Among the many solutions proffered by the U.S. government to “civilize” the American Indian, Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania was a long-standing program that isolated American Indian children from their culture in order to Europeanize them. Though there were several off-reservation boarding schools for American Indian children, Carlisle possessed a unique amenity in its student-produced publications, spearheaded by *The School News* and *The Indian Helper*. However, the cultural hegemony the children at Carlisle suffered extended beyond isolation from their culture and into their writing, which then projected an inaccurate representation of the student to the public. These publications were purportedly created entirely by the students but analysis reveals that they were heavily edited by Carlisle leaders as a means to promote the success of the school. Of the nine total publication produced at the school, *The School News* and *The Indian Helper* are two of the initial publications that received varying levels of monitoring by the school and therefore exemplify the loss of authenticity and use of children’s writing as propaganda.

**Cultural Hegemony at Carlisle**

The ultimate goal of Indian boarding schools was to isolate children from their homes and families at a young age and civilize them by Euro-American standards. Once at a boarding school, American Indians were under complete control of white society in order to become “useful.” At Carlisle, students spent half of the day in classes learning the English language and social norms, and the other half earning a trade that was meant to increase their employable
skills, such as tin smithing, blacksmithing, housekeeping, sewing, carpentry, and printing.\(^1\) There were countless changes implemented upon their arrival to off-reservation boarding schools, the basic protocol being that they were given European clothing, forced to burn their traditional garb, cut their hair short, and abandon their native languages. Boarding schools would regiment the children’s schedules and force them to attend classes on English language and culture as well as traditional primary school classes. Luther Standing Bear of the Sioux nation was among the first class enrolled at Carlisle. He recounts how school officials would mix the different nations together so they were forced to speak in the only common language they had. English. An article in the November 1881\(^2\) issue of *The School News* titled “Talk English” states that, “We Indian children came here to learn the English language so we may do good to our people and be better able to take care of ourselves.” This article and others like it indicate that the English language was the only language allowed at Carlisle.

The Carlisle vision, like most off-reservation boarding schools, was to “eradicate the ‘Indianness’ from the children”\(^3\) and assimilate them into white society. This meant altering the children’s entire value system to reflect the Europeanized code of conduct. They were taught the superiority of “the white man’s way” over “the Indian’s way,” to demean their culture and prescribe to certain stereotypes of the Indian as examples of how not to behave, such as being lazy, dirty, and ignorant. *The Indian Helper* of September 16, 1887\(^4\) features a two page article about the homecoming of an Indian girl from Carlisle who is appalled by the lack of cleanliness of her people. She describes the bed “full of creeping things,” her mother’s unhygienic cooking practices, and criticizes the lack of furniture and general refinement of her family and tribe.

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\(^1\) Haller, 66.
\(^2\) *The School News*, November 1881, p.2
\(^3\) Haller, 67
\(^4\) *The Indian Helper*, September 16, 1887, p.1 and 4
Another example is John Downing, Cherokee, who wrote an article in the July 1880 School News issue entitled “Learning How to Use Bad Things” arguing that the Indian learns “bad things” quickly, specifically to “utter an oath, and to use intoxicating drink” and needed to strive to avoid developing these habits.\(^5\) There is not a single issue of either The School News or The Indian Helper that does not include the phrase “the white man’s way” or some sort of reference to how beneficial the U.S. government has been for the American Indians. Ellis Chiders, who took over Charles Kihega’s position as editor while he was visiting home, wrote in The School News June 1882, “But the government who has the authority over us, gave us this school and gave us the chances to learn what ever we can.”\(^6\) Michael Burns also wrote in the November 1881 issue that, “The ignorant race of Indians have no knowledge how to bring those who have committed crimes to justice and them worthy of punishment. We only depend on the promise of our superior friends at Washington to help us.”\(^7\) Chiders is correct in that the government had control over the American Indians, and his letter is one of many written by students conditioned or compelled to shed the government in a positive light.

**The Influences of Richard Pratt**

The most significant influence on Carlisle’s initial ideals and successes was their founder, Captain Richard Henry Pratt. Pratt was enthusiastic about the potential of American Indians and founded a boarding school for American Indian children at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Pratt had an unusual vision in late 19th century America. The general opinion was that American Indians were “uneducable savages.”\(^8\) Pratt not only firmly believed that they were capable of

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\(^5\) *The School News*, July 1880, p.1  
\(^6\) *The School News*, June 1880, p.1  
\(^7\) *The School News*, November 1881, p.1  
\(^8\) Haller, 69
being educated and taught useful skills, but he also believed that it was necessary to “civilize” American Indians with the goal of making them productive members of society. By modern standards he was still highly ignorant of cultural differences and he is quoted as saying “Kill the Indian; save the man,” but this view was “somewhat enlightened in the 19th century context because he gave the Indian humanity,” as Beth Haller puts it. Pratt created a militaristic environment for the students, requiring that the children wear uniforms, march to and from chapel and other group events, and implemented strict Christian values into daily activities. This structured routine was a means of control over every aspect of the students’ lives to condition them to white control and assimilate them more quickly.

Captain Pratt was also a gifted propagandist, a skill that greatly affected the Carlisle legacy. Pratt was a charismatic speaker and a public figure who had a great deal of influence over others, so much so that he was able to convince eleven American Indian men who had been his prisoners in Florida to help him recruit for and establish Carlisle. In his memoir, Luther Standing Bear even defends Pratt on the late or absent notification of student deaths for parents by transferring the blame to Indian agents on the reservations for irresponsibility. Pratt was also a publisher for twenty five years previous and highly skilled at utilizing publications for multiple means, so the publications at Carlisle were propaganda to elicit a positive political opinion from the very beginning. Luther Standing Bear wrote, “Captain Pratt was proud to ‘show us off’ and let the white people see how we were progressing,” which he did through actual presentations

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9 Haller, 69  
10 Haller, 69  
11 Luther Standing Bear  
12 Haller, 69  
13 Luther Standing Bear, 162  
14 Haller, 71  
15 Luther Standing Bear, 166
of the children, but which was more efficient via the publications as they were being widely disseminated not just locally but to reservations and interested parties in the government.

The Publications

The grim reality of Indian boarding schools’ ability to eradicate culture from the students combined with Pratt’s progressive attitude both lend to the uniqueness of Carlisle’s student publications. There are dozens of American Indian newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century, but Carlisle had the premiere school newspapers for and by American Indian boarding school youths. These publications helped shape student behavior, recruitment, and outside perspectives of the school, and still provide glimpses into the student’s daily lives. The School News and The Indian Helper were among the first at Carlisle, and though The Indian Helper was longer running, they both had significant impacts on the propaganda movement and how the cultural voices of students were being modified to fit the Carlisle values. The School News was established in 1880 and ran monthly until 1883 when it was merged with Morning Star. It was a very simple newspaper comprised of four pages and wrought with broken English. It was marketed as a student led, edited, and written publication and because it was the first student newspaper it possibly “suffered the least editorial intervention” while still being pro-assimilation.16 It was primarily for student readership, both current and prospective, and contained entirely student writing, primarily samples of writing assignments. The School News often used the phrase “white man’s way,” which was the student’s way of explaining the difference between the two cultures. Roman Nose, one of Carlisle’s students who travelled between his time at Carlisle and reported back to the school, wrote “When I get through school and work then I will return to my old home in Indian people and teach them about the good way

16 Stanciu
of the white man road and to love God, they will pray for him to make good Indian men and women.” Roman Nose implies that “good Indian men and women” can only be created by learning the white man’s road comprised of hardworking Christians rather than the Indian’s road of lazy savages.

The newspaper also offered “editorials praising industriousness, sobriety, the use of English, and student writing”, as well as announcement of activities and events held at the school, from special visitors to the “ten boys learning to sing bass.” The issues featured in the editorials tended to focus on letters and experiences of students that include recounts of short stories and letters home.

*The School News* was followed two years later by *The Indian Helper*, which ran weekly on Fridays from 1885 to 1900. This newspaper appears to be for primarily student readership, as noted by its subtitle, “For Our Indian Boys and Girls.” *The Indian Helper* was essentially a more developed version of *The School News*, reporting on events and gossip and featuring editorials and student writing. It was also four pages and two columns, but it always began with a short, simple poem, usually on traditional values such as Christianity, team work, and morality. The major transition between the two publications aside from the slight elevation in writing is stated on the second page of every issue; “Printed by Indian boys and edited by the Man-on-the-Bandstand who is NOT an Indian.” The Man-on-the-Band-stand was a fictional character who acted as an all-seeing eye to watch the children and whose primary purpose was to create a sense of community reminding them that they were always being watched. Both *The School News* and *The Indian Helper* publications were printed by the Carlisle Printer Boys, all American Indians,

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17 *The School News*, September 1880, p.2
18 Stanciu
19 *The School News*, July 1880, p.2
20 Stanciu
who were supervised by Marianna Burgess in the printer shop. Burgess was not the Man-on-the-
Band-stand entity, but she did help to maintain the shared ideals of Carlisle that the entity
represented. The publications were sold at Post Offices in the area and disseminated to political
stakeholders who would have an interest in the progress of the school. As the publication became
better established, they were also sent to reservations to recruit new students and to remind
students on break or who had graduated not to lose the Carlisle mindset.21

Though their writing was unquestionably controlled, there are still several articles that
depict some aspects of the children’s homes, usually a history of the area or an experience they
had during the transitions between their homes and Indian Territory. Samuel Townsend, editor of
The School News wrote “A Little History of the Pawnee” in the June 1881 issue that described
the Pawnee move from Nebraska to Indian Territory and how that move devastated their
agricultural tendencies because the new land was not suitable. The article appears to be in favor
of the Indian for the first half, but Townsend closes by discussing how Indians who do learn
English “Don’t learn it fast” because they forget their education when they return to their homes
and speak in their native tongue. His last statement is representative of the influence Carlisle had
on its students. He writes, “We are very glad that we were the Pawnee children that came to
Carlisle.”22 This method of conditioning appears on nearly every page in every issue of these
publications. The ending to the September 1882 issue, for example, read, “You can have what
you like in this world, if you will but like what you have.”23 These children were taught that their
Europeanized education was worth more than their own culture, and as they were stripped of
their culture they were taught to value what they were given at Carlisle. The subtitle for The

21 Fear-Segal, 117
22 The School News, June 1881, p.1
23 The School News, September 1882, p.4
School News states, "A pebble cast into the sea is felt from shore to shore. A thought from the mind set free will echo on forever more," further implying that the students were conditioned to value their education at Carlisle, and more importantly, to spread the conditioning to others.

The students often wrote letters to and from home and while they were on outings or travelling, and many students were sent to local farmers as farmhands and expected to write in of their experiences. There are numerous examples, but if they were not short blips describing their daily tasks or greetings to friends still at Carlisle, most of these letters also included some sort of positive reference back to Carlisle. Mabel, a Kiowa, wrote from home that, “I hope that I may go back to school…I am glad to see all our friends but there is no better place here as the Carlisle school.”

There are some students who were more indignant about the idea that American Indians were inferior to white people. However, the arguments in these articles are that American Indians can learn how to be white. Charles Kihega wrote, “We who are in Carlisle school believe that Indian children can learn how to make wagons, shoes, or anything else just as well as white people can,” and his plan for achieving this is to gain a European education.

These examples of student writing all have one distinct commonality; they only mention positive aspects of Carlisle. Given that the students were either taken from or sent from their homes, forced to adopt another culture and abandon their own, and controlled every single day, the likelihood that these children were all truly happy and thankful for Carlisle is unrealistic. The bias towards Carlisle as a progressive school, as opposed to one that oppresses, is the result of two possibilities. First, the children were truly conditioned to become useful, lower to middle class Christians who valued European culture over their own. This was probably the case for

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24 *The School News*, August 1882, p.4
25 *The School News*, June 1882, p.2
many children at one point or another during their education, particularly the younger students as they were more impressionable. Second, the students published writing was heavily edited or entirely fabricated by Carlisle to shed the school in a positive light. Because most of the children’s English was not advanced there were infinite editing opportunities for Carlisle staff to take advantage of, especially if the children needed to dictate a letter. Either of these options still lead to the conclusion that cultural hegemony of European culture over American Indian culture undoubtedly and intentionally took place at Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

**Publications as Propaganda**

Such editing and selectivity occurred because Captain Pratt enabled it. As previously discussed, Pratt was a propagandist and had ulterior uses for these publications. The purpose of the Carlisle publications is threefold; to interact with each other, to influence the children, and to promote the school. Most of the newspapers were connected to each other in some way; in this case *The Indian Helper* is a more advanced extension of *The School News*, which shows development in the printing press as well as the school as a whole. As newspapers flourished and merged, the printing shop became more advanced and respected. Furthermore, the publications influence the children on several levels. There was a sense of pride in producing a useful product for the Printer Boys, as well as the reward for students whose writing and successes were published in the papers for the entire school to see. The publications acted as a reward system for students; improved writing and following rules earned them praise, whereas failure to speak English or comply with regulations was reprimanded and used as an example of how not to behave. This kind of system created a sense of community at Carlisle among the children as well as reaching out to the children on break back at home.
Finally, the publications were also used as political and social propaganda. The idea was to “balance their stated assimilationist agenda with representations of the cultural voices of American Indian children.”

26 Featuring student writing indicated that there was success in education American Indians, and featuring what appeared to be positive reactions to Carlisle indicated that the methods were humane. This meant that first, the money provided by the government was being used appropriately, and second, the Carlisle practice could be replicated successfully at other institutions. The trick was to value student writing while promoting the Carlisle ideologies in a nonthreatening medium.

27 This method of using publications as propaganda was successful for Carlisle and Captain Pratt. The public appeared to be impressed by the American Indians ability to learn, read, and write, and student enrollment increased, and they were also pleased by the student’s eagerness to learn how to be “white.”

The other audience on the reservations were the parents of current and prospective students. Many parents were naturally skeptical of sending their children to a white boarding school, and the publications acted as proof that the students were becoming educated, skilled, and most importantly, that they were happy.

The publications also required a printing shop, which in turn required manpower to operate and maintain. This allowed American Indians boys to learn applicable printing skills that were actually useful in life outside of Carlisle. Samuel Townsend, for example, was a Pawnee boy who served as the first editor of The School News. After Carlisle he attended Marietta College in Ohio and proceeded to work as a printer for The Chippeway Herald at White Earth Boarding School.

28 Haller, 73

29 Haller, 80
students could learn, and these skills should not be dismissed because the school’s staff lacked integrity.

**The-Man-on-the-Band-Stand**

One of the most intriguing and mysterious aspects of *The Indian Helper* in particular is the presence of “The Man on the Band Stand,” heretofore known as MOTBS. As previously mentioned, *The Indian Helper*’s editorial heading intentionally noted one page two of every issue that the publication was, “Printed by Indian boys and edited by the Man-on-the-Band-stand who is NOT an Indian.” This figure, considered an apparition to most students, represented the male white authority of Carlisle who presided over the children like a god. He sat atop the bandstand and kept a watchful eye on all of the activities on the Carlisle grounds. The platform was in the middle of the property so if one were actually on top of it they would have the entire view of Carlisle under them.\(^{30}\) This metaphor carried into the children’s daily lives as he could see not only what could be realistically viewed from his position of prestige on the bandstand, but he could see through walls and move about on the grounds and among the students as he pleased and vigilantly watching at all times. One comment in the January 13, 1888 *Indian Helper* issue said, “The Man-on-the-band-stand pricked up his ears when he heard strains of music on Friday evening and... he stepped over to see what might be going on.”\(^{31}\) The Bandstand is comparative to Jeremy Bentham’s idea of the Panopticon, as it presented an all-seeing eye that reminded the children to behave at all times in addition to being the perfect watchtower to spy on the grounds.\(^{32}\) He was presented as a “regulatory paternal figure” who could move in and around the children invisibly and “spy, eavesdrop, and praise”\(^{33}\) as he saw fit to exemplify.

\(^{30}\) Fear-Segal, 102  
\(^{31}\) *The Indian Helper*, January 13, p.3  
\(^{32}\) Fear-Segal, 109-110  
\(^{33}\) Stanciu
What is most intriguing about this figure is the only tangible presence that the MOTBS had at Carlisle was in his role as the editor for *The Indian Helper* and his occasional interjections into the children’s writing. There was no face for the MOTBS, only his words in the school newspaper and the whisperings of his existence. Jacqueline Fear-Segal remarks that the MOTBS was a combination of “God, Uncle Sam, and grandfather with a prison officer, spy, and dirty old man,” all of which are accurate descriptions given the purpose of an all-seeing eye that the MOTBS represented. Outside of the efforts of those who assisted in creating the figure of the MOTBS, primarily the instructors, Marianna Burgess, and Captain Pratt, the only recorded evidence of the existence of the MOTBS is his voice within the newspapers. Unlike traditional newspaper editors the MOTBS did not provide editorials for the paper, but rather preferred to make small interjections in the announcements or to reply to a letter from a student. Students could write letters to him and leave them in a drop box at the printing office. Some references to the MOTBS speaking for him, such as a short article in the September 16, 1887 issue of *The Indian Helper* entitled “What the Man-on-the-band-stand Likes to See,” which includes: “The girls lady-like. The boys gentlemanly in manner. Boys put on their coats when they go out in the rain. Every one polite at table, old and young, white, red, and black. A great many take part in our Sunday evening meetings.” These are just daily reminders of what the MOTBS valued most; an obedient, malleable student body.

The idea for the MOTBS was preceded by a figure called Mr. See-All, who existed only briefly, who was a reminder to students of the “institutionalized surveillance they are likely to encounter in a post Carlisle world.” Mr. See-All and the MOTBS were both fictitious figures

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34 Fear-Segal, 102
35 *The Indian Helper*, December 23, 1887, p.2
36 *The Indian Helper*, September 16, 1887, p.3
37 Stanciu
created and perpetuated by the entire Carlisle staff. The MOTBS’s presence was akin to an
ominous Santa Claus that is always watching the children’s behavior and used as a means to
enforce good behavior. In some issues the MOTBS would write directly back to student’s
questions, such as in the March 23, 1888 issue of *The Indian Helper* where he writes, “All this
time, too, I must keep a look-out for the boys and girls at play, and see who wins the most games
of ball and croquet, and my eyes and ears must be wide open for news to tell to you.”\(^{38}\) He signs
the letters “Truly Your Friend,” implying he was supposed to be a positive figure to the students.
This line and others similar reinforce that he could “see” everything. The MOTBS was a less
overtly threatening figure that the students looked up to more than they feared. The students
appeared to want to please the MOTBS, such as in the November 18, 1887 issue of *The Indian
Helper* which has the lines, “How long shall the Man-on-the-band-stand have to wait before he
can point his finger with pride to an Indian young man, and say, ‘There is a first-class business
man.’”\(^{39}\) Of course, the MOTBS can also be critical of errors, which is often noted in articles like
in the same issue that says, “The Man-on-the-band-stand is ashamed of such work” after a
radiator installed by the students overflowed and damaged the flooring.\(^{40}\) Younger students in
particular believed he was quite real and even worried about his health because he lived outside
on the bandstand. One student, Nellie Carey, even wrote in a letter published in the January 13,
1888 issue of *The Indian Helper* that, “‘It is a wonder that he doesn't freeze. I guess Jack frost
gets hold of his nose and toes. I wish I could knit him a pair of slippers.”\(^{41}\)

In reality, the MOTBS exhibited complete editorial control and doled out praise and
punishment as he deemed necessary. Similarly to Mr. See-All, the MOTBS was meant to shadow

\(^{38}\) *The Indian Helper*, March 23, 1888, p.2
\(^{39}\) *The Indian Helper*, November 18, 1887, p.2
\(^{40}\) *The Indian Helper*, November 18, 1887, p.3
\(^{41}\) *The Indian Helper*, January 13, 1888, p.3
the students whenever they left Carlisle whether it was a short outing, summer break, or after graduation from the school. As the publications were sent out to reservations the students were never free from the influence of the MOTBS. His goal was to form a community out of all students, past and present, to link them to Carlisle and act as a constant nagging idea that they were never free from the Europeanized control of Carlisle.42

Throughout his existence at Carlisle boarding school there has been much speculation as to the true identity of the MOTBS. It is generally assumed that the MOTBS is simply Captain Pratt, there is also the printing shop supervisor Marianna Burgess. She claimed not to be the MOTBS, but she certainly played a role in creating and maintaining his presence within and outside of the newspaper.43 What the MOTBS ultimately represented was the ideals of Carlisle, specifically white supremacy, the importance of practicing Christianity, and the idea that the government was always watching the American Indian.

**Conclusion**

What is ironic about Carlisle is that the education Captain Pratt wanted to give them was always meant to be for assimilation and developing skills to survive the white man’s way, but what he did was to provide the tools enabling his students to record and study their culture upon returning home. Luther Standing Bear, for examples, has published several books including *My People the Sioux* that describe his childhood and the transition from one culture to another. Pratt’s ultimate goal of “eradicating Indianness from children” helped to create a lasting written and oral history and therefore saving the culture from destruction by white Europeanized hegemony.

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42 Stanciu
43 Fear-Segal, 103-4
Carlisle Indian Industrial School closed in 1918 but left nine publications as a record of its accomplishments. The fact that The School News and The Indian Helper only feature these accomplishments leads to several conclusions. First, that American Indian youth were at some level assimilated into white European culture and exposed to conditioning that compelled them to discredit their own culture. Second, these publications were edited or contrived by Carlisle staff to act as propaganda supporting the school. Third, that the creation of the Man-on-the-band-stand entity who only existed through his voice in the publications was a significant influence on the behavior of current student and recruitment of new students and acted as a monitoring device for the children. These publications may not provide an accurate depiction of the children’s true perspectives and reactions to their time at Carlisle, but they do provide an idea of Carlisle’s ideals and some insight on what the American Indian youth endured as they underwent government-sponsored cultural hegemony.
References


*The Indian Helper*. Carlisle Barracks. 1885-1890.