1. Background

Carlisle Indian Industrial School was established by ex-military Captain Richard Pratt in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879. He believed that American Indians were capable of learning and becoming productive members of society and his ultimate goal was to assimilate American Indian youth into white, Europeanized society. These boarding schools often enforced Europeanized clothing and hair styles, banned the use of languages other than English, and provided training in a particular trade.

What made Carlisle unique was their student-produced publications. Pratt’s agenda was to use the publications as propaganda to promote the success the school had in teaching English and assimilating the children into a Europeanized culture. These newspapers featured student writing and activities.

2. Publications

The School News, established in 1883, was the first student publication at Carlisle. It was a simple, four page publication consisting of student writing, letters, and bits of news at the school. Because it was the first publication at Carlisle it suffered the least alteration by the school.

The Indian Helper ran from 1885 to 1890 every Friday. A slightly more advanced version of The School News, this paper’s subtitle “For Our Boys And Girls” implies primarily student readership, but it was also used for student recruitment on reservations and updates for stakeholders and other political and social figures with an interest in the school’s progress.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Transcribing and TEI Encoding

The primary documents each consisted of several years worth of publications. These were selected based on articles that revealed insight on the school and American history. Selected issues were transcribed from photocopied images and encoded according to the Text Encoding Initiative’s P5 encoding guidelines. Basic formatting was maintained, and original student errors in spelling and grammar were tagged when necessary to preserve their style.

3.2 Traditional Research

In order to compile the contextual history of the boarding school, other resources on the cultural hegemony of American Indians, the history of Captain Pratt and Carlisle, and background information on the publications and references within the publication.

4. Results

- The Man-on-the-Band-Stand
  The Indian Helper introduced the character Man-on-the- Band-Stand to the students. His presence in the newspaper is on the 2nd page where it is noted that, “The Indian Helper is PRINTED by Indian boys, but EDITED by The-man-on-the-band-stand, who is NOT an Indian.” This entity would occasionally reply to children’s letters, praise good behavior, condemn poor behavior, and leave “Enigmas” at the end of each issue. This figure served as the Carlisle ideal, not only Captain Pratt, and was meant to remind the students that Carlisle was always watching them.

- Most student writing was altered
  Though the claims of happiness and superiority of “the white man’s way” run rampant in both publications, most were fabricated by Carlisle. The influence of the Man-on-the-Band-Stand in addition to their cultural overhaul indicates that most of the writing was heavily edited.

- Most accurate info is misbehavior
  These publications still offer insight into the children’s lives, such as daily routines, events happening at the school, and most importantly, when they deviated from Capt. Pratt’s orders. There are countless instances noted in the papers of students misbehaving and rebelling. These ranged from not marching in line and being late to more grievous offenses like arson and runaways.

- Publications as Propaganda
  The ultimate use of these publications was not actually for the students, but as clever modes of propaganda to send to anyone doubting the success of the school, including parents still on the reservations, government and other monetary sponsors, and local community members.

5. Contribution

This research is a contribution to Professor Amanda Gailey’s archive “The Tar Baby and the Tomahawk” at childlit.unl.edu, hosted by the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities. The archive examines race and culture in American children’s literature at the lead up and turn of the 20th century.