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Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940. By Brenda J. Child.

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so-called "Indian problem." Conversely, military service provided Native Americans with exposure to members of many different tribes. As they learned of each, their knowledge promoted what the author calls "pan-Indianism." The book also includes some important comparisons among Native Americans and other minorities involved in World War I.

The early chapters of the book are well-grounded in their content. However, the later chapters should have been converted into charts and graphs dispersed throughout the first sections of the book. Overall this book examines and presents very interesting points about Native American involvement in World War I, and may be used as a supplemental text in history and American Indian studies courses. Without a doubt, readers will better understand the complexities of turn-of-the-century assimilation strategies and appreciate the different motivations that lead all Americans to service.

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**Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940.** By Brenda J. Child. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. 143 pages. \$40.00 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

Drawing primarily from the archives of the Flandreau, Haskell, and Pipestone schools, Brenda Child's *Boarding School Seasons* focuses on letters written by students and their families. Child's investigation thus adds significantly to the work of previous scholars, including Sally McBeth, Celia Haig-Brown, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, who have employed oral history to place Indian peoples' stories at the center of the historical narrative. While acknowledging that any material found in school records must be met with a degree of skepticism, Child views the letters as a relatively uncensored opportunity to examine Indian attitudes and points of view.

Child begins the book with letters from her own family, which were recovered from boxes of materials stored in government archives. The first is from her great-grandfather, a former Carlisle School student, who wrote to the school officials at Flandreau in 1924, "I would like to have my daughter come home this summer Jeannette Jones she is got money to come send her home right away please" (p. xv). With these words, Child introduces one of the major themes of her book: American Indian parents' devotion to their children and their suffering as a result of the lengthy separations mandated by the school system. The parents' letters convey not only the anguish of separation, but also concern about the children's health and diet. In turn, the students' letters home, often returned by parents to the schools as evidence to document problems, describe their homesickness, their struggle to keep up with their workload, and their battle against disease. Together these letters reveal the degree to which American Indians lost control over key aspects of their lives as a result of forced assimilation. Nevertheless, as Child shows, these documents also record the resistance that students and their families

exerted against the government and its schools, as well as their occasional triumphs over bureaucracy. These experiences, Child argues, have become part of the shared heritage of North American Indians.

Among Child's many important findings is that American Indian families used the boarding schools for their own purposes and ironically were largely responsible for keeping the system alive even after the era of enforced off-reservation schooling had passed. By the end of the nineteenth century, most reformers had lost faith in residential education as a tool for assimilation. Nevertheless, the boarding-school system endured, partly because of the sluggish bureaucracy and the overwhelming social problems plaguing reservations. Indian communities had been devastated by the allotment system, Child reminds us, and the schools became a refuge from consequent poverty, disease, and early mortality.

Drawing on personal stories that emerge from the letters, Child uncovers many reasons why families relied on boarding schools. Focusing on her own Ojibwa people, Child explains how the tribal way of life was breaking down under the extreme stress brought on by the high death rate. Like many other tribes, the Ojibwa had traditionally opened their homes to orphans. The number of parentless children now made this practice impossible, however, and the boarding schools provided a home. Most Indian families sought out the schools to secure food and clothing for their children, especially during the economic depression of the 1930s. Additionally, they desired that the younger generation acquire skills required to gain access to economic opportunity. Although local public schools were available to Indian children, they were often unsuitable. Some schools were too far away for children to walk to, especially those subject to torrential Midwest storms. Parents forced to leave the reservation to find work in the city often turned to the residential schools as an alternative to what they perceived to be a detrimental urban environment.

Emphasizing the extent to which students were active agents in their own educational lives, Child cites letters revealing that they often chose to attend boarding schools. Some students requested residential placements to escape the racism that pervaded the public schools. Others opted for boarding schools to further their education or to gain specific skills that would be useful in the adult world since the public schools often did not offer upper grades or vocational training. Many also wanted to join relatives and friends who already attended school off the reservation.

Child's research confirms previous historians' findings that the boarding schools typically did not provide the kind of education and care that parents sought for their children or that the students sought for themselves. In most cases, the students were physically overworked, inadequately clothed, poorly fed, and meagerly housed in unsanitary and overcrowded dormitories. Consequently the students were left prone to the disease and death that haunted many of their reservations. However, Child maintains that even such scrupulous historians as Frederick Hoxie and David Wallace Adams have underestimated the role of parents in addressing these issues. Long before the Meriam Report of 1928 documented these appalling conditions, parents repeatedly wrote letters to school and government officials to lodge complaints, and some withdrew their children

from these schools in protest. Nevertheless Child acknowledges that it was not until the government-sponsored report became public that the boarding-school abuses were addressed. Even then the schools were far from ideal.

From the parents' perspective, the problems in the schools were exacerbated by the fact that school officials communicated poorly about the students' health and welfare. Child notes that parents wrote appreciative notes when they were properly informed, but she emphasizes that their letters were more typically filled with demands for explanations of school policy, especially as it related to vacation time. School principals were reluctant to release students because the schools depended on students' daily manual labor to minimize institutional costs, and because officials believed the students' continued presence at school would weaken the link with their own languages and cultures. Hundreds of letters in the school files record parents' demands that children be allowed to visit home, especially during the summer months. Their requests were routinely denied, even when there was a family emergency. One parent wrote in frustration, "It seems it would be much easier to get her out of prison than out of your school" (p. 47). Child observes that a number of parents apparently discovered they could subvert the system by wording the request in such a way as to suggest a child was needed at home to do work, for that was the only appeal that consistently produced the desired result.

Parents were deeply angered when school officials did not inform them of their children's illnesses and hospitalizations in a timely fashion or at all. This omission, Child makes clear, was deliberate: student files reveal that officials often confiscated letters written by sick children. Child's comparison of parents' letters to the schools with letters from the schools to the commissioner of Indian Affairs exposes the dishonesty of officials who declared that they received no complaints.

Child takes issue with historical interpretations suggesting that educational reformers achieved their goal of distancing students from their tribal identity. Although many students in this study lost their first language as a result of their schooling, most remained grounded in the life of their home communities even as they developed a strong pan-Indian consciousness and even as they adopted some of the practices of European American society. By focusing on the communication between parents and their children rather than on government documents and school records, Child is able to call attention to the continuing influence that parents exerted over their children's lives. She notes, for example, that parents' and children's requests for visits home often coincided with traditional activities such as tribal celebrations and seasonal harvests. The record of numerous student runaways also speaks to the intense pull of home. Finally, when she returns to her own roots, Child argues that the continued vitality of the community at Red Lake shows that "influences stronger than the boarding school continued to shape the lives of Ojibwe people" (p. 99).

Child's narrative is marred by a tendency toward repetition. Many excerpts from letters serve only to illustrate a similar point rather than to provide a springboard for new analysis. Closer readings of individual letters could have brought forth deeper insights into particular experiences. Nevertheless,

the material itself remains compelling and contributes appreciably to an understanding of the poignancy and complexity of the interactions between families and schools.

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**Choctaw Genesis, 1500–1700.** By Patricia Galloway. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 411 Pages. \$25.00 paper.

I spent the summer of 1998 relearning the stories of Nanih-wayá, the stomp dance, and my family's origins. From these stories I gained a greater sense of why I see myself the way I do. This experience taught me that Choctaws and Africans not only toiled together during the slavery period, but also united to combat racism and exploitation. Such bonds endured these dangers, easing the intermarriage between cultures and the absorption of one group into the other. However, to the outsider we remain Choctaw or African American—never both. In retrospect I wonder at the authenticity of my heritage. Were the experiences of my elders random cases of Choctaws intermarrying with Africans, or Choctaws borrowing African melodies so that both groups could express good times at a stomp dance? Are we and our dances still Choctaw?

At issue here is the question, How has Choctaw culture changed? Angie Debo's 1934 *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* provides an historical review of Choctaw cultural change from contact to the early twentieth century. Although Debo's work affords detailed insight into the social and political aspects of this issue, it questions neither the internal diversity of the Choctaw people nor our monolithic notions of Choctaw culture. On the other hand, Patricia Galloway, with extreme attention to detail and bias, presents an archaeological investigation that challenges Choctaw and non-Choctaw to question the ways scholars have addressed the effects of social and cultural change on political identities. Her premise is that what is often familiar about Choctaw cultural change is only the "end of the story," meaning that before scholars examined this process, intertribal politics, marriage, and adoption caused social changes undocumented in the historical and archaeological records (p. 1).

This original case study provides an unique synthesis of anthropology and history. Galloway shows how intertribal politics, war, and population diminution contributed to the dislocation of the proto-Choctaw and early historic Choctaw. Using the Choctaw creation story, Nanih-wayá, in relation to the historical and archeological records, she traces the origin of the Choctaw people to Mississippian mound-building chiefdoms. Many of these chiefdoms were in a state of decline by the time of Hernando de Soto's 1539 expedition. The author also implies that the remnant populations of these chiefdoms united to create new confederacies. Galloway believes it was such movements and interactions that created the Choctaw.

Galloway believes this process to have repeated itself in response to European encroachment. In this context, slavery, war, and population