⁶³⁷ John Roll. “Jacobsen Hits Indian ‘Aboriginality’.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (January 31, 1987).

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁹ Harrison, “High-tech Moves to Former Indian School.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*.

⁶⁴⁰ Joe DeChick. “Indian Museum Celebrating Birthday with Arts, Crafts Fair.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (June 18, 1986).

the supposed extinction of Native peoples had been absorbed, parroted, and accepted by local journalists and newspapers.

Stewart alumni and Native communities also consistently requested that the state set aside additional land on the campus grounds for the establishment of a museum dedicated to the school during this period. The nonprofit Stewart Indian Museum Association was established in 1981 to advocate for this position, and planned to utilize the two buildings set aside by state and federal authorities for the display of historic items related to the school. A state-authored agreement stipulating these buildings' use, however, contained two provisions the Association could not accept. Nevada's Department of General Services wanted the option of reclaiming the buildings at any time with 60 days' notice, and argued that the Stewart Indian Museum Association should pay for repairs to the buildings to bring them up to code.⁶⁴¹ Despite these unresolved issues, the Museum Association moved into these buildings in 1984. By 1987, however, the Museum Association had accused the Nevada state government of renegeing on the deed agreement, and the Inter-Council Tribal of Nevada sued both the state and federal governments on behalf of the Association for failing to maintain it.⁶⁴² This lawsuit occurred amidst the ongoing negotiations between Nevada and the Department of the Interior over the price the state would pay for the Stewart School grounds, which were still officially owned by

⁶⁴¹ "Stewart Indian Museum Negotiations Continue." *Nevada State Journal*. (June 11, 1983). *Nevada State Historical Society Collection*.

⁶⁴² "Stewart Indian School's Future Remains Up in the Air." *Reno Gazette Journal*. (January 25, 1987) *Nevada Historical Society Collection*.

the federal government. Within this context, Director of State General Services Terry Sullivan remained confident that the federal government would find a way to ensure state control over the land. In response to the lawsuit, Sullivan informed the Nevada State Senate Finance Committee, “if the state lost, I’m sure the feds would just rewrite the agreement and give it back to us,” thereby ensuring its ownership of the land.⁶⁴³ This episode, which was eventually settled, highlights the state’s willingness to ignore Indigenous land rights, as well as its certainty the U.S. government would side with Nevada. As it turned out, this confidence was well-placed.

The fate of the Stewart School remained in limbo until 1990, when the federal government formally agreed to sell the campus to the State of Nevada. In March 1990, the state purchased the land for \$153,000, despite the fact that the grounds’ estimated value was \$8.3 million dollars.⁶⁴⁴ The bargain rate for this massive parcel of land was, according to the General Services Administration (GSA), because the Stewart School grounds were considered “surplus property,” a term with deep settler colonial roots and connections with the federal allotment of Native lands.⁶⁴⁵ In 1887, the U.S. government passed the Dawes Act, which divided tribal territory into small parcels of land that were granted to Native families, while leftover, or “surplus” land, was opened to white settlers. The irony of this language was apparently lost on the GSA, which did not consider offering, or, more precisely, returning the land to the

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ “House Panel Endorses Sale of Stewart Indian School.” Nevada Appeal. (March 2, 1990) *Nevada State Museum Collection*; “Resurrecting Stewart.” Nevada Appeal. (April 2, 2000) *Nevada State Museum Collection*.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

Native nations that originally resided there. The land issue was not the only way in which the state of Nevada asserted its control over the Stewart School and its legacy after its closure, however. State institutions also engaged in efforts to depict the school's history in a manner that celebrated its assimilationist objectives and erased Stewart students' negative experiences.

“People Should Know What the People at Stewart Indian School Went Through”⁶⁴⁶

Amid the ongoing battle over the legality of the federal transfer of land to Nevada, Native Nevadans also advocated for the commemoration of the Stewart School's history, initially through the Stewart Indian Museum Association. Additionally, this organization began holding annual powwows and reunions, a tradition that continues in the present. Also established was the Stewart Indian Booster Club, sponsored by the Stewart Community Baptist Church.⁶⁴⁷ On January 23, 1982, the Stewart Indian Museum Association opened a small museum in one room of the Stewart Community Baptist that exhibited photographs of graduating classes, band members, sports events and displayed items including trophies and student art work.⁶⁴⁸ The museum was funded through a private grant of \$5,500, staffed entirely by volunteers, and relied largely on donations from alumni to build its collection.⁶⁴⁹ Ed Johnson, the National Council of American Indians (NCAI)

⁶⁴⁶ Former Stewart Indian School Museum director and curator Ed Johnson quoted in Tracey Wong Briggs. “Indian Heritage Survives in Museum: School Keeps History Alive for Stewart Indians.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (September 18, 1985).

⁶⁴⁷ “Reception for Indian Museum.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (January 20, 1982).

⁶⁴⁸ “Stewart Museum Opens with Attractive Displays.” *The Native Nevadan*. (February 5, 1982). *Nevada State Historical Society Collection; Reno Gazette-Journal*, “Reception for Indian Museum.” This first Stewart Indian School Museum was open Monday-Friday from 12:00pm to 2:00pm.

⁶⁴⁹ “Gannett Foundation Distributing \$63, 962 Locally.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (February 5, 1982).

representative who advocated for the continued operation of the school in 1980, curated its first exhibit.

The efforts of the Stewart Indian Museum Association were almost immediately rivaled, however, by a parallel effort by the Nevada State Museum to commemorate the history of the school. This exhibit, which also opened in early 1982, was entitled *The Brave New World of the Stewart Indian School, 1890-1980*, with the word ‘brave’ referencing the name of the school’s mascot, as well as the new environment to which Native students were expected to acclimate. According to the museum, the exhibit was intended to “salute the many accomplishments of the Stewart Indian School.”⁶⁵⁰ In taking an approach that sought to celebrate the school and its students, however, the museum overlooked the assimilationist agenda of the Stewart School and failed to explore the darker aspects of its history. Nevada State Museum curator of anthropology Donald Tuohy euphemistically noted that the U.S. government established Stewart as a means of directing the “culture change” occurring in the late nineteenth century, and to bring students “in closer contact with white civilization.”⁶⁵¹ Further, according to Tuohy, the exhibit was intended to demonstrate how the school “contributed so much to the Indians in the state of Nevada,” which was “a story that was rarely told.”⁶⁵² This interpretation, even if well intentioned, obscures the violent aspects of this history.⁶⁵³ The notion of “cultural

⁶⁵⁰ “Brave New World of Stewart Revisited.” *Nevada State Journal*. (April 4, 1982) *Nevada State Historical Society Collection*.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

⁶⁵³ This approach underscores Patricia Pierce Erickson’s assertion that “museum representations are symbolic manifestations of the belief structures of those who fund, create, or authorize exhibitions.” In

change,” for example, could allude to any number of U.S. government policies directed at subjugating Native peoples in the late nineteenth century, including their placement on reservations or land allotments, the outright massacre of tribes throughout the West, the suppression of the Ghost Dance in Nevada, or in the case of the boarding schools, the kidnapping of Native children and the attempted destruction of their identities. Further, while many Stewart students, especially those who attended the school in the later decades of its operation, did have some good experiences there, Tuohy’s characterization of the school as uniformly positive is problematic, and perpetuates a narrative in which individual Native perspectives are ignored or erased in favor of a history created in support of the objectives of the settler state. Had the exhibit included student testimonies about the militaristic nature of boarding school life, the various punishments and abuses students experienced, or asked alumni to discuss the traumas of being separated from their families or forced to abandon their languages and cultures, the exhibit might have presented a more well-rounded view of life at the school.

Beginning in June 1984, however, some of these issues were explored by the Stewart Indian School Museum, which was now managed and curated by Ed Johnson,

this case, the Stewart Indian School was deemed a benevolent institution that worked to help Indigenous Nevadans contend with the onslaught of white settlers, rather than a destructive institution dedicated to perpetuating cultural genocide against Great Basin tribal nations. See Patricia Pierce Erickson. “Decolonizing the “Nation’s Attic:” The National Museum of the American Indian and the Politics of Knowledge-Making in a National Space,” in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, eds. Amy Lonetree and Amanda Cobb. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 49.

whose father, grandfather, and uncles attended Stewart.⁶⁵⁴ This Stewart Indian School Museum occupied the former superintendent's cottage, one of the two buildings on the Stewart campus set aside by the federal government to celebrate the history of the school. In this building, Johnson created a permanent exhibit on the history of the school, a gallery of Edward S. Curtis photographs owned by the museum, a rotating exhibit space, and an arts and crafts display that featured the work of former students. Johnson also expanded the museum's community outreach program beyond the annual powwow by reinstating alumni inductions into the Stewart Indian School Hall of Fame, the first of which occurred in a 1986 ceremony.⁶⁵⁵ In a further effort to work with Stewart alumni and their relatives, Johnson solicited artifact donations and collected photographs and slides from former students, and made plans to interview Stewart alumni and share their experiences at the museum.⁶⁵⁶ He also worked to raise the museum's profile in the region through newspaper announcements and the purchase of a local billboard in 1986.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁴ Johnson had also worked for the museum as a curator when it was housed in the Stewart Baptist Church. See David L. Anderson to Edward C. Johnson, December 22, 1980. *Nevada State Museum Collection*. Once the museum moved to the former superintendent's cottage, it seems that the Church was no longer involved with the museum, though the specific circumstances of this arrangement remain unclear.

⁶⁵⁵ Briggs, "Indian Heritage Survives in Museum: School Keeps History Alive for Stewart Indians."

⁶⁵⁶ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Stewart Indian School Museum received no financial support from either the state of Nevada or the federal government, though in 1984 the museum did receive tax-exempt status. All funds, however, were secured through private grants and donations, sales from the museum trading post/gift shop, and proceeds from an annual powwow and arts and crafts show held at the former Stewart campus. "Stewart Indian Museum Makes Great Strides." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (October 9, 2018); Sandra Macias. "Carson City Powwow: Games, Dance, More." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (June 22, 1985).

⁶⁵⁷ DeChick, "Indian Museum Celebrating Birthday with Arts, Crafts Fair."

Johnson's vision for the Stewart Indian School Museum also included its expansion, both in size and scope, to include a cultural center with space for senior citizens, and exhibits that would detail the dark side of Stewart's history.⁶⁵⁸ Johnson was also unambiguous about his desire to educate the non-Native public about the traumatic nature of students' experiences at the school, stating "They were punished for speaking their own languages...a lot of people ran away. People should know what the people at Stewart Indian School went through."⁶⁵⁹ Johnson further observed, "Stewart graduates are a tough breed who survived to earn diplomas," and asserted that the museum did not intend to "glorify" the school itself.⁶⁶⁰ Rather, he wanted the museum to "honor the achievements" of Stewart students and showcase their resilience by illustrating that "It wasn't easy to go to school here. It was tough."⁶⁶¹ This discussion of punishments, running away, and the characterization of students as strong individuals who "survived" their boarding school experience conveyed a less sanitized version of life at Stewart than that suggested by the Nevada State Museum, and began to expose the traumas experienced by alumni.

Johnson's efforts to raise awareness of the history of the Stewart School were bolstered in September 1985 when the campus was added to the National Register of Historic Places, a list maintained by the National Park Service.⁶⁶² This designation

⁶⁵⁸ Briggs, "Indian Heritage Survives in Museum: School Keeps History Alive for Stewart Indians."

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ "Indian School Exhibit Opens." *Reno Evening-Gazette*. (March 24, 1990); Steve Sneddon. "History Will Come Alive at Stewart." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (October 15, 1986).

⁶⁶¹ Sneddon, "History Will Come Alive at Stewart."

⁶⁶² National Park Service. "Asset Detail: Stewart Indian School." Accessed November 2, 2018 on <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail?assetID=c16f9aa9-c577-425e-8dd4-36380be16f41>.

acknowledged the historical legacy of the Stewart Indian School and affirmed the need to protect and preserve the architectural integrity of the former school's buildings. However, this was also mostly an honorary distinction, as it did not provide funding or generate the political will for politicians to invest financially in the refurbishment of the school. This reality was not lost on Johnson, who, while pleased with the designation, lamented the fact that much of the campus remained in a state of disrepair, with many of the buildings having been vandalized or defaced over the five years since the school was closed. In a 1985 newspaper article he commented that much of the campus was a "no-man's land," and relayed that "A lot of the Indians are very sad about it and upset with the federal government" for ignoring the importance of the school to Native communities.⁶⁶³ This lack of investment in the Stewart campus also meant that few non-Native tourists, according to Johnson, including those who lived in Carson City, visited or even knew the campus existed.

Despite these ongoing issues, exhibits at the Museum continued to explore and investigate Stewart's history, and its board members began making plans to transform the space into a "Great Basin Cultural Center."⁶⁶⁴ This proposed expansion would include artifacts from the Stewart School, exhibits on the history of Nevada's

⁶⁶³ Trinda Pasquet. "Monument Honor Can't Keep Old Indian School from Falling Apart." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (October 20, 1985). This article, as well as another published in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* mistakenly referred to the Stewart Indian School as being a "national monument" as a result of its designation on the National Register.

⁶⁶⁴ Will Behr. "Stewart Indian School...A Century to Remember." *Nevada Appeal*. (July 19, 1992). Nevada Historical Society Collection. By 1991, Ed Johnson was no longer affiliated with the Stewart Indian School Museum, though I have found no information indicating the reason for his departure. Beginning that same year, members of the Stewart Indian Museum Association board of directors began appearing in local publications to discuss the facility and its proposed future.

Indigenous nations, a library, language classes, an artist in residence program, and exhibits of Great Basin artists' work.⁶⁶⁵ Importantly, the Great Basin Cultural Center would also emphasize a range of Indigenous perspectives on life at Stewart. As James Fuller, a member of the Stewart Indian Museum Association board of directors noted in 1992, the center would highlight the 1890s attitude in the U.S. that "...the only good Indian was a dead Indian, or an Indian made into a white man," and underscore that Native children sent to Stewart were often "abducted" by BIA authorities.⁶⁶⁶ The center would also address the brutality of students' experiences at Stewart and explore how it had changed over time, eventually transforming into a school that some Native students actually wanted to attend. In the end, Fuller expected that, through the center, "The school would become a place to protect and restore what it worked for ninety years to destroy."⁶⁶⁷ This description of the Stewart Indian School, and the vision for a cultural center that would both celebrate student accomplishments and acknowledge the painful aspects of their experiences, is quite different from the image of Stewart presented by the Nevada State Museum.

In 1996, the Stewart Indian Museum Association approached the Nevada state government for the funding necessary to implement this vision, and requested that the Nevada Legislature allocate twenty million dollars to renovate the school grounds.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. When this article was published Ojibwa artist Greg Bird was living at the museum as an artist in residence.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. To help realize their vision, museum personnel requested permission to expand into the Stewart School's former administration building, and persuaded the state of Nevada to give the organization a \$60,000 grant to remodel the building. However, that building alone required another \$200, 000 in work to fix the roof, plumbing, and wiring, while the museum estimated it needed a total of four to five million dollars to fully implement its cultural center plan.

The Museum Association also presented a “master plan” for a Native American cultural center, educational facility, and sports complex that would transform the campus into a “Smithsonian of the West.”⁶⁶⁸ The state of Nevada declined to provide this funding and the museum closed in early 1998. In June of that year, a newly-formed nonprofit organization called the Carson City Urban Indian Consortium took over the management of the museum.⁶⁶⁹ Sheila Abbe, who had previously worked as a volunteer at the museum, formed the Consortium and then assumed the role of museum director. During the summer of 1998, she staged a reopening to showcase new exhibits that, in her words, presented the history of the school in a “family oriented” manner.⁶⁷⁰ Abbe planned to fund the museum primarily through grants, which she intended to use to improve buildings and expand the museum facilities. In 2000, the museum received two sizeable grants to move forward on these projects: the Nevada state Commission for Cultural Affairs awarded the Museum \$93,650 to use toward rehabilitating the buildings, while the federal program Save America’s Treasures presented the museum with a \$250,000 grant for the same purpose.⁶⁷¹ According to Abbe, the money from these grants would be used to renovate and

⁶⁶⁸ Jim Namiotka. “Group Wants Old School to Become Indian Center.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (April 13, 1996). Nevada State Historical Society Collection. This master plan was written in collaboration with a graduate student studying at the University of Nevada, Reno.

⁶⁶⁹ Limited information is available about this organization; it was formed in 1998 and its license was permanently revoked in 2004. It also maintained a small board of directors, with a rotating membership. “Carson City Urban Indian Consortium, Inc.” (Accessed on November 6, 2018) <https://www.nevada-register.com/303279-carson-city-urban-indian-consortium-inc>. See also *Reno Gazette-Journal*. “Stewart Indian School Museum.” (June 14, 1998); Mary Thompson. “Museum Control Returned to Board.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (January 5, 2001).

⁶⁷⁰ Susan Skorupa. “Museum Preserves Native History.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (August 17, 1998).

⁶⁷¹ “Schools in Reno, Virginia City get \$2.1 million in State Grants.” *Associated Press*. (February 27, 2000); Rhina Guidos, “Grant Will Upgrade Area Museum.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (July 14, 2000).

expand the school's administrative building, create classroom and meeting spaces, and begin building an intertribal archives center.⁶⁷²

While Abbe worked diligently to secure funding to improve and expand the Stewart Indian School Museum, her vision of the space and what it might represent for Indigenous communities differed from that of Ed Johnson, who had publicly pledged to address the difficult aspects of the school's history. Abbe and her husband, Jeff, who also worked at the museum, did emphasize the importance of preserving the campus buildings and attracting visitors to teach the public about Native American history.⁶⁷³ Abbe did not, however, share publicly how this might be accomplished or describe the specific facets of the school's history the museum planned to feature. Some of Abbe's public comments about the school and its alumni also seemingly ignored the trauma some students experienced at the school. In March 2000, for example, at a newly instituted 'Spring Awakening' festival on the school grounds, Abbe asserted that while most students who attended Native American boarding schools hated them, this was not true of Stewart alumni, who remained "the most loyal" of all former boarding school students.⁶⁷⁴ This oversimplification suggests that conveying the breadth of student experiences at Stewart was not part of her plan for

⁶⁷² Guidos, "Grant Will Upgrade Area Museum." Also, according to an October 2000 article, the museum employed prison laborers as a cost cutting measure when construction on administrative building began. Abbe proudly described this as "bargain price" labor, without acknowledging that the buildings were originally constructed through the use of student labor, and were maintained by the institutional labor required of Stewart students throughout the period the school was open. Rhina Guidos. "Inmates Restoring History." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (October 12, 2000).

⁶⁷³ Guidos. "Grant Will Upgrade Area Museum."

⁶⁷⁴ Guy Richardson. "Stewart Museum Heralds Spring's Return." *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (March 16, 2000).

the museum. Former students and Native Nevadans may have picked up on this attitude, as the Abbes, who were not from Carson City, had trouble connecting with these communities. Shortly after the museum reopened under her direction in 1998, Abbe, who identified herself as “half Chippewa,” admitted this, noting that “some of the local Indians may not trust her yet,” and had thus avoided donating items to the museum.⁶⁷⁵

By the end of 2000, Abbe’s leadership was openly questioned by a group of her fellow board members. On December 27, five individuals, Esther Thompson, Jason May, Rocky Boice, Norman Fillmore, and Mike Williams, all Native Nevadans, accused Abbe of financial improprieties and living at the museum, and had both her and her husband fired from the board of the Carson City Urban Indian Consortium.⁶⁷⁶ Abbe was also ousted from her position as museum director and physically removed by local police from the Stewart campus.⁶⁷⁷ In response, the museum was temporarily closed and Abbe filed a lawsuit that claimed the action by the board was illegal. In January 2001, a judge ordered that Sheila Abbe be restored as a board member of the Consortium, and suggested that a formal investigation through the Nevada Attorney General’s office might be in order if Abbe was, indeed,

⁶⁷⁵ Skorupa, “Museum Preserves Native History.”

⁶⁷⁶ Susie Vasquez. “Museum Controversy Moves to District Court.” *Nevada Appeal*. (December 18, 2001). Accessed on February 17, 2016 on <http://www.nevappeal.com/news/3434731-113/news-none>; Jim Scripps. “Groups Says They’re Protecting Heritage.” *Nevada Appeal*. (December 19, 2001) Accessed February 17, 2016 on <http://www.nevappeal.com/news/3434738-113/news-none>; Velasquez. “Stewart Indian Museum Executive Replaces in Hostile Takeover;” Rhina Guidos. “Control Over Indian Museum in Dispute: Stewart School: Lawsuit filed; Operations Stalled After Incident.” *Reno Gazette Journal*. (December 27, 2000). *Nevada State Historical Society Collection*; Andy Bourelle. “Judge Postpones Hearing on Museum.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (December 30, 2000).

⁶⁷⁷ Rhina Guidos. “Power Struggle Closes School, Museum.” *Reno Gazette-Journal* (December 27, 2000).

improperly managing the nonprofit organization.⁶⁷⁸ This decision frustrated Native Nevadans, some of whom complained that the decision was yet another example of a non-Native official, in this case a local judge, telling Native people how their affairs should be managed. This ruling also led some alumni who had donated items to the museum to try and take them back, including sisters Berdina Dick-Burns and Virginia Carillo, who had contributed photographs for exhibits, on the grounds that Abbe and her staff were non-Native outsiders. Carillo noted of the ruling “It [the museum] should have gone to the Native Americans.”⁶⁷⁹ By June 2001, other parties who had loaned items to the museum had requested they be returned, and Abbe agreed to transfer the remaining items in the collection to the BIA, which placed them in a storage annex maintained by the Nevada State Museum.⁶⁸⁰ The Stewart Indian School Museum, emptied of most of its collection, did not open again under Abbe’s control.⁶⁸¹

Despite this setback, Native efforts to commemorate their experiences at the Stewart School did not wane. Items representing the school were included in the

⁶⁷⁸ Mary Thompson. “Museum Control Returned to Board.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (January 5, 2001).

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Rhina Guidos. “Stewart School Reunion Still on Despite Problems.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (June 16, 2001). Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum), in discussion with the author, November-December 2018.

⁶⁸¹ Though Sheila Abbe’s tenure at the Stewart Indian School Museum ended in 2001 when the museum closed, she apparently retained custody of the valuable Edward S. Curtis prints, and possibly other items. In 2003, Abbe claimed that the Carson City Urban Indian Consortium owned the prints and was entitled to send them to Arizona for an exhibition. Abbe had taken the prints from the museum in 2001 and stored all 106 of them, valued in 2003 at almost \$100,000, with the Carson Valley Historical Society. With the support of the Nevada Indian Commission and the Intertribal Council of Nevada, the state successfully filed a lawsuit to keep them in Nevada, under the control of the Nevada State Indian Commission. Sandi Wright. “Judge’s Ruling Keeps Historic Indian Photos Within Nevada.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (April 16, 2003).

Under One Sky exhibit, installed at the Nevada State Museum in 2002, which was created in collaboration with local Native communities and is now a permanent exhibit.⁶⁸² *Under One Sky* represents the perspectives of Nevada's Native American tribes, and places them alongside those of non-Native museum curators and anthropologists. The majority of the exhibit focuses on the broader history of Native Nevadans, though a small section includes the experiences of former Stewart School students. Photographs of school buildings, sports teams and marching bands are displayed, along with a graduation gown and a cheerleading uniform. Photographs and oral testimony from four prominent Stewart alumni are also represented in the exhibit as a means of celebrating their success after graduating from the school.⁶⁸³ Some of these items were also shown at the Stewart Indian School Museum prior to

⁶⁸² This approach, which placed Native experiences and lifeways on equal footing with those of museum anthropologists and curators, resulted from a dispute between Native Nevadan communities and the Nevada State Museum over the latter's plans to display the 9,000-year-old remains of the "Spirit Cave Man," which was found in a cave in Nevada in 1940, placed in museum storage, and rediscovered in 1996. Native Nevadan tribes filed a lawsuit to obtain control of the remains, but the Bureau of Land Management declared there was no evidence linking the remains to Native Nevadans. In response, the Nevada State Museum pledged not display the remains. Museum curator Gene Hatori stated that the approach taken in the *Under One Sky* exhibit was "an attempt to mend fences" with Native communities and "balance the presentation" of Native Nevadan history. Carey Goldberg. "Oldest Mummy 'Found' on Museum Shelf." *New York Times* (April 27, 1996); Frank X. Mullen. "Spirit Cave Man Debate Continues, Sparked by Student's Interest." *Reno Gazette Journal*. (June 11, 2006) Accessed February 17, 2016 on http://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/spirit-cave-man-debate-continues-sparked-by-student-s-interest/article_2a971e9c-b0d4-5afb-8bf9-beffe330a3ce.html; Title Card. *Under One Sky*. Nevada State Museum, visited August 2015. The disagreement between Native Nevadans and the NSM is also documented in Karen Coody Cooper. *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices*. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 44-45.

⁶⁸³ The former students represented in this panel are Katie Christie Frazier, Dewey Sampson, Hilman Tobey, and Florence Francis Hooper.

2001, and may be loaned by the BIA for exhibit at the new Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum in 2019.⁶⁸⁴

What is missing from this small exhibit are the variety of perspectives and memories Native students have about their time at the Stewart Indian School. It is also somewhat jarring when visiting the Nevada State Museum to walk from an exhibit in which Native perspectives are placed on somewhat equal footing with those of anthropologists, to one that celebrates the Nevada Armory and contains dozens of rifles. Even more unsettling are the pictures displayed across the backs of the exhibit cases, which portray armed confrontations between white settlers and Native men on horseback. These depictions, as well as the absence of negative testimonies about the impact of the Stewart School, matter, and underscore the need for a space in which Native communities can share their varying perspectives, represent history as they experienced it, and perhaps transform “sites of colonial harm into sites of healing.”⁶⁸⁵ The Nevada Indian Commission, in collaboration with local Native communities and the state of Nevada, began working to remedy these problems in 2002.

“...To Preserve the History of the School, So it Won’t be Forgotten.”⁶⁸⁶

After the Stewart Indian Museum closed, Nevada state government officials and the Nevada Indian Commission initiated discussions about establishing a new museum on the school grounds, and moving the NIC’s offices to a building on the

⁶⁸⁴ Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum), in discussion with the author, November 2018.

⁶⁸⁵ Amy Lonetree. *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 173.

⁶⁸⁶ Matt Farley. “Stewart Indian School Trail Opening Celebrated by Community.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (October 3, 2008).

Stewart campus. Former NIC Executive Director Sherrada James proposed in 2002 that the NIC move from Reno to Carson City, in part so it could reopen the Stewart Indian School Museum and use its annual budget to cover operating costs until grants could be secured to fund the facility. She further suggested that the Nevada State Museum could help the NIC with exhibits, given its possession of items previously showcased on the campus.⁶⁸⁷ James, an alumna of Stewart, established a 28-member advisory committee in 2003 to investigate the possibility of reopening portions of the school as a museum and cultural center. This committee included members of each tribal nation and band living in Nevada to ensure that a wide range of perspectives would be represented. Placing the museum under the aegis of the Nevada Indian Commission was particularly important to Native Nevadans, who, according to James, were frustrated by the repeated failures of the nonprofit organizations that had previously managed the facility and were eager to serve on an advisory board dedicated to establishing a new museum.⁶⁸⁸ She further pointed out that many Native Nevadans “grew up” at the boarding school, and wanted a space in which they could both “remember Stewart for what they learned there” and tell a more comprehensive story about their experiences at the school.⁶⁸⁹

Three years after James announced her intention to reestablish a museum on the Stewart grounds, Sherry Rupert, who took over as NIC executive director in 2005,

⁶⁸⁷ Susie Vasquez. “Nevada Indian Commission Could Move to Stewart Facility.” *Nevada Appeal*. (April 6, 2002).

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ Willie Albright. “Infamous Indian School May Open as a Cultural Center.” *Sparks Tribune*. (May 18, 2003) *Nevada Historical Society Collection*.

presented a plan for a space that would include museum exhibits that focused on Stewart alumni, Nevada's Paiute, Washoe, and Shoshone tribes, as well as a cultural and resource demonstration room. Rupert, who had multiple relatives attend the school, estimated that restoring just the museum building would cost approximately \$550,000, an amount which she hoped to raise quickly, given the advanced age of many of the school's alumni. This fact underscored the importance of creating exhibits that illustrated alumni experiences at the school and recording their experiences through oral history interviews, according to Rupert, who stated in 2006 "A lot of our alumni are dying, and we don't want the history of this place to die with them."⁶⁹⁰

Though funding for the rehabilitation of the museum building proved elusive, within two years of Rupert's statements on the importance of documenting Stewart Indian School alumni experiences, the NIC introduced a powerful and innovative way of commemorating them. In September 2008 the organization unveiled the Stewart Indian School Trail, a self-guided audio tour that allows visitors to walk around the school grounds, visit buildings, and learn about the daily experiences of those who attended or worked at the school. Presenting these stories was important not just to the alumni who shared their memories with Rupert, who recorded and edited each of the interviews, but also because the history of the Native American boarding school

⁶⁹⁰ Jarid Shipley. "Nevada Indian Commission Kicks off Campaign to Reopen Museum Dedicated to the Stewart Indian School." *Nevada Appeal*. (November 19, 2006) Nevada State Museum Collection.

system is widely unknown outside of Native communities.⁶⁹¹ According to Rupert, “If you ask any Native American, they will know about Stewart, but it’s important to educate the rest of the public” as well.⁶⁹² She further added, “The trail is really to preserve the history of the school and let the public know about this place and so it won’t be forgotten.”⁶⁹³ The audio guide and accompanying brochure and map were funded through private grants, and present the history of the Stewart School in the words and voices of those who attended it via visitors’ mobile telephones.⁶⁹⁴ Thus, visitors can hear from Florence Millett, who enrolled in the school at age 12, ran away repeatedly, and disliked her job working in the school infirmary. Also featured on the trail is Buck Sampson, who argued with his teacher about American Indian history, and Aletha Tom, who has fond memories of her years as a student at Stewart.⁶⁹⁵ In each case, Native perspectives are presented directly to the listener, in their own words and voices.⁶⁹⁶

This is an important aspect of this project and an intentional effort on behalf of Rupert and the NIC to share the experiences of Stewart alumni in their own words. Further, they seek to place the Stewart School within the broader context of the settler

⁶⁹¹ Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission) in discussion with the author, November 2018.

⁶⁹² Farley, “Stewart Indian School Trail Opening Celebrated by Community.”

⁶⁹³ Sue Morrow. “Carson City Leaders Honored for Tourism Contributions.” *Reno Gazette-Journal*. (April 10, 2009).

⁶⁹⁴ Reno Gazette-Journal. “Former Boarding School Offers First-Person Stories of Students, Employees.” (September 12, 2008)

⁶⁹⁵ *Stewart Indian School Trail*. “Guide by Cell Audio Tour.” Accessed February 17, 2016 on <http://stewartindianschool.com/walking-trail/>.

⁶⁹⁶ This approach reflects both the decolonizing approach of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and the “Indigenous paradigm” created by Sue Miller. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies*, and Susan A. Miller. “Native America Writes Back.

colonial practice of Indigenous child removal in the United States. In her introduction to the walking tour, Rupert asserts that, in establishing Stewart, “the intent of the federal government was to assimilate Indian children in Nevada into white society.” She goes on to recount that “children as young as four years old were forcibly taken from their families, often without permission and knowledge, and thrown into a military environment,” and that they were sometimes subjected to “terrible punishments and treatments,” particularly during the early years of the school. Rupert continues, noting that “the boarding school process attempted to strip the American Indians of their culture, their language, and their traditions,” and in the process caused irreparable harm to Native families. She adds, “when young children were torn from their families at such young ages, some not returning to their reservations until they were adults, it severed their ability to nurture.”⁶⁹⁷

In this introduction to the Stewart School, Rupert explains the painful and complicated history of the facility, and does so in a manner that places Native students’ experiences at the center of its history. She points out the assimilationist objectives of the U.S. government, and conveys the damage these policies caused Native families. This representation of the Stewart School is quite different from that at the Nevada State Museum, and underscores the importance of Indigenous communities sharing their experiences on their own terms. In a continuation of these efforts, NIC employed a consultant in 2017 who conducted additional oral history interviews with Stewart alumni, which was funded by a \$20,000 grant from the

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid. Each of the quotes in this paragraph are from the introduction to the Stewart audio tour.

Nevada 150 Foundation.⁶⁹⁸ Through these oral history testimonies, many of which were cited in this dissertation, the Nevada Indian Commission significantly expanded the amount of information available about student experiences at the school during the final decades it was open.⁶⁹⁹

Rehabilitating and refurbishing the buildings at the Stewart campus also remains an important objective of the NIC. Since beginning its initiative to open a new museum on the school grounds in 2003, the NIC has pushed for state funding to help transform the vacant buildings on the campus into spaces that can be utilized by Native communities and attract tourists. Funding for these projects has come from a series of state-awarded grants that have contributed significantly to rehabilitation efforts. In addition to the funding for the Stewart Trail, the NIC won \$100,000 in 2010 from the Nevada Commission for Cultural Affairs for building restoration and seismic retrofitting.⁷⁰⁰ After over a decade of lobbying the state government for financial assistance to commemorate the Stewart School, the NIC made significant

⁶⁹⁸ “Stewart Indian School Receives \$20,000 Grant for Oral History Program.” *Nevada Appeal*. (May 1, 2015). The Nevada 150 Foundation was created by the Nevada state government to commemorate 150 years of Nevada Statehood and provided grants to organization involved in preserving Nevadan history. “About Nevada 150.” (Accessed October 25, 2018) <http://www.nevada150.org/about-nevada-150/>.

⁶⁹⁹ In addition to being housed in the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum collection, these recordings are available at the Nevada State Library and Archives and the Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Nevada, Reno.

⁷⁰⁰ “Nevada Cultural Commission Awards \$3M in Grants.” *Nevada Appeal*. (March 14, 2010). Despite the NIC’s early success with these grants, the organization also faced setbacks during this period, in part because, as Rupert noted, she was still learning about the grant process and the complicated task of working with and securing state approval for the renovation of buildings on the Stewart campus. Rupert noted that this led, in some cases, to the loss of grant funding because the state was unable to complete the process within specific timelines. Overall, however, these experiences helped Rupert better understand how to work with state officials and to build stronger relationships with specific organizations, including Nevada’s State Historic Preservation Office and the Division of Museums and History. Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission) in discussion with the author, November 2018.

progress in this regard in 2015. In January of that year, Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval announced in his annual State of the State address that he had proposed \$122,177 to fund two fulltime employees to staff the future Stewart Indian School Museum.⁷⁰¹ In May 2015, the Nevada State Assembly passed Assembly Bill 15 (AB 15), which created a specific funding source for the ongoing restoration of the Stewart Indian School, to be directed by the Nevada Indian Commission.⁷⁰² This revenue is diverted into a special account and designated to pay for building repairs and maintenance on the former campus, and acquired through the sale of land in Carson City.⁷⁰³ In 2016, the NIC received an additional \$400,000 from the state, an unexpected windfall that came from the Nevada Department of Tourism. These funds were used to draft a new “master plan,” which considers how the NIC might interpret the history of the entire Stewart campus, for the renovation of NIC administrative offices, and directed toward efforts to have Stewart designated as a National Historic Landmark.⁷⁰⁴ For the first time since the school closed, the state of Nevada had agreed to fund efforts to commemorate the history of the Stewart School and, more

⁷⁰¹ “Governor Proposes ‘Cultural Heritage Destination’ at Carson City’s Stewart Indian School.” *Nevada Appeal*. (January 18, 2015). According to Rupert, she also regularly reminded state officials of the clause included in the deed for the Stewart campus land requiring state officials to maintain two buildings dedicated to the history of the Stewart School. If this provision was not met, the land could be given back to the federal government. Rupert credits this factor as an important component in the state’s eventual support of a museum and cultural center managed by the Nevada Indian Commission. Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission) in discussion with the author, November 2018.

⁷⁰² “Gov. Signs 2 Bills Key to Carson History/Tourism.” *Nevada Appeal*. (May 28, 2015).

⁷⁰³ Nevada State Legislature. “Assembly Bill No. 15 – Committee on Government Affairs.” (Accessed November 8, 2018) <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/78th2015/Bills/AB/AB15.pdf>.

⁷⁰⁴ Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission) in discussion with the author, November 2018.

importantly, that this process should be guided by the Nevada Indian Commission in collaboration with members of the Stewart alumni community.

Two years later, because of the continued lobbying of the Nevada Indian Commission and the receptivity of Governor Sandoval and the Nevada State Legislature, long-term funding for the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum (SISCCM) was included in the annual state budget. Proclaiming that the Stewart Indian School was “An important piece of Nevada that holds a special place in our state’s and nation’s history,” Sandoval announced in February 2017 that his proposed budget included \$4.5 million dollars to restore two campus buildings: the school’s administrative building, which would be used to house the museum and cultural center, and the former campus post office, to be used as a welcome center.⁷⁰⁵ The Governor included an additional \$1.2 million in his budget to finance the restoration of the Stewart campus gym, and also added Rupert to his gubernatorial cabinet.⁷⁰⁶ One year later, the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office awarded the

⁷⁰⁵ Nevada Appeal, “Governor Recognizes Stewart Indians School in Final State of the State.” (February 27, 2017).

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid; Riley Snyder. “Restoring Indian School a Priority for Lawmakers.” *Elko Daily Free Press*. (March 30, 2015). Nevada Historical Society Collection. According to Rupert, who worked on obtaining financial support from the Nevada state government for nearly a decade before funding for the school was allocated, Sandoval was instrumental in securing state support for the museum and cultural center. Rupert believes that much of Sandoval’s support for the Stewart facility comes from his personal interest in Nevada history, and also his positive memories of playing in competitive basketball games at Stewart when he was in high school. Sandoval has also enthusiastically participated in tours of the school buildings, attended annual powwows on the campus, and in July 2018 attended and spoke at a tribal blessing ceremony held prior to the beginning of the construction of the main museum and cultural center building. SISCCM curator Chris Ann Gibbons also attributes the financial support of the state to Rupert’s continuous lobbying on behalf of the Nevada Indian Commission, and to the Stewart alumni who testified before the Nevada State Legislature for years in an effort to make state legislators understand the importance of the Stewart School and its history to Native nations. Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission) and Chris Ann Gibbons (Museum Curator, Stewart Indian School and Cultural Center), in discussions with the author, November 2018.

NIC \$79,000 toward the restoration of the campus auditorium. The NIC then officially hired a museum director and curator, both of whom were in place by late 2017. Importantly, while all of the funds for the museum and cultural center were provided by the state of Nevada, the overall vision for the museum and the decisions regarding its exhibits and content are left entirely to the NIC, which is working with Stewart alumni and Native communities to ensure that a range of student experiences are represented.

“To bring those things back that were... taken from us as a Native people.”⁷⁰⁷

Even before the funds for the SISCCM were allocated in 2017, Sherry Rupert was clear about her vision for the facility and the fact that, like the Stewart Trail, the museum would not shy away from examining the darker aspects of the school’s history. In March 2015 she stated “What we’re trying to do here is not just tell the positive stories or the happy stories...we have the opportunity to tell the whole story of what this school is, was, and means.”⁷⁰⁸ For Rupert, this means directly challenging the idea that schools like Stewart were designed solely to improve the lives of Native children and confronting the settler colonial nature of the boarding school system:

What these boarding schools were all about were not to bring these savages to these schools to prepare them to go on to college and better themselves. It was more to force them into these schools, force them to learn a different language, force them to retain a different value system, with the idea that

⁷⁰⁷ ⁷⁰⁷ Claire Cuddy. “Stewart Indian School Museum to Tell the Full Story.” *Nevada Appeal*. (July 10, 2018) Accessed on November 14, 2018 on <https://www.nevadaappeal.com/news/local/stewart-indian-school-museum-to-tell-the-full-story/#>.

⁷⁰⁸ Snyder, “Restoring Indian School a Priority for Lawmakers.”

when they grew up, the federal government could more easily get their land.⁷⁰⁹

The NIC is also keen to share this history with the broader public, and has underscored the importance of ensuring that the complicated history of Stewart and other Native American boarding schools are incorporated into broader U.S. history narratives. According to Rupert, the history of the Stewart Indian School is part of “our shared American history that is largely untold,” and “Native and non-Native generations will benefit” from learning more about the boarding school system and its traumatic impacts on Indigenous families.⁷¹⁰ Conveying this history will be front and center at the SISCCM, and in many ways echoes the themes Ed Johnson attempted to convey during his tenure at the Stewart Indian School Museum, and those Sherrada James hoped to explore through a NIC-managed museum dedicated to the school.

Even more than the previous Stewart Indian School museums, the new SISCCM is poised to examine the complicated nature of student experiences in a detailed and nuanced manner. In part, this is due to the organizational and financial infrastructure provided by the NIC and the Nevada state government. For the first time, the museum will be staffed by fulltime museum professionals dedicated to its management, rather than by volunteers. Bobbi Rahder, who led the Haskell Cultural Center and Museum in Kansas, was hired as museum director for the SISCCM, while Chris Ann Gibbons, who began working with the NIC in 2005, became its curator.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ “Historic Stewart Indian School Moving Toward Future.” *The Humboldt Sun*. (June 9-11, 2015) *Nevada Historical Society Collection*.

Further, because the museum is funded by the state of Nevada, it will not have to rely solely on grants or funds raised by giftshop sales or at powwows. Additionally, the 2017 funding allocated in the Nevada state budget permitted SISCCM staff to hire a professional museum design firm, Gallagher and Associates, to create exhibit displays, signage, and text panels for the interior of the museum, and two Native Nevadan artists with familial connections to the Stewart School, Melissa Melero Moose and Ben Aleck, to consult on the interior design of the museum and create original artwork to be displayed in the SISCCM.⁷¹¹ The SISCCM staff also hired me as a researcher to identify archival materials related to the school and advise on the historical content presented in museum exhibits. By employing dedicated experts and individuals with connections to the school, SISCCM staff is attempting to uncover and share as much information about Stewart as it can, even if it portrays the school, its students, or its employees in a negative manner.

Equally important to the infrastructural support the SISCCM now has from the state of Nevada is the attitude and approach of its fulltime employees, who are determined to create a museum that centers Indigenous perspectives and focuses on the experiences of Stewart Indian School alumni. Museum exhibits will therefore center first person alumni stories, quotes from oral history interviews, student writings, and newspaper interviews to ensure, in the words of Rahder, that alumni feel

⁷¹¹ Melissa Melero Moose is enrolled in the Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribe; her mother attended the Stewart Indian School. Ben Aleck is a member of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe; several of his family members attended the Stewart School.

that the SISCCM is “their museum” and full of “their stories and their voices.”⁷¹²

Visitors will also be encouraged to think not just about the history of the school, but about the fact that the Stewart campus was built upon Indigenous lands. This model is designed to help museum patrons understand, according to Rahder, that “the land is part of Stewart,” and also to recognize that the first students who attended the school were members of Great Basin tribal nations. The stories and histories of Native Nevadan tribal nations, along with maps displaying their lands prior to settler colonization, will therefore also be represented at the SISCCM. Prior to entering the exhibit spaces, visitors can enter a storytelling room that explores these tribal histories in more detail; they can also spend time in a reflection room to contemplate the trauma associated with the boarding school system, and work toward their own healing or consider the pain of others. An additional room will contain a small library, several computers, and workspace for visitors interested in conducting research.

The main exhibit gallery will also convey the history of the school through student experiences and first-person accounts. Upon walking into the gallery, visitors will encounter an exhibit that describes what it was like for students to arrive at the Stewart Indian School at different periods of its 90-year history. This section highlights the fear many students experienced upon their arrival, particularly during the early years the school was open, but also describes the reasons why some parents wanted their children to attend the school. Just past the entryway, the SISCCM team

⁷¹² Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum), in discussions with the author, November 2018.

created a timeline that includes key events in the history of the Stewart School as well as important concepts and policies that shaped the conquest of the Americas and the colonization of the United States. In keeping with the focus on Stewart alumni, the timeline area also includes photographs of students and first-person quotes about life at the school. Two additional museum sections will focus on daily life for students over the decades and how they adapted to and coped with the challenges of living away from their families. This latter section focuses on student friendships, athletic and extracurricular activities, as well as students' writing, art, and, in later years, their explorations and expressions of their tribal cultures. Throughout, visitors will see a range of items connected with the school and photographs of students engaged in various activities between 1890 and 1980.

Importantly, the museum also devotes extensive attention to the darker side of life at the school. In an area entitled the "Shadow of Stewart," the museum will explore the trauma experienced by many alumni, and detail the pain of familial separations, the illnesses and deaths that occurred at the school, and the abuse some experienced at the hands of teachers and fellow students. The SISCCM team is taking particular care with the development of this section, as it wants to ensure that student experiences are represented correctly and with sensitivity, as these topics continue to affect Stewart alumni and their families in the present. Even more than other areas of the museum, the "Shadow of Stewart" section relies on student accounts, many of which were shared in oral history interviews and in newspaper articles, and, to a lesser extent, incidents documented in memoranda or correspondence between

Stewart School and federal officials. Another portion of the exhibit describes periods of reform at the school, and details student and parent resistance to policies they opposed. As patrons leave the exhibit, they will encounter an area entitled “Stewart Today,” which highlights alumni accomplishments and efforts to heal from the boarding school experience. This section also emphasizes that assimilation did not work and that Indigenous cultures and lifeways continue in the present, a point which will be further underscored by an immersive audio experience in which visitors can listen to many of the languages spoken by Stewart students.⁷¹³

To develop these themes, Rupert, Rahder, and Gibbons repeatedly reached out to the Native Nevadan and broader Stewart alumni community, a process which has continued throughout the planning and construction phases of the museum. In April 2018, the SISCCM team, which included Rupert, Rahder, and Gibbons, held an inaugural SISCCM planning meeting on the campus in the former superintendent’s cottage, which houses NIC and SISCCM staff. Also included in the meeting were representatives from Gallagher and Associates, artists Melero Moose and Aleck, myself, and multiple members of the Stewart Indian School Advisory Committee, which is comprised of school alumni and their family members. In this and other meetings, alumni have been encouraged to share their views on all aspects of the SISCCM, from its layout and design to the stories and themes the museum will

⁷¹³ This description of the main exhibit gallery and the themes represented within stems from my personal knowledge and involvement in the planning for the museum, along with extensive conversations with Bobbi Rahder and Chris Ann Gibbons between February 2018 and November 2018.

address. The SISCCM staff has also solicited feedback on museum-related issues from alumni and their families at annual powwows and other public events connected with the school. Additionally, Rahder and Gibbons are holding round tables and inviting tribal members and alumni to examine the plans for the museum and cultural center. Great Basin tribal members will also have the opportunity to review and comment on all of the proposed exhibits prior to their finalization.

The SISCCM has reached out the broader Stewart community in other ways as well. The NIC and SISCCM maintain active YouTube and Facebook accounts and routinely post interesting historical facts, school photographs, information on efforts to honor alumni, and updates on the progress on the construction of the museum and cultural center. Many alumni follow and comment on the Stewart Indian School Facebook page, and the feedback is almost exclusively positive and supportive of SISCCM efforts. The NIC and SISCCM also host an alumni reception during the annual powwow, and invite former students and their family members to reminisce about the past and spend time looking at school photographs, yearbooks, and other memorabilia at this event.⁷¹⁴ Additionally, on July 11, 2018 the NIC invited spiritual leaders from the Washoe, Southern and Northern Paiute, and Western Shoshone tribes to conduct a blessing at the site of the museum and cultural center to start the construction “with a good heart and good intentions,” and honor those who attended

⁷¹⁴ Stewart Indian School. “Stewart Alumni Reunion.” Facebook. (June 14, 2018). (Accessed November 13, 2018) <https://www.facebook.com/StewartIndianSchool/photos/a.210762892290944/1902977603069456/?type=3&theater> .

the school.⁷¹⁵ This event, which also featured comments from alumni about their experiences at the school and speeches by Governor Sandoval and Rupert, was a further effort by SISCCM personnel to reach out to alumni and reassure them that the museum staff intends to represent the breadth of their experiences in a respectful manner. It was also intended to address the trauma experienced by Great Basin nations, particularly during the early decades the school was open, and demonstrate that the NIC and the SISCCM staff were approaching the museum in a manner that acknowledged many alumni's need for healing.⁷¹⁶

Though supportive reactions from alumni and other community members have far outweighed negative feedback, Rahder and Gibbons have encountered some hostility from members of the public who are concerned that the museum will gloss over the uglier aspects of the school's history. Rahder received a telephone call from an unidentified individual who questioned her about alleged abuse that took place at the school and whether this would be addressed at the museum.⁷¹⁷ This individual, who chose to remain anonymous, expressed the opinion that there should not be a museum dedicated to the history of the Stewart School because of the past cases of abuse that occurred on the campus. Rahder asked for specific information or documentation about the incidents the caller mentioned and pledged to address the

⁷¹⁵ Guy Clifton. "Blessing Ceremony Set for Stewart Indian School Museum." *Nevada Appeal*. (May 30, 2018).

⁷¹⁶ Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum) and Chris Ann Gibbons (Curator, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum) in discussions with the author, November 2018.

⁷¹⁷ Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum), in discussions with the author, April 2018.

issues of abuse, but the individual refused to provide additional information. Though this individual did not provide any details about these issues, this same concern was raised on Facebook on September 18, 2018. This user, Sandia Snows Stana, posted the following message under the ‘Reviews’ section on the Stewart Indian School’s Facebook page:

TELL THE TRUTH OF THE PUNISHMENTS....Post The List of the Administrators (sic) that worked there that allowed STUDENTS to be Abused...sexually, physically...EVEN KILLED....The Teachers...The Names of the Students that died there AND WHY....even were they medically abandoned??? Refused proper medical treatment.....TELL THE TRUTH....TELL THE TRUTH⁷¹⁸

SISCCM staff are clear in their plans to address these painful issues, including the violent punishments inflicted on Native children and the sexual and physical abuse many experienced, and Rahder and Gibbons have repeatedly asserted the importance of incorporating such facts into the narratives presented at the museum. Rupert is adamant on this point as well, and underscores the importance of telling the “whole story” of the school, “good and bad, and that this history not be sugar-coated, but honest.”⁷¹⁹ Recognizing the positive and negative experiences of life at Stewart is also important alumni, many of whom have “sternly directed” the SISCCM staff to

⁷¹⁸ Sandia Snows Stana. “Sandia Snows Stana doesn’t recommend Stewart Indian School.” Facebook. (September 18, 2018). (Accessed on November 13, 2018) https://www.facebook.com/pg/StewartIndianSchool/reviews/?post_id=971282089722257&referrer=page_recommendations_home_card&ref=page_internal. All emphases are original to the post.

⁷¹⁹ Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission) in discussions with the author, November 2018.

include this information in exhibits and other information produced about the school.⁷²⁰

The SISCCM has also had dealt with some of the fallout that resulted from the controversial closing of the previous Stewart Indian School Museum in 2001. During the conflict between museum board members in 2000 and 2001, numerous items from its collection were moved to the Nevada State Museum by the BIA for their protection, and these remain in an offsite storage facility in Indian Hills, Nevada, not far from the Stewart campus. The SISCCM staff has spent months sorting through these items and is working with collection managers at the Nevada State Museum to borrow some of them for exhibits. Whether state and federal officials will agree to give all of these items to the SISCCM remains unclear, though state officials have expressed a willingness to work with the SISCCM in their efforts to gain temporary or permanent custody of many of the items.⁷²¹ And while the Nevada State Museum has welcomed the SISCCM's efforts to catalogue and sort these items, it is hesitant to permanently return them. The holdup in this regard is twofold: the Nevada State

⁷²⁰ Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission); Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum) and Chris Ann Gibbons (Curator, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum) in discussions with the author, November 2018. At the same time, however, the SISCCM staff is also aware that many such stories may remain untold, and they have pledged to respect the fact that not all Stewart alumni want to share their personal experience in a public manner.

⁷²¹ While working with the SISCCM, I visited this facility in Indian Hills three times. It is a large warehouse-type building, and contains rows upon rows of shelves, the majority of which contain fossils and other archaeological items. The Stewart Indian School Museum collection takes up almost two entire rows of shelves, which run about fifteen feet high and approximately 30 feet long, and consists of photographs, archival documents trophies, furniture, a gate, a bell, tools, signs, and other items. None of the photographs or documents are protected in archival boxes, nor are they organized according to archival standards. To me, it seemed as if these items were taken from the old museum, placed on shelves, and ignored.

Museum must secure permission from the BIA to loan items from its collection to the SISCCM, while the SISCCM must take steps to become a recognized repository for BIA items. However, other BIA concerns center on the SISCCM's ability to care for and preserve the items in the Stewart Indian School collection. This particular concern is suspect given the condition and storage of many of these items at the Indian Hills facility. While conducting research at this site, I observed that some items in the storage facility appeared moldy or covered in dust, and that most items in the collection were placed in regular, versus archival, storage boxes. SISCCM staff have also requested funding from the Nevada State Legislature to renovate the former bakery and post-office buildings on the Stewart campus so they can install environmental controls and properly store of all of the museum's collections.

As the NIC and SISCCM work to build their collections and develop exhibits, they are also envisioning different ways for the museum and cultural center to expand and grow in the future. Rahder and Gibbons plan to establish community outreach programs in Carson City and beyond, and want to attract audiences from across the U.S. and the globe that are interested in learning more about Stewart's history. At the same time, however, even as the reach of the SISCCM grows, they plan to maintain their focus on the alumni and their families, whom they hope will view the facility as "their home away from home."⁷²² Rupert is similarly focused on increasing the number of visitors to the school while also maintaining the campus as a space for

⁷²² Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum) in discussions with the author, November 2018.

Indigenous communities, and wants to ensure that any future endeavors are guided by their interests. As Rupert asserted in 2015: “Tribal people will have a say in the future uses of the school... This place was created for Indian students. They would like it to remain that way.”⁷²³ Rupert would also like the Stewart Indian School Living Legacy to expand its programming to include tribal language programs, an artist residency, cultural events and ceremonies, and eventually envisions the campus becoming a center for Indigenous culture in Carson City and the region, in accordance with the vision outlined in the Stewart Master Plan in 2016.⁷²⁴ Tribal members seem to agree with this vision. Herman Fillmore, the culture and languages director for the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, would like to establish a tribal “immersion school” on the campus where Native Nevadan communities “could once again pass on our language and tradition.”⁷²⁵ Transforming the Stewart campus from a space in which federal officials sought to erase Native cultures to one that restores and revitalizes them aligns with Rupert’s vision:

This school was meant to assimilate our Indian children, take away their language, take away their culture, essentially choose a different identity, so with programming through the cultural center and the way we’re going to develop the facility here, we want to bring those things back that were meant to be taken away from us as a Native people.⁷²⁶

⁷²³ Geoff Dorman. “A Living Legacy: Stewart Indian School to Become Historic Museum and Cultural Center.” *Lahontan Valley News & Fallon Eagle Standard*. (June 5, 2015) *Nevada State Historical Society Collection*.

⁷²⁴ Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission in discussions with the author, November 2018

⁷²⁵ Claire Cuddy. “Stewart Indian School Museum to Tell the Full Story.” *Nevada Appeal*. (July 10, 2018) Accessed on November 14, 2018 on <https://www.nevadaappeal.com/news/local/stewart-indian-school-museum-to-tell-the-full-story/#>.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid*.

The NIC is also seeking national recognition by having the Stewart School selected as a National Historic Landmark by the Department of the Interior and the National Parks Service. This designation is reserved for “nationally significant historic places” that “possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.”⁷²⁷ Currently, there are only two other former Indian boarding school on this list, the Carlisle Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which was recognized in 1961, and the Haskell Indian Nations University, in Lawrence, Kansas.⁷²⁸ This distinction is particularly important to the NIC, according to a 2015 memorandum on the subject, because Stewart represents a history that is “largely unknown and seldom taught,” but is “essential to understanding American Indians and their relationship with government and education.”⁷²⁹ This is also envisioned as helping the NIC to “save the legacy” of the school and to preserve the “memories and collective wisdom” of its alumni. Further, such recognition would place the Stewart Indian School and the attempted assimilation of its Native American students firmly within the historical records of Nevada and the United States.

Rupert would also like to obtain Stewart School student records, the majority of which are housed at a National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

⁷²⁷ “National Historic Landmarks Program.” *National Parks Service*. (December 1, 2015) (Accessed February 18, 2016) <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/>.

⁷²⁸ “Listing of National Historic Landmarks by State.” *National Parks Service*. (Accessed December 12, 2018) <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1582/index.htm>.

⁷²⁹ “Stewart Indian Living Legacy Project.” *Nevada Indian Commission*. Accessed February 17, 2016 on <http://stewartindianschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/SIS-Living-Legacy-Project-Description-.pdf>; Sherry Rupert (Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission), in discussion with author, August 26, 2015.

facility located 222 miles from Carson City in San Bruno, California.⁷³⁰ SISCCM personnel would like alumni to have access to their academic records and other documents related to the school, and have set aside space in the museum for a research room where such information could be reviewed. Identifying the location of these and other records related to the school, however, has been a somewhat complicated endeavor. The majority of the records for the Stewart Indian School are held at the NARA facility in San Bruno. This branch has multiple, detailed finding aides for these records, and the archival technicians who work at the facility are incredibly helpful and legitimately focused on making sure researchers can access their collections. They seem to understand the importance of these records, and have worked with groups such as the National Boarding School Healing Coalition in their efforts. With regard to the Stewart School, the San Bruno records available to the public date from the 1890s through the late 1950s. Student records from the early 1900s through the 1940s are open for public research, along with some additional files from students in the Navajo program in the 1950s. The majority of these files are sparse; they generally contain student applications, and sometimes test results or grades. Most Stewart-related files focus not on students, but on the administration of the school, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s during the Indian New Deal period. In general, the Stewart School records at San Bruno consist primarily of letters,

⁷³⁰ Morrow, "Carson City Leaders Honored for Tourism Contributions." Some BIA records connected with the Stewart Indian School are also housed at the main NARA facility in Washington, DC, while personnel records connected with BIA employees employed at the school (as well as all federal employee records) are held at the NARA facility in St. Louis, Missouri.

memoranda, daily schedules, and new policy announcements. The files of students who attended the school in the 1960s and 1970s are unavailable to the public due to privacy concerns.

Confusingly, however, the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR) in Lenexa, Kansas, also maintains some Stewart student records, and alumni who graduated from the school are directed to work with AIRR to gain access to their transcripts.⁷³¹ This process is not straightforward, however, as it requires former students to download a transcript request form (available on the Stewart Indian School website), have the form notarized to confirm their identity, and then send it to a Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) office in Phoenix, which forwards the request to AIRR. If you are a Stewart alumnus without Internet access or the ability to pay a notary it is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to get a copy of a transcript that might be needed for employment or educational purposes. As a researcher, working

⁷³¹ The AIRR was created in 2004 in response to class action lawsuit filed by Native plaintiffs in 1996 against the federal Departments of Interior and Treasury for their mismanagement of Native American trust funds. AIRR is part of the National Archives and Records Administration, and is a repository for the BIA and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST). This latter organization was created in 1994 to “improve the accountability and management of Indian funds held in trust by the federal government.” These records extend back to the 1700s and include “trust, education, and other historic Indian affairs records.” Unlike other NARA facilities, however, researchers cannot schedule appointments at AIRR, which does not publish finding aides or other information about its collections. Though this is done, at least in part, to protect records connected with Native peoples in the U.S., it also precludes researchers and others from developing an understanding of which records this facility maintains. For additional information on the creation, management, and scope of AIRR collections, see the following: Office of the Secretary of the Interior. “American Indian Records Repository Dedication Begins New Chapter in Department’s Trust Reform Effort.” U.S. Department of Interior. (May 14, 2004) (Accessed November 16, 2018) https://www.bia.gov/sites/bia.gov/files/assets/public/press_release/pdf/idc012872.pdf; Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians. “History.” U.S. Department of the Interior. (Accessed November 16, 2018) https://www.doi.gov/ost/about_us/history; Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians. “AIRR Records.” U.S. Department of the Interior. (Accessed November 16, 2018) https://www.doi.gov/ost/records_mgmt/records.

with AIRR is also challenging, as it is difficult to determine exactly which records it maintains. There is no general email address for the public to use to contact AIRR staff and just one telephone number listed for the facility; I left a voicemail message describing my request for information about school records, and my call was never returned. Through the connection of a SISCCM staff member, we learned that AIRR would not give any information out except through requests submitted through the same BIE office in Phoenix that forwards former students' transcript requests. This office, while ultimately helpful, did not initially understand or have the proper forms to accommodate a request for information about the Stewart School records maintained by AIRR. Ultimately, a letter from Rahder, on Nevada Indian Commission letterhead, was required before the BIE would forward the request for information to AIRR.

Two months after submitting the request for information, the BIE office mailed several thousand pages of information to the Nevada Indian Commission. These pages contained listings of mostly unidentified items under the subject header "Stewart Indian School," along with alphabetical and numerical codes. Those of us working with the SISCCM were only able decipher the codes because of that same SISCCM connection with an AIRR employee, who explained what the codes meant and suggested which entries might contain the information we wanted. In addition to the codes, some records on the list provided by AIRR had short notes that provided a limited amount of information about specific items. Some of these brief descriptions, for example, 'rosters,' 'applications,' or 'enrollment records,' provided enough

details to tell us whether or not these items might be of interest to the museum. Other descriptions, however, did not provide enough information for us to judge their potential importance. What types of documents, for example, might be included in listings for the “206.70 Stewart Students Bank,” “Stewart Museum FY 2001,” or “Stewart Boarding School FY 80?” We decided to err on the side of caution and request information about any and all items that could, potentially, be of interest to the SISCCM. This request, which, according to AIRR rules had to be submitted through yet another BIA office, in this case the Western Nevada Agency in Carson City, was submitted by the SISCCM in July 2018 and is still pending.

AIRR’s lack of transparency and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures were not the only problematic issues I encountered in trying to track down Stewart Indian School records, particularly those generated during the final decades the school was open and those detailing its closure. Despite their extensive collections, the federal archival repositories I visited in Washington, D.C. and San Bruno, California, do not have any BIA administrative documents from the 1960s or 1970s in their collections, nor do they have information about the closure of the Stewart School in 1980.⁷³² According to NARA archivists and archival technicians at both of these institutions, this may be because these records, which are still considered relatively recent in historical terms, have not yet been submitted to the National Archives by the BIA. However, an archival technician in San Bruno shared a different story with me about

⁷³² The NARA facility in St. Louis does maintain the files of individuals employed at Stewart in the 1960s and 1970s, but these files are unavailable to the public due to privacy concerns.

these documents. Supposedly, the San Bruno collection previously included additional Stewart Indian School documents, including some that referenced the 1980 closure of the school. These items were inadvertently destroyed by water damage, however, and lost. Though a report documented this apparent loss, employees at NARA San Bruno are unsure of its whereabouts and have been unable to provide me with a copy. Though this story may be apocryphal, such destruction might explain the absence of documents about the 1980 closure of Stewart, despite federal orders to school officials in June 1980 to create an “Inventory of Historic Documents and Artifacts” related to the school.⁷³³ Rahder and Gibbons have also heard stories from alumni concerning the handling of documents and other items related to the school at the time of its closure. According to multiple witnesses, large numbers of photographs, documents, and other items connected with the school were thrown away in dumpsters on the campus. Some of these items were recovered by locals, who saved photographs and photo albums that were later given to employees who worked at the Stewart Indian Museum or the NIC. If these accounts are correct, however, troves of documents and items related to the school and its history may have been thrown in the trash by school officials following the school’s closure in 1980.⁷³⁴ Some items might also be scattered across the Stewart campus. In a

⁷³³ Memorandum from Mahlon Marshall to All Supervisors. “Inventory of Historic Documents and Artifacts.” (June 26, 1980). *Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum Collection*. This and the few other surviving documents that reference the closure of the school are maintained by the SISCCM.

⁷³⁴ As Ashley Glassburn Falzetti points out, the absence of tribal histories in settler archives, or in this case the apparent disposal of archival items connected with Native students and their families, is another form of settler colonial violence. Highlighting what is missing from such archives and

particularly dramatic instance in January 2018, handwritten financial ledgers were found in a locked safe in the SISCCM main building.⁷³⁵

Developing its own set of records connected to the history of the Stewart Indian School is important to the SISCCM, as a core mission of the facility is to educate the public about the history of schools like Stewart in as detailed and comprehensive a manner as possible. Ensuring that students can easily access their records without going through the expense of employing a notary or cumbersome bureaucratic processes is also a priority. Such efforts also underscore these organizations' desire to focus on the needs and interests of the broader Stewart community, which has waited so long for its stories to be commemorated and recognized in a meaningful manner. That federal officials have made it so difficult for students and researchers alike to access portions of the documents connected with the Stewart School raises a number of questions. Why must Stewart students provide notarized proof of their identities merely to prove they attended or graduated from the school? Why is AIRR unable, or unwilling, to provide a comprehensible list of items it maintains that are connected to the Stewart School? And what should alumni and researchers make of stories alleging the destruction of records and documents connected to the school and its closure? The simple answer to these questions may be that the labyrinthine bureaucracy connected with BIA records management has led to

questioning why and how such omissions occurred is thus an important way of countering the erasure of Indigenous histories. Falzetti. "Archival Absence: The Burden of History."

⁷³⁵ Stewart Indian School. "In the end it took two to crack the safe in the basement of the former Administration Building at Stewart." *Facebook*. (January 12, 2018). (Accessed November 19, 2018) <https://www.facebook.com/StewartIndianSchool/photos/pcb.1736734569693761/1736729249694293/?type=3&theater>.

confusion and the mishandling of records associated with Stewart Indian School. At the same time, however, the organization and mismanagement of these records could also be connected with the broader constructs of settler colonialism and the attempted erasure of Native peoples and their experiences. If the goal of the boarding school system was assimilation, why bother organizing and preserving the records of Indigenous nations that were destined to disappear from the United States? Also, why worry about the accessibility of student transcripts to Stewart alumni if the objective was to train them only for menial jobs? The answers to these questions are currently unknown, but some sort of “colonial common sense,” undergirded by a sense of white supremacy and certainty that federal efforts to ‘civilize’ Native peoples would succeed, may have influenced the archival processes connected with Stewart Indian School records.⁷³⁶

Since its closure, the Stewart Indian School has been subjected to repeated attempts to erase the experiences of the students who attended the school, or to reconfigure them in a manner better suited to the settler colonial narrative of assimilation and progress espoused by the U.S. government. This has been done through the efforts of the Nevada state government to control the Stewart grounds and use them in a manner that neglected the history of the school and the experiences of

⁷³⁶ Ann Laura Stoler writes, with regard to the Dutch empire, that colonial archives were built upon “colonial common sense,” and thus reflect the priorities, prejudices, and omissions, meaning the common understandings that do not need to be articulated, of a colonizing power. Ann Laura Stoler. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2-20.

its alumni. The Nevada State Museum also contributed to this situation by presenting a history of the school that does not acknowledge both the positive and negative experiences of Stewart alumni, or the long-term trauma the boarding school system unleashed on Native families.⁷³⁷ Throughout, former Stewart students and Native communities with connections to the school have persevered, and urged that their voices be heard and their perspectives represented. Despite several setbacks and the difficulty, until recently, of obtaining financial assistance and recognition from the state of Nevada, these efforts are becoming a reality, through the Stewart Trail audio tour and the efforts of the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum to commemorate the range of student experiences at the school. These efforts are critical; the history of Stewart Indian School deserves to be recognized because, as Sherry Rupert asserts, “This isn’t just about the Native people. This is about the community. This is about the state of Nevada.”⁷³⁸ It is also about U.S. history,

⁷³⁷ However, even this is changing in a positive manner, as Nevada State Museum staff have recently reached out to the SISCCM for help in revising their docent presentations to reflect a broader range of alumni perspectives on the Stewart School. Additionally, in 2017 the Nevada State Legislature created a new position at the Nevada State Museum, Curator of Cultural Collections, to work directly with Nevada’s tribal nations and handle “native Indian human remains, funerary objects and other cultural items.” Nevada State Museum Blog. “Anna Camp Joins Staff of Nevada State Museum.” (June 5, 2018) Accessed December 12, 2018 <http://nvculture.org/nevadastatemuseumcarsoncity/2018/06/05/anthropologist-anna-camp-joins-staff-of-nevada-state-museum/>. Rahder and Gibbons consider this a positive step toward better collaboration between the Nevada State Museum and the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum. Bobbi Rahder (Museum Director, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum) and Chris Ann Gibbons (Curator, Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum) in discussions with the author, December 2018.

⁷³⁸ “Restoring Historic Stewart Indian School a Priority for Lawmakers.” *Associated Press*. (March 30, 2015). Accessed January 29, 2016 on <http://www.nevadaappeal.com/news/15682314-113/restoring-historic-indian-school-a-priority-for-lawmakers#>.

challenging historical narratives established by settler states, and recognizing the trauma experienced by generations of Native families.

Conclusion

On a warm summer day in July 2018, Stewart Indian School alumni, their families, and a collection of tribal leaders traveled to Carson City to attend a blessing ceremony on the former campus. Before the ceremony started, former students strolled the school grounds, looking in the windows of now-closed buildings, reconnecting with old school friends, and enthusiastically giving their family members tours. Members of an Indigenous drum circle heralded the beginning of the ceremony, which featured blessings delivered in the Indigenous languages of the Washoe, Paiute, and Western Shoshone nations, speeches from alumni who shared their memories of the school, and a rendition of the Stewart School song, the lyrics for which were passed out to enthusiastic attendees. The mood was positive, hopeful, and joyous, and those in the audience were clearly excited to be at the event. As the ceremony went on, and speakers discussed their connections with the school, an overriding theme became clear: the grounds of the Stewart Indian School were being reclaimed and revitalized by Native communities on behalf of the thousands of children the U.S. government had attempted to assimilate there. The era of erasing Indigenous experiences at the school was, finally, over.

Efforts to transform the Stewart Indian School from a sight of trauma to a sight of healing were also evident at the blessing ceremony. The hosts of this event, the Nevada Indian Commission and the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum, emphasized that no subject was off limits for those who wanted to share their memories, and underscored that the point of the ceremony was to acknowledge

and honor the range of student experiences at the school. Nevada Indian Commission Executive Director Sherry Rupert further indicated that the blessings delivered at the site were undertaken with the goal of recognizing the trauma many students experienced at Stewart, as well as their resilience and ability to persevere while attending an institution that deemed students, their families, and their cultures as inferior. In holding this event on the eve of the museum's construction, the Nevada Indian Commission pledged to former students, their families, and tribal nations that the varied perspectives and experiences of Stewart alumni would be on display in the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum.

Given the settler colonial aim of destroying Indigenous cultures in the United States and beyond, it is hard to imagine that those who designed and implemented the Native American boarding school system could envision what is now happening on the Stewart campus. Schools like Stewart were initially created with the objective of destroying Indigeneity and eradicating all aspects of Native cultures, languages, spiritualities, and traditions, and replacing them with the values and norms of the white settler population. Boarding schools were viewed as a necessary and humanitarian way to prevent the extinction of Native peoples, while also preparing them to live side by side, though certainly not on equal terms, with white Americans. Further, these schools would encourage Native Americans to vacate their lands, leaving them open for white settlement. These settler colonial principles underscored the creation of the boarding school system, and drove Nevada state officials' support for the construction of a boarding school in Carson City in the late 1880s.

Settler colonialism does not explain all aspects of the complicated history of Stewart Indian School, however, because, despite the efforts of BIA officials, Stewart students and their families consistently found ways to undermine school officials and their plans. Operating in a borderlands space far from federal control, Indigenous peoples found ways to pressure local Stewart officials and fight back against assimilationist programs. From the early years the school was open, Stewart students and families were consistent in using whatever advantages they might have to bend school rules to their will, negotiate changes in school policies, and to force Stewart administrators to acknowledge their needs and perspectives. They were not always successful in their efforts, and these subversive moments certainly did not lessen the brutality many children experienced at Stewart. However, the examples in this dissertation illustrate the strength and resilience of generations of children and their relatives who stood up for themselves and refused to accept settler notions of white supremacy and Indigenous inequality. Similarly, borderlands theory illuminates the resistance to federal policies that came from local school officials who had their own ideas about how assimilationist programs should be implemented, and which federal rules should be ignored. In both of these cases, the geographical distance from federal authority, as well as the recognition of Indigenous leverage in Nevada, impacted the behavior of Stewart administrators and Native peoples alike.

While this dissertation attempts to explain the founding and history of the Stewart Indian School through these two analytic frameworks, the most important objective of this project is to share the experiences and stories of Stewart alumni, in

their own words, with a broader audience. Equally important to recognize is the spectrum of students' perspectives regarding their time at Stewart, and the unique ways they view their time at the school. Some students thrived in the regimented boarding school system, and felt it prepared them for military service and long-term careers, including those which resulted in students' return to Stewart as employees, or their acceptance of jobs in other parts of the federal Indian service. Alumni also attained college and post-graduate degrees, particularly those who graduated in the later decades the school was open, and a few worked with organizations that advocated on behalf of Indigenous communities. Even these students, however, expressed pain at being separated from their families and their communities while at Stewart, and acknowledged the lasting impacts attending an assimilationist boarding school had on their mental and emotional well-being. Each of these stories deserves to be honored, acknowledged, and accepted as honest accounts of what children who attended the Stewart Indian School experienced and how they were affected.

The Native American boarding school system operated with little input from Native communities for over a century in the United States, and, during that time, thousands of Native children were taken from their families and communities, sometimes for years at a time, and forced to contend with a white supremacist system that attempted to erase all aspects of their heritage. Given the duration of these schools' existence and their impacts on Native communities across the country, it continues to shock me how rarely the boarding school system is addressed in mainstream histories of the U.S., or how little is known about the boarding school

system outside of Native communities. I have mentioned this project to countless non-Native friends, family members, and acquaintances over the past three years, and not a single one of them was aware of the boarding school system before our discussions. To many, the idea that the U.S. government would kidnap children from their parents was an appalling and surprising aspect of U.S. history of which they were unaware.⁷³⁹ To me, the lack of knowledge about the history of Native American boarding schools demonstrates an enduring power of the settler state to conceal those aspects of its history that it wishes to be ignored or erased. The Australian and Canadian governments have taken steps to recognize their similar histories of Indigenous child removal in recent decades; whether the United States government will do so, or even initiate a conversation on this topic, remains to be seen.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ This surprise is unfounded, in my opinion, as the removal of children from their families, especially non-white families, has been consistently and officially sanctioned in the U.S. throughout the country's history. For example, enslaved parents and children were routinely separated from one another prior to the end of the Civil War; after World War II, in addition to taking Indigenous kids for enrollment in the boarding school system, federally affiliated organizations removed thousands of Native children from their families and secured their adoption into predominantly white homes, a practice that became so widespread legislation was passed in 1978 to stop it; and, in 2018, the U.S. government stole and imprisoned hundreds, and possibly thousands, of children from asylum-seeking parents in an effort to deter others from crossing the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

⁷⁴⁰ The Australian Human Right Commission initiated an investigation into the removal of Aboriginal children from their families between 1910 and 1970, a period during which programs to assimilate these children into white Australian society were in place. In 1997, the Australian government issued a report, *Bringing them Home*, on these programs, the abuses they entailed, and their traumatic impacts on Aboriginal communities. Australia also formally apologized for its assimilation program in February 2008. In Canada, generations of First Nations Indigenous children were forced to attend residential boarding schools, many of which were run by the Catholic Church, that maintained assimilation programs similar to those in the U.S. In 2008, the Canadian government formed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the abuses committed at residential schools. Seven years later, Canada published a report on the schools that acknowledged the extensive trauma and damage the residential schools caused First Nations families. See Australia Human Rights Commission. *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. (1997) (Accessed February 25, 2019) https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf; Frances Mao. "Australia's Apology to Stolen Generations: 'It gave me peace.'" *BBC News*. (Accessed February 25, 2019) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-43039522>; Truth and

It is my sincere hope that this history of the Stewart Indian School will encourage readers to learn more about the school and its students. There are hundreds of pages of oral history interviews with Stewart alumni and former employees that are accessible online, and I highly recommend traveling to the Stewart campus in Carson City, listening to the interviews available on the Stewart Trail Walking Tour, and, once it is open, visiting the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum. Each of these projects honor the memories of Stewart Indian School alumni and their families, all of whom deserve recognition for what they endured and survived. This school was designed to assimilate and eradicate Native Americans in Nevada and across the western United States. It failed. These Indigenous nations, along with hundreds of others across the U.S., still exist, and in Nevada they are reclaiming an institution dedicated to their destruction and converting it into a space that will celebrate and perpetuate Indigenous cultures. I can think of no better tribute to the generations affected by the assimilationist programs of the Stewart Indian School than its transformation into a site of renewal and healing for Native peoples.

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