

## NINETEENTH CENTURY NATIVE AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE

by  
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Horror stories of Indians and their captives abound in American literature.<sup>1</sup> First brought to the attention of the public in the 17th and early 18th centuries by the Mathers, both Increase and Cotton, these early narratives instantly caught the public's attention. With their typical emphasis on the brutal slayings and kidnappings of innocent pioneers to their horrific scenes of mutilation, deprivation, and sexual abuse, they appealed to a society that firmly believed in the natural depravity of man and acknowledged the abiding presence of evil in the world.

According to Charles M. Segal and David C. Stineback in *Puritans and Manifest Destiny*, "to the Puritan, the Native American was the instrument of Satan" and his "struggle against sin was, in part, a struggle against Satan as personified by the Indian."<sup>2</sup> Thus, early settlers could rationalize all actions toward Indians, including western expansionism and extermination, as crusades under God's command.

The narratives changed over time, explains Roy Harvey Pearce in "Significances of the Captivity Narrative," from religious documents and spiritual confessions to fictionalized and sensationalized accounts. Their purposes also changed, from symbolic spiritual journeys to propaganda espousing Manifest Destiny, until by the end of the 18th century, they simply became melodramatic entertainment. Later, anthropologists and historians collected captivity narratives as scholarship, "to see what [they] revealed about the frontier and the frontiersman, to broaden the scope of the American historical imagination."<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the 19th century, notes Frederick Drimmer in *Captured by the Indians*, as Native Americans were safely herded onto reservations, the tribes exchanged "the role of the threatening, hostile raider for that of the peaceful farmer and herdsman," and "the captivity narrative began to die out and disappear." He adds, "This is a shame."<sup>4</sup>

I would like to argue that the captivity narrative did not disappear at this time, but that the sides merely reversed roles. No longer were the Indians the captors, but the

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captives. Their autobiographies detailing their lives within the confines of the reservations and their forced acculturation to the white man's ways should be considered as captivity narratives, too.<sup>5</sup>

Ironically, early American reformers, in their humanitarian zeal, did not consider their efforts to acculturate Native Americans as cruelty, again looking to religion as rationalization for their actions. These idealists believed that education, acceptance of the Christian faith, and assimilation to the white culture were the only means to "save" the Indians. Although the first school for Indians was founded in Havana, Cuba, in 1568, the period most crucial for the western Indian nations occurred after the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> At this time, Christian reformers, many of them military leaders such as Richard Henry Pratt and O.O. Howard, were convinced that education promised the quickest and best road to assimilation.

Richard Henry Pratt, whose frontier years with the Cavalry brought him into close association with units of freed Negro slaves and Indian scouts, developed the philosophy that, for these minority citizens, "The rights of citizenship included fraternity and equal privileges for development." All that minority groups needed to be able to compete on equal terms in the white community was education, concluding that once Native American children could speak, read, and write English, they would adjust to the civilized world. Pratt boasted, "I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked."<sup>7</sup> Although Howard's military career was marked by sincere humanitarian effort, he shared the same misplaced beliefs of his contemporaries in believing that there was nothing in the Native American culture worth saving.<sup>8</sup>

Following the principles and theories of Pratt and Howard, schools like the Carlisle, Hampton, and Forest Grove Institutes as well as various missionary schools, removed Native American children from what they considered the degrading influences of their tribal communities and attempted to teach them the ways of the white man. The Bureau of Indian Affairs supported this policy, believing that Indian children would assimilate more rapidly into American society if they were kept from their reservations and families for long periods of time. Although government and religious leaders' humanitarian concerns were noble, they did not consider how much human suffering that their efforts to eradicate an entire culture would cause.

The first school session at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, began in 1879 with more than two hundred children from about a half a dozen tribes in an old cavalry barracks, which served as the first school for the young Native Americans. Later, off-reservation schools began in Nebraska, Kansas, Oregon, and in Indian Territory, patterning themselves after Carlisle. That the school should begin in a military barracks was appropriate, for it became a sort of prison to children sent there. Torn from their parents and their culture, the Native American youths suffered loneliness, fear, hunger, and abuse in the name of Progress.

Many Native Americans chronicle in their autobiographies the poignant events of their captivity in the white man's schools. Francis La Flesche (1857-1932), an Omaha

Sioux, received his schooling in a Presbyterian mission school north of Omaha, Nebraska, in the mid 1860s. His autobiography was first published in 1900. Zitkala-Sa or Gertrude Bonnin (1876-1938), a Yankton Sioux, obtained her education in the mid-1880s at White's Manual Institute in Wabash, Indiana. Her autobiographical narratives were first published in 1900 and 1901 in *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly*. Charles Eastman or Ohiyesa (1858-1939), a Santee Sioux, went to the Santee Training School during the mid-1870s at Yankton, South Dakota. His works appeared between 1902 and 1918. Luther Standing Bear (1863-1939), a Lakota Sioux who attended Carlisle in the 1880s, recorded his life and past in four books written between 1928 and 1934.<sup>9</sup> The stories of these Native Americans, although from different schools, different tribes, and often different decades, represent similar reactions to their school experiences and their return to the reservation.

The personal accounts of these Indians' "captivities" in the American schools follow nearly the same pattern as those of the traditional captivity narratives, such as the one written by Mary Rowlandson after her 1675 kidnapping.<sup>10</sup> The narratives begin with an account of the capture, a narrative of the journey to their place of captivity, a report of their cultural displacement in an alien society, and an exposé of the sufferings and cruelties they endured. They conclude with a description of the return to their own society. The emotional and psychological scars inflicted upon Indian children during their "schooling" were as serious as those abhorred by the reading public in the traditional Indian captivity narratives.

### I. The Capture

The most horrifying aspect of the traditional captivity narratives is their description of the capture. Mary Rowlandson pictured the Indian raid and her kidnapping in her account: "There was one who was chopped into the head with a hatchet, and stripped naked, and yet was crawling up and down. It is a solemn sight to see so many Christians lying in their blood, some here, and some there, like a company of sheep torn by wolves, all of them stripped naked by a company of hell-hounds, roaring, singing, ranting, and insulting, as if they would have torn our very hearts out."<sup>11</sup>

The "capture" of the Native American children was no less emotional than that of the white captives, although false promises, not physical force, often lured many away from their parents. In Zitkala-Sa's *American Indian Stories*, missionaries came to the Yankton Reservation and told the children of "a more beautiful country than ours"<sup>12</sup> where they could "pick all the red apples [they] could eat."<sup>13</sup> Zitkala-Sa's mother warned her about "the white man's lies," saying, "Don't believe a word they say! Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter. You will cry for me, but they will not even soothe you. Stay with me, my little one! Your brother Dawee says that going East, away from your mother, is too hard an experience for his sister."<sup>14</sup> Not until later did Zitkala-Sa lament, "Alas! They came, they saw, and they conquered!"<sup>15</sup> Family

members left behind mourned the losses intensely, too. Zitkala-Sa's mother's loud cries pierced the night: "She cried aloud for her brothers' spirits to support her in her helpless misery."<sup>16</sup>

When the false promises and temptations didn't work, the agencies relied on threats. According to George E. Hyde, in *A Sioux Chronicle*, Pratt himself would come out to the agencies and bully the Sioux parents into letting him take their children to the white men's land to go to his big school far away. Many Sioux had little respect for Pratt, knowing that "he knew only one method of negotiation—that which he used in dealing with recalcitrant Indian boys at Carlisle. The moment anyone opposed his will [he] grew angry."<sup>17</sup> In 1884, when Red Cloud's camp at Pine Ridge refused to send their seventy-five children to school, Major Valentine T. McGillicuddy petitioned "the Indian Office for permission to cut off from the ration rolls all families in Red Cloud's camp that refused to put their children in school." He obtained permission to begin starving the Indians into submission in 1885.<sup>18</sup> Orphans helped fill the school quotas when promises, threats, and starvation attempts failed.<sup>19</sup>

During the Indian wars, other children were literally kidnapped. Angie Debo, in *A History of the Indians of the United States*, explains: "White men, in raiding Indian villages, also killed the children if sufficiently angered, and in kindlier moods they also spared them. Placing them in a distant school was an extension of this humane impulse. . . . They never understood the desperation of the bereaved parents. Even the Apache prisoners crowded within the stockades found ways to hide some of their children from the Carlisle kidnapers [sic]."<sup>20</sup>

Even in the reservation schools the children were not safe from kidnappers. In the 1880s, when Angel DeCora, a Winnebago, was in class one day, strange men entered the room and through translators, asked her if she would like to ride on a train. The prospect excited her, so she and six other children agreed to leave with the white men. Angel related, "We did get the promised ride. We rode three days and three nights until we reached Hampton, Va. My parents found out, but too late."<sup>21</sup> Hampton Institute added seven new names to their roll call that week, seven unsuspecting children kidnapped against their families' wills.

The capture of the Indian children was preceded by years of battles as bloody as those described by Rowlandson, battles begun early in the westward expansion as trappers, traders, miners, and settlers raided the Indians' lands. Many Native American parents resisted the missionaries' attempts to educate their children in the white culture: those parents who knew that the ability to speak, read, and write English would be essential for their children and were willing to send them away to school understood all too well that the means to achieve this end would have disastrous effects on their children and their culture.

## II. The Journey

In all traditional captivity narratives, the captives are torn from their familiar environment and taken on a journey to an unknown or unfamiliar destination. As Mary Rowlandson began her "Second Remove," she lamented, "I must turn my back upon the town and travel with them into the vast and desolate wilderness, I knew not whither"<sup>22</sup> while the Indians taunted her saying, "'your master will knock your child in the head, 'and then a second, and then a third,' your master will quickly knock your child in the head'."<sup>23</sup> The Indian children's journeys to the unknown held as much anxiety and hardship for them as it did for Rowlandson. Their travels away from the safety of their families terrified the young Native Americans, and the sight of the large steamboats and hooting trains as well as the hundreds of rude spectators caused many of them to fear for their lives. Luther Standing Bear, the first male student to step inside the grounds at Carlisle, viewed himself as a captive as he recalled the scene of the "eighty-odd blanketed boys and girls marching down the street surrounded by a jeering, unsympathetic people whose only emotions were those of hate and fear; the conquerors looking upon the conquered."<sup>24</sup>

For most of the Indian children, their journey began with a ride on the unfamiliar steam locomotive. Standing Bear described his fear at eleven years old during the train ride when "suddenly the whole house started to move away with us. . . . We expected every minute that the house would tip over, and that something terrible would happen. We held our blankets between our teeth, because our hands were both busy hanging to the seats, so frightened were we."<sup>25</sup> However, real fear for their lives soon replaced anxiety as the train rushed closer and closer to the East where the Native Americans believed the earth ended, for they had been taught that the earth was flat with four corners. "The big boys were now singing brave songs" and they "expected to be killed because [they] had passed the moon."<sup>26</sup> Standing Bear went East, as did many Indian children, expecting to die.

The arrival at the large, wooden army barracks and schoolhouses did not comfort the children, either. La Flesche described his first day, using the detached third person: "Everything seemed to be in a whirl. He took fright, ran to the door that first caught his sight, and went with a thud down to a landing, but did not lose his balance; he took another step, then fell headlong into a dreadful dark place. He screamed at the top of his voice, frightened almost into a fit."<sup>27</sup> Zitkala-Sa, too, described her terror: "trembling with fear and distrust of the palefaces, my teeth chattering from the shilly ride, I crept noiselessly in my soft moccasins along the narrow hall, keeping very close to the bare wall. I was as frightened as the captured young of a wild creature."<sup>28</sup> Her fear did not lessen as the days went by: "My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon. . . . As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, 'Wait until you are alone in the night.'"<sup>29</sup> Needing compassion, she begged for her mother, but the paleface captors would not comfort her.

Although the journeys of these young Indians were often not as physically grueling as those of the white captives, the children's sense of displacement, isolation, and their actual fear of dying equaled that of their counterparts.

### III. Cultural Displacement

Adapting to a foreign culture presented additional hardships to captives. Different types of lodging, food, and clothing made their confinements more stressful. During Mary Rowlandson's captivity, the Indian's diet appalled her the most: "The first week of my being among them I hardly ate a thing; the second week I found my stomach grow faint for want of something; and yet it was very hard to get down their filthy trash; but the third week, though I could think how formerly my stomach would turn against this or that, and I could starve and die before I could eat such things, yet they were sweet and savory to my taste."<sup>30</sup>

Although the Native American children slowly adjusted to the "paleface days,"<sup>31</sup> as Zitkala-Sa termed them, they had more to adapt to than the food. Anxious to remove all traces of "savagery" from their new charges, white educators and missionaries tried to strip and clip and scrub their children's Indianness away, committing emotionally harmful actions toward the youngsters.

The cutting of the boys' and girls' hair universally caused the most trauma among the children and parents alike. Zitkala-Sa lamented the loss of her Indian individuality when the girls' glossy, black hair was cut. Among Native Americans, short hair was only worn by mourners, and "shingled hair by cowards."<sup>32</sup> Zitkala-Sa tried to escape, but she was caught and tied securely in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I have suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of the many little animals driven by a herder.<sup>33</sup>

When Standing Bear's turn came in the barber's chair, he stated that "it hurt my feelings to such an extent that it made tears come to my eyes. I do not recall whether the barber noticed my agitation or not, nor did I care. All I was thinking about was the hair that he had taken away from me." He then realized that he was no longer an Indian, but only "an imitation of a white man."<sup>34</sup>

The children were not alone in their anguish, for when chief Red Cloud accompanied his daughter to the school at the Pine Ridge agency and saw the white women cutting the scalplocks of the young boys, he immediately withdrew her. These scalplocks were "the Sioux badge of honor, a boy deprived of that lock would never amount to anything and would soon become a social outcast."<sup>35</sup>

Then, the children's blankets and clothing were taken from them and replaced by outfits that Standing Bear considered awkward and uncomfortable. Moreover, he believed that trousers and handkerchiefs were "unsanitary and the trousers kept us from breathing well. High collars, stiff-bosomed shirts, and suspenders fully three inches in width were uncomfortable, while leather boots caused actual suffering." The red flannel undergarments Standing Bear considered as "actual torture."<sup>36</sup> Missionaries forced them into tightly fitting clothes which, Zitkala-Sa recalled, made her feel "immodestly dressed."<sup>37</sup>

Next, they were given English names, thus erasing their identity. La Flesche explained, "the aboriginal names were considered by the missionaries as heathenish, and therefore should be obliterated. No less heathenish in their origin were the English substitutes, but the loss of their original meaning and significance through long usage had rendered them fit to continue as appellations for civilized folk."<sup>38</sup>

Whereas Indian names had personal or symbolic connotations and ceremonies often accompanied the ritual of naming, the English names forced upon the children at the schools were chosen randomly with no connection to their individuality. Standing Bear pointed out his name from a list on the blackboard he could not read. He explained, "None of the names were read or explained to us, so of course we did not know the sound or the meaning of any of them." When the teacher handed him the pointer, Standing Bear said, "I took the pointer and acted as if I were about to touch an enemy."<sup>39</sup> He considered his action a heroic act, a sort of "coup" on the enemy. It was the child's attempt to marshal his cultural traditions to survive.

Finally, the missionaries prohibited the Indian children from speaking their own language, a rule, stated La Flesche, which was "rigidly enforced with a hickory rod, so that the new-comer, however socially inclined, was obliged to go about like a little dummy until he had learned to express himself in English."<sup>40</sup> This harsh rule, especially in the first months when the children were undergoing major cultural and personal adjustments, caused much emotional isolation. Standing Bear explained, "I now remembered how hard it had been for us to forego the consolation of speech. I remembered how lonely we used to get and how we longed for the loved ones at home, and the taking away of speech at that time only added to our depression. Those of us who knew the sign language made use of it, but imagine what it meant to those who had to remain silent."<sup>41</sup> With this one rule, the silencing of an individual, educators moved effectively toward silencing an entire culture.

The young children also had difficulty adjusting to the white man's food, considering it as unpalatable as the white captives described the Indian cuisine. Standing Bear believed that "Of all the changes we were forced to make, that of diet was doubtless the most injurious, for it was immediate and drastic. White bread we had for the first meal and thereafter, as well as coffee and sugar. Had we been allowed our own simple diet of meat, either boiled with soup or dried, and fruit, with perhaps a few vegetables, we should have thrived."<sup>42</sup> With weakened bodies and souls, it is no wonder

that within the first three years of school, "nearly one half of the children from the Plains were dead."<sup>43</sup>

The children's days were regimented by a system of bells, and strict military order governed their every move. Zitkala-Sa explained how this new culture distressed her: "A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. . . And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless."<sup>44</sup> Eastman summed up the feelings of these culturally displaced youngsters, stripped of their hair, their clothing, their names, their language, and their health, when he exclaimed: "I felt like a wild goose with its wings clipped."<sup>45</sup>

#### IV. Sufferings and Cruelties

Readers of captivity narratives shudder at the cruelties, oftentimes exaggerated or sensationalized, that Indians inflicted upon their white captives. Mary Rowlandson described this incident in her travail when she was hungry and went to visit a kind Indian woman who had once given her food: "When I was there, there came an Indian to look after me, who when he found me, kicked me all along. I went home and found venison roasting that night, but they would not give me one bit of it." Rowlandson explained, "Sometimes I met with favor, and sometimes with nothing but frowns."<sup>46</sup> Although Rowlandson's physical torments do not compare in degree with the cruelties of some other white captives, they are probably more indicative of the treatment that most white captives received at the hands of their Indian captors.

Native American children endured equally cruel physical oppression and neglect. Unsympathetic teachers demanded rigid adherence to rules and inflicted unnecessarily harsh corporal punishment. Discipline was swift and relentless, and often the Indian children, unfamiliar with white customs or unable to speak or understand English, did not comprehend why they were being hurt. La Flesche and a friend, who were attending the Presbyterian Indian Mission School north of Omaha, Nebraska, were caught in an innocent boyish prank and punished severely:

Gray-beard brought down the stick heavily on Brush's shoulders, an inch of the sapling broke; then he struck faster and faster, and at each stroke a piece fell off. Brush stood with clenched fists, determined not to show any flinching; but we could see that he felt keenly the blows. He went to his desk, and buried his face in his arms.

"I'm afraid this isn't hickory," says Gray-beard, throwing on the floor the stump of the switch. "I know this one is," and he dealt blow after blow on the broad shoulders of Alexander, who gave no sign of pain. The boy stood unmoved, every muscle relaxed, even his hands were open, showing no emotion whatever. The stick was worn out, and Gray-beard threw the stump on the floor.<sup>47</sup>



However, the worst cruelty inflicted by the teachers at the Mission School La Flesche attended occurred when a young orphan brought by a grandmother accidentally hit the teacher with a clod of dirt: "Catching a firm grip on the hand of the boy, Gray-beard dealt blow after blow on the visibly swelling hand. The man seemed to lose all self-control, gritting his teeth and breathing heavily, while the child writhed in pain, turned blue, and lost his breath." La Flesche was horrified and unable "to reconcile the act of Gray-beard with the teachings of the missionaries."<sup>48</sup>

When the leading Sioux chiefs Red Cloud, Red Dog, and Spotted Tail visited Carlisle in 1880, they were angry at the educational program, for they wished their children to be taught to speak, read, and write English, not work as drudges in the fields. The physical punishment the youngsters received also incensed them. According to George E. Hyde in *A Sioux Chronicle*, the chiefs were incensed at the "thugs on the staff whose duty it was to beat the pupils."<sup>49</sup> The Native American leaders could not understand how Christian people in the East could approve of Pratt's plan when "they knew that he had men and women on his payroll under the euphemistic designation of disciplinarians whose main duty was to thump recalcitrant Indian boys and girls into submission."<sup>50</sup> A bill was introduced into Congress to halt such beatings at Indian schools, but Pratt personally went to Washington to fight it and won, delaying its passage for twenty-five years.<sup>51</sup>

Even though corporal punishment was not uncommon even in white boarding schools, and many teachers were dedicated and compassionate individuals, the cause for the severe discipline was unique. Teachers routinely disciplined Indian children for speaking their native language, for singing Indian songs, for not understanding English, and, as a consequence, for running away from school. When compared to the traditionally lenient upbringing of most Indian children, such harsh physical punishment for previously approved behavior was alien and incomprehensible.

Most appalling, however, were the great numbers of children who died from disease, neglect, starvation, and even homesickness at the Indian schools. Grippe, whooping cough, smallpox, pulmonary diseases, and tuberculosis spread rapidly in the crowded schoolrooms and dormitories. Zitkala-Sa, even as a child, understood the lack of medical resources and attention, stating, "I grew bitter, and censured the woman for cruel neglect of our physical ills."<sup>52</sup> Later, when Zitkala-Sa was a teacher herself at Carlisle, she understood more clearly the woeful medical conditions at the school: "An inebriate paleface sat stupid in a doctor's chair, while Indian patients carried their ailments to untimely graves."<sup>53</sup>

The sufferings and cruelties forced upon the uncomprehending Native American children were all the more tragic since the pain was consciously inflicted by a society that prided itself in its democracy, superiority, and Christian charity.

## V. The Return

The reunion of white captives with their families and friends was usually accompanied by rejoicing and thankfulness, and most were welcomed wholeheartedly back into the community, often paying ransoms as high as two thousand dollars.<sup>54</sup> Rowlandson spoke of "pitiful, tender-hearted and compassionate Christians," "tenderhearted friends," "Bounty and religious charity," and "public thanksgiving" at her return.<sup>55</sup> Although she mourned the loss of loved ones killed during the attack, the ordeal taught her "the vanity of . . . outward things" and that "we must rely on God Himself, and our whole dependence must be upon him."<sup>56</sup> As a result of her captivity, she considered herself now one of the "elect" and had an important role to fulfill in her community: to serve as an example for others to appreciate the goodness of God and not stray from the Puritan paths of righteousness.

Indian families, of course, rejoiced at the return of their once-captive sons and daughters, but the dramatic changes affected upon their children and the emotional and physical scars they brought back home with them made homecomings tragic. The newly-aculturated youths returned complete strangers to their families and were unable to fit back into their own societies. Zitkala-Sa explained, "Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one. This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East."<sup>57</sup> In her story of the "Soft-Hearted Sioux," a young Christian returned to his tribe, and the medicine man taunted, "What loyal son is he who, returning to his father's people, wears a foreigner's dress? . . . Here is the traitor to his people."<sup>58</sup>

Often, upon returning to their families and villages, the restored captives were not greeted with celebrations, but suspicion. Traditional members of their own tribes considered them as outcasts and looked upon them, stated La Flesche, as "make-believe white men,"<sup>59</sup> neither white nor Indian. "Some of the boys came back years later, turned into imitation whites, and most of them were unhappy," states Hyde in *A Sioux Chronicle*. "Some died off there in the white men's land and were never seen again."<sup>60</sup>

Standing Bear reported the sad spectacle of returned children who could no longer speak their native language, or pretended they could not out of shame, and who turned to "deception and trickery."<sup>61</sup> They became like the young men in Zitkala-Sa's autobiographical tale "The Blue-Star Woman," tricksters who preyed on the old, the uneducated, and the helpless and who "thrived in their grafting business. . . . the by-product of an unwieldy bureaucracy over the nation's wards."<sup>62</sup>

Most unfortunate, the white world still regarded the educated Indians as inferior and did not allow them the brotherhood and equality Pratt and other assimilationists had envisioned. In 1890, Standing Bear and a group of other students who had just returned from Carlisle held a council meeting to discuss what they could do with the education they had received at the institution and which they had found useless back on the reservation. Fifteen of them decided that each should open a little shop if the government would give them the necessary tools. Standing Bear, who believed this to

be an excellent idea, drew up a letter for them to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, only to have their request ignored.<sup>63</sup> Even the Indians who had positions within the white system on their own reservations, like Zitkala's brother Dawee, lost them to white men: "the Great Father at Washington sent a white son to take my brother's pen from him,"<sup>64</sup> and he was not able to make use of his Eastern education.

Many Native Americans continued on to college. Eastman graduated from Dartmouth College and went on to receive a medical degree at Boston University. He began his practice at the Pine Ridge Indian agency in Nebraska; however, when he exposed fraudulent practices at the agency, he was charged as insubordinate and forced to resign. When he attempted to establish a medical practice in St. Paul, Minnesota, after being one of the few to pass the medical examination for that state, he complained he was "persistently solicited for illegal practice, and this by persons who were not only intelligent, but apparently of good social standing."<sup>65</sup> Eastman refused such illegal solicitations as well as tempting offers to perform "Indian treatments." Thus, the education that the white man promised would transform the Indian into a full member of civilized society proved worthless, in the white world as well as on their own reservations.

Zitkala-Sa described white men and women as "a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice."<sup>66</sup> Alden T. Baughan writes in *Narratives of North American Indian Captivity* that although the integration of the white into Indian society may have been traumatic, their assimilation was "genuine and binding upon the Indian. By contrast, the integration of the Indian into the white society was often more formal than real."<sup>67</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

Both the captivity narratives written by early white settlers and the autobiographies of Native Americans record the parallel experiences of whites captured by Indians and forced to live within tribal communities and of Indians captured by whites and held against their wills in white educational facilities. Just as some of the white captives assimilated into the Indian culture of their captors,<sup>68</sup> so did many Native Americans, especially those children taken from their families at an early age. However, nearly all Indian autobiographies contain incidents which record the emotional, physical, and cultural abuses imposed upon them just as graphically as those described by white captives.

Alice Poindexter Fisher, in *The Transformation of Tradition*, notes the traumatic impact these schools had on their captive pupils: "The Indian, educated off the reservation by whites, abandons for a time the traditions of his heritage. During this liminal state of trying to pass from one way of life to another, the protagonist becomes alienated from those intuitive and spiritual faculties that have been the touchstone for truth. As he becomes further disoriented, he suffers an emotional and psychological

crisis that often places him in physical danger and threatens a total disintegration of the self."<sup>69</sup>

What sets the Indian narratives apart is their unrewarding return to society, either the white man's world or the Indian's, intensifying their cultural displacement. Zitkala-Sa summed up the effect of her captivity in white-run Indian schools: "But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization."<sup>70</sup> Eastman was another who questioned the worth of his acculturation and the values of civilized society: "I am an Indian; and while I have learned much from civilization, for which I am grateful, I have never lost my Indian sense of right and justice. I am for development and progress along social and spiritual lines, rather than those of commerce, nationalism, or material efficiency."<sup>71</sup>

Even Standing Bear, one of those who succeeded in the white world, felt so strongly about the harm done to him, his fellow students, and his culture that it caused him to resolve: "if today I had a young mind to direct, to start on the journey of life, and I was faced with the duty of choosing between the natural way of my forefathers and that of the white man's present way of civilization, I would, for its welfare, unhesitatingly set that child's feet in the path of my forefathers. I would raise him to be an Indian."<sup>72</sup>

Although both Indian and white captives record similar experiences, important differences exist in the audiences and the purposes of the texts. The captivity narratives of the Euro-Americans appealed to the writers' own social and spiritual communities who accepted them back into the fold. Their purposes were three-fold: to warn Christians of their tenuous position in God's universe if they continued in their sinful ways, to proclaim the grace of God for the physical and spiritual salvation, perhaps even election, of the captive, and to justify the takeover by Euro-Americans of the "savage" Indians' lands. The narrator and the audience shared religious, social, and intellectual beliefs, and the language appealed to these common grounds.

However, for the Native Americans who were often not accepted back into their communities, their audience was not their own people but the culture that abducted them. As such, their narratives fulfilled different purposes. Written primarily for a white audience, the autobiographies, rather than serving as an example for other Native Americans to follow, attempted to awaken white Americans to the wrongs done an entire nation while reaffirming the positive qualities of the Indian civilization. Foremost, the texts celebrated the Native American way of life as more humane, more in touch with the earth, and more community-centered in an attempt to replace the "savage" and "pagan" stereotypical thinking of their readers. Next, they attempted to project their own actions and spiritual beliefs as more pure than those of the Euro-American culture who professed the golden rule but acted selfishly. Too many of the narratives served as political statements of the injustices they suffered, testimonies of the atrocities that never made the bold newspaper headlines as did those of the white captives.

Moreover, the language and the systems of belief that the Native Americans had to employ was not a shared one. To explain the Indian spirituality, the narrators had to apply Biblical comparisons; to describe their connectedness with Mother Earth, they had to allude to Wordsworth and the Romantics; and to air their own grievances, they needed to employ subversion rather than confrontation, or their audience would not accept them. Moreover, to do all of this, they not only had to use a "foreign" language but an alien system of communication—written, not oral.

Despite all of the efforts of early reformers to erase the Indian culture, Native American voices were heard and their histories saved. Tribal identity and native traditions not only survived but are renewing their strength and following. Presses across the United States are currently publishing new editions of the early 20th century works as well as poetry, novels, and autobiographical works by contemporary native Americans.

This current revival and reassessment of our past is important, for, as James Axtell states, "evaluation is *intrinsic* to the historical process, not an option, because the moral connotations of the everyday words we use are part of their descriptive meaning."<sup>73</sup> We must judge the past not only "to do justice to it . . . To set the record straight,"<sup>74</sup> but also "to advance our own moral education."<sup>75</sup>

Standing Bear believed that "the attempted transformation of the Indian by the white man and the chaos that has resulted are but the fruits of the white man's disobedience of a fundamental and spiritual law."<sup>76</sup> That law, he explained, encompassed "an intense and absorbing love for nature; a respect for life; enriching faith in a Supreme Power; and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equity, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations."<sup>77</sup>

With the growing awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity, many in the white community are now looking to Native American beliefs and traditions as moral and spiritual guides to ease their own increasing sense of alienation and to help them establish a new set of values, especially concerning humanity's relationship with the environment.

Many ironies exist in this expropriation. First, Euroamericans are seeking strength and knowledge from the very culture that their forefathers and foremothers considered as savage and inferior—a culture that they could not destroy. Second, as noted by Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., in *The White Man's Indian*, Whites have historically created an image or stereotype of the Indian to suit their ends, whether for economic, religious, or cultural exploitation and expansion.<sup>78</sup> And, last, the idea of the Noble or Romantic Savage and the promise of a utopian existence in harmony with nature and reason has existed since the 18th and 19th centuries.

So how do Americans, as a whole, reconcile historic facts from opposing viewpoints and centuries of image-making and exploitation to solve the very real dilemmas of the approaching twenty-first century? What Jane Tompkins suggests to me in "'Indians': Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History," is that each of us must

"piece together the story of European-Indian relations"<sup>79</sup> for ourselves as best we can and work morally toward solving, or at least not repeating, the mistakes of the past.

## NOTES

1. Throughout my research, I discovered conflicting preferences in the use of the terms "Indian," "First Americans" as in Norman T. Oppelt's *The Tribally Controlled Indian Colleges: The Beginnings of Self-Determination in American Indian Education* (Tsaile, Az: Navajo Community College Press, 1990), "Native American," "American Indian" preferred by Saily J. McBeth in *Ethnic Identity and the Boarding School Experience of West-Central Oklahoma American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), and "Indians of North America" employed by the Library of Congress. Louis Owens in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P. 1992), 258, uses the terms "Native American" and "Indian" interchangeably, because, as he states, it is "a term that Indian people have taken to themselves and redefined and, which they are, for the most part, comfortable." The terms will be used synonymously through the following pages because "no one term is preferred by all First Americans" (Oppelt, *Indian Colleges*) ix. My preference would be the tribal name; however, as much of my discussion includes Indians from diverse tribes, this approach would not be applicable.
2. Charles M. Segal and David C. Stineback, eds., *Puritans and Manifest Destiny*, (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1977), 49.
3. Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significances of the Captivity Narrative" (*American Literature*, 1947), 17.
4. Frederick Drimmer, *Captured by the Indians: 15 Firsthand Accounts, 1780-1870*, (New York: Dover, 1985), 10.
5. In *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1978), Luther Standing Bear describes the captivity-like existence of Indians on the reservations as well as his experiences at Carlisle.
6. Oppelt, *Indian Colleges*, presents a thorough history of the "Historic Antecedents of Contemporary Indian High Education" in his first chapter on the missionary period.
7. Robert M. Utley, ed., *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), xi, xv.
8. Bruce J. Dinges, "Introduction," in O.O. Howard's *Famous Indian Chiefs I Have Known: 1907-1908*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), xix.
9. The autobiographies being considered in this study include: Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories* (1921; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); Francis La Flesche, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe* (1900; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); Charles Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977); and Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978) and *My People the Sioux* (1928 reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975). All Indian autobiographies, of course, are not negative in their attitudes toward their school experiences. Many, such as La Flesche, after surviving the initial culture shock, found the experience rewarding, just as many whites captured by Indians, chose not to go back to the white civilization.
10. Mary Rowlandson, "A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, (Ed. Nina Baym, et al. New York: Norton, 1979), 58-96.

11. Ibid., 61.
12. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 39.
13. Ibid., 41-2.
14. Ibid., 41.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 74.
17. George E. Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 189.
18. Ibid., 103.
19. Edward a. Milligan, *Dakota Twilight: The Standing Rock Sioux, 1874-1890*, (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1976), 111.
20. Angie Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma P., 1970), 240.
21. H. David Brumble III. *American Indian Autobiography*. Berkeley: University of California P., 1988: 226.
22. Rowlandson, "a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration," 62.
23. Ibid., 64.
24. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 232.
25. Ibid., 128-29.
26. Ibid., 131-32.
27. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, 5.
28. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 45.
29. Ibid., 49-50.
30. Rowlandson, "A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration," 68.
31. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 65.
32. Ibid., 54.
33. Ibid., 55-6.
34. Standing Bear, *My People*, 141.
35. Hyde, *Sioux Chronicle*, 100.
36. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 232-33.
37. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 53.
38. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, xvii.
39. Standing Bear, *My People*, 137.
40. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, xvii.
41. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 242.
42. Ibid., 234.
43. Ibid.
44. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 52.
45. Eastman, *Deep Woods*, 44.
46. Rowlandson, "A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration," 74.
47. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, 122.
48. Ibid., 138.
49. Hyde, *Sioux Chronicle*, 57.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 67.
53. Ibid., 95.

54. Aiden T. Vaughan, *Narratives of North American Indian Captivity: A Selective Bibliography*, (New York: Garland, 1983), xviii.
55. Rowlandson, "A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration," 90-1.
56. *Ibid.*, 96.
57. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 69.
58. *Ibid.*, 117.
59. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, 23.
60. Hyde, *Sioux Chronicle*, 189.
61. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 235.
62. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 168.
63. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 239-40.
64. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 90.
65. Eastman, *Deep Woods*, 137.
66. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 76.
67. Vaughan, *Narratives of North American Indian Captivity*, xlvii.
68. James Axtell has described well the clash between Euro-Americans and Native Americans, especially regarding acculturation in both societies, in *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) and *The Invasion Within: The Context of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
69. Allee Poindexter Fisher, *The Transformation of Tradition: A Study of Zitkala Sa and Mourning Dove, Two Transitional American Writers* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilm International, 1979), 105.
70. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*, 99.
71. Eastman, *Deep Woods*, 195.
72. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 258.
73. James Axtell, *After Columbus. Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19-20.
74. *Ibid.*, 20.
75. *Ibid.*, 21.
76. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 248.
77. *Ibid.*, 247.
78. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian*, (New York: Random House, 1979), xvi.
79. Jane Tompkins, "Indians": Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History," *Styles of Cultural Activism: From Theory and Pedagogy to Women, Indians, and Communism*, (Ed. Philip Goldstein, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 200.