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**CARLISLE INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL PORTRAITS: FROM THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY TO CONTEMPORARY ART**

by

NINA FIORUCCI

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

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MAJOR: ART HISTORY

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Advisor

Date

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INTRODUCTION

The photographs from Carlisle Indian Boarding School (CIBS) in Carlisle, Pennsylvania produced during its operation from 1879 to 1918 survive as visual documents of the United States government's effort to assimilate Native American children. This essay will examine how CIBS portraits portray transformation in students and the aesthetic history that perception holds with portrait painting, the ideological use of student portraits as illustrations of assimilation, and the continued emotional weight those portraits carry in contemporary media.

Formal and aesthetic choices by the official school photographer and propagandistic uses by the school's founder determine the role of nineteenth-century assimilationist and racist ideology in the commission and dissemination of CIBS student portraits. Three student portraits guide the topics above for their especially common reproduction in both CIBS propaganda and modern media and scholarship.

A portrait of White Buffalo reveals a continuous thread of Romantic Primitivism from Native American portrait painting. Portraits of Chauncey Yellow Robe are emblematic of a regular practice by the school photographer to show a narrative of transformation through "before and after" diptychs. A famous portrait diptych of Tom Torlino encompasses both of the aspects above and has received publicity grander than the photographer of the portraits, the man who built the school, or the man within the portraits himself. Torlino's portraits are crucially demonstrative of the way student portraits were created, used, and continue to be illustrations of assimilation. Contemporary artists Marcus Amerman, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, and Shan Goshorn interpret and

incorporate CIBS portraits into their artwork in ways that speak to the powerful and unresolved tension these portraits represent for the history of Native American portraiture.

Identifying Terminology and Agency

The ethnic labels “Native American” and “Indian” will both appear in this essay, meanwhile, they are not interchangeable.¹ “Native American” is the commonly preferred term for indigenous persons and culture, although, when known, tribal affiliation will take precedence over the general term. The term “Indian” will be used when referencing within the paradigm of assimilationist ideology, quoting publications from that era, and when drawing attention to the colonial fantasy around tribal people as opposed to their historical reality. The terms “Indianisms” and “Indianness” are umbrella concepts for visual characteristics, tropes, and costumes that reinforce, propagate, and fantasize antebellum racial profiling of indigenous people as a homogenous group.

Self-representation and artist representation coexist in portraiture.² The sitter’s recognition of and preparation for an image of themselves is the agency that person holds in the portrait process. In recent discourse on the history of Native American portraiture, counterpoints of agency have challenged decades of scholarship that leaned too heavily on viewing Native Americans exclusively as victims of the white lens.³ Photographs in

¹ *Native Times*, Native Sun News Editorial Board, April 12, 2015, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.nativetimes.com/46-life/commentary/11389-native-american-vs-american-indian-political-correctness-dishonors-traditional-chiefs-of-old>.

² Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 46.

³ Michael Katakis, *Excavating Voices: Listening to Photographs of Native Americans*, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1998), 3. For an essay on “visual sovereignty” in boarding school photographs see Nicole Strathman’s “Student

direct service to the boarding school, i.e., portraits of students, were within a wholly contrived environment, far beyond a portrait studio where one would voluntarily pay for a portrait when they choose. Students wore uniforms, had guidelines for appearance, and, especially in the case of arrival images, were not in control of when the portrait session took place. Reading for institutional control encourages an unflinching critique of school portraits as entirely propagandistic, yet this narrow focus unfortunately also leaves little evidence for counterpoints of self-representation, or agency. Essays on Carlisle Indian Boarding School literature, mainly the student-published newspaper, encounter the same uncertainty for “genuine” student voice.⁴

Whereas one could argue for self-representation in minor details such as hairstyle, jewelry, or facial expression, the aesthetic significance of early boarding school portraits relevant to this essay lies in the broader choices made by the school administration and photographer. Hence, personal aesthetics are treated as attributes of ideological control and boarding school portrait tropes.

Captain Richard H. Pratt and the Carlisle Indian Boarding School

In the nineteenth century, the United States government embraced education as the most promising policy in solving the “Indian problem” largely created after President Andrew Jackson’s forced relocation efforts in 1830 left large populations of indigenous people segregated to reservations and dependent on federal rations. To implement

Snapshots: An Alternative Approach to the Visual History of American Indian Boarding Schools” in *Humanities*.

⁴ Beth Haller, “Cultural Voices or Pure Propaganda?: Publications of the Carlisle Indian School, 1879 – 1918,” *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (2002): 65 – 86.

education rapidly, the U.S. government legally required Native children to attend federal boarding schools, going as far as withholding food rations if parents did not voluntarily send their children.⁵ Prior to 1870, day schools for children existed on reservations, primarily operated by missionaries, and their curriculums were loosely guided by the religious and political agendas of the group that ran each school.⁶ By the time Congress embraced a national education system as a policy for controlling the indigenous population, there was a man ready to take on the charge for creating an organized schooling system for Native American children.

The “Father” of Indian education, Captain Richard H. Pratt was inspired by his dealings with Native Americans while in the military and became passionate about their plight as maltreated dependents of the federal government. While stationed at Ft. Marion to oversee the detainment of Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Arapaho prisoners of war, Pratt first appealed to the military for funds to teach his prisoners the English language, a move he argued could be a cure-all way to stabilize the hostile relationship between tribes and the U.S. military.⁷ In a letter to the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army in 1875, only a few weeks after arriving at Ft. Marion, Pratt wrote about the prisoners: “A small few of the most hardened characters might with benefit be taken out and held in

⁵ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875 – 1928* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 211.

⁶ “BIA’s Impact on Indian Education Is an Education in Bad Education,” *Indian Country Today*, January 30, 2012, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/bia-s-impact-on-indian-education-is-an-education-in-bad-education-FdMmazeFZUS1NAkyNCZbOQ/>.

⁷ Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867 – 1904*, ed. Robert M. Utley (1964; Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 110, 122.

confinement for the present, but the great majority are ready and anxious to be lead [sic] in the paths of the new life which they are all convinced they must now lead.”⁸

The “new life” Pratt envisioned for Native Americans was total cultural assimilation into white society. Pratt staunchly advocated that the path for full U.S. citizenship (legally and socially) was through formal education. It can be easy to regard Captain Pratt as a hero, especially in comparison to his detractors. Pratt consistently proselytized with optimism and sociological conviction that race has flexible characteristics, not inscribed to our bodies from birth; he believed “savagery” was a condition of environment, not blood.⁹ However progressive Pratt may seem in comparison to phrenological theories prevalent to the era, which positioned races on a hierarchy of evolutionary intelligence, his vision for Native Americans absorbed these “others” into the dominant culture in a way that required eradicating all tribal cultures, languages, and identities.

Captain Pratt made a famous slogan to advocate his assimilation philosophy that has reached notoriety beyond the man himself; in 1892 he wrote, “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.”¹⁰ Pratt envisioned a national boarding school system where Native youth were entirely removed from their family, community, and tribal lifestyle, often discouraging students from going back to their tribe, in order to fully rid them of the Indianness inside

⁸ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 123.

⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 52.

¹⁰ *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), 46 – 59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880 – 1900* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–271.

them.¹¹ Pratt was disgusted with tribal reservations and considered government welfare detrimental to Native Americans' path in becoming "true citizens."¹²

Despite the government calling Pratt's first students "hostages," most children were given to Pratt willingly by chiefs as a good faith gesture towards improving tribal and federal relations.¹³ Chiefs found optimism in Pratt's dramatic pitches in which he claimed students would return as mediators, fluent in the language and commerce of white America, and would "civilize" the tribe enabling equal footing in government dealings.¹⁴ When speaking to a group of Sioux leaders, Pratt blamed the injustices within treaties on the tribe's lack of English fluency, saying, "... cannot you see that if you and these with you here today had been educated as the white man is educated that you might right now have all your people out there in the Black Hills digging out the gold for your own uses?"¹⁵ Language was the main convincer in the early recruitment process. In a letter to his daughter in 1880, Brave Bull tells her, "I have always loved you and it makes me very happy to know that you are learning... If you could read and write, I should be very happy."¹⁶ Pratt of course never made it clear to those parents and tribe leaders that he intended to ostentatiously strip students of their native identity and that his motivations were based on grander philosophies than simply returning children to their tribe fluent in English.

¹¹ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 211 - 212, 221.

¹² Ibid, 179, 221, 252.

¹³ Ibid, 220.

¹⁴ Ibid, 221 – 222.

¹⁵ Ibid, 223 – 224

¹⁶ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 252.

After years of lobbying for policy, fundraising, and arranging teachers and staff, Pratt opened the Carlisle Indian School at the military barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. During its operation, from 1879 to 1918, the CIBS enrolled over 8,000 children from over 140 tribes.¹⁷ The early success of his school allowed dozens of government-run boarding schools to open across the country. Pratt consistently defended the “red man’s” right for education and capacity for self-sufficiency his entire career. However, he also used language common to the era that characterized Indianness as inferior and immoral. In its first issue, the school newspaper called the first group of students at the school a “motley assembly” and that “a more undisciplined mass of youthful humanity” could not be imagined.¹⁸ In a 1902 catalog for the Carlisle Industrial School, text dated 1883 in the introduction under the title “The Carlisle Idea” explains that the school’s mission was to “show the Indian that his greatest advantage lies in losing his identity as a Sioux, a Ute or a Creek and becoming an American citizen, he is sensible enough to do it and that is the end.”¹⁹

It is clear from the photographic history of the school that the process of transforming identity was as much visual as it was intellectual. When the first group arrived at Carlisle, a local, well-established studio photographer John N. Choate was waiting with his camera. Choate photographed the school from its opening until his death in 1902 and made hundreds of individual and group portraits of students and visiting families. Portraits were essential tools for influencing public perception of forced

¹⁷ Linda Witmer, *The Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania 1879 – 1918*, 3rd ed. (Carlisle, PA: Cumberland County Historical Society, 2002), 123 – 148.

¹⁸ *Eadle Keatah Toh*, January 1880.

¹⁹ John N. Choate, *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School*, 1902, Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Carlisle, PA. CIS-I-0039.

assimilation boarding schools. As the primary photographer to the Carlisle school, Choate's photographs served as propaganda for colonialist ideology and recorded a generation transformed into what Luther Standing Bear, a former CIBS student, described as "imitation white men."²⁰

Photography as a Means

Photography was Captain Pratt's most effective tool for federal and public support and his references to photographs indicate a cunning recognition of its persuasive effects. He included photographs with his letters requesting money or some other form of support to then-President Rutherford B. Hayes, Senator Henry Dawes, Secretary of Interior Carl Schurz, and many other government officials. He began a letter to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1880 with:

I send you today a few photographs of the Indian youth here. You will note that they came mostly as blanket Indians... Isolated as these Indian youth are from the savage surroundings at their homes, they lose their tenacity to savage life, which is so much of an obstacle to Agency efforts, and give themselves up to learning all they can in the time they expect to remain here.²¹

Pratt planned photography as part of the school's publicity from the beginning since photographs were influential during his Ft. Marion experiment.²² Photographing students "as they arrived" was customary. The 1902 catalog recounts the spectacle of the first group of children, mostly Sioux, to arrive at Carlisle: "The Indians were in native dress

²⁰ Luther Standing Bear, *My People, the Sioux*, ed. E. A. Brininstool (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 141.

²¹ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 248 – 249.

²² Lonna Malmsheimer, "Imitation White Man: Images of Transformation at the Carlisle Indian School," *Studies in Visual Communication* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 56.

and the traditional blanket, with hair long and faces painted, and their persons adorned with beads and other ornaments. Hundreds of citizens of the town awaited them... half feared treachery, outlawry, and scalp-lifting, while others prophesied [sic] utter failure of the school.”²³ In this account, the physical description of the children takes precedence as well as the audience’s expectations of sensationalized stereotypes of Indian behavior. These two aspects, the perception of appearance and behavior, were the dominant pivots for photography as Pratt’s most effective propaganda. Portraits were visual evidence to show a physical transformation of appearance and behavior in the students, which were also meant to represent the ideological changes happening within Native Americans as a race.

The 1902 account mentions “faces painted,” however, there is no apparent face painting in the surviving photographs of the first group. This is not the only instance that body paint was a sensationalized Indianism in the telling of the CIBS story. In one of his first souvenir booklets, Choate included a photograph of an illustration by George Catlin and placed this image at the beginning of the school’s history (fig.1). Choate captioned the image, “The first [Indian] boy who reported to Capt. Pratt at Fort Berthold, Dakota, Sept. 19, 1878 for education at Hampton Inst., Va.; was called out of the medicine lodge painted and decorated as seen in the picture.”

²³ Choate, *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School*.



Figure 1. *First Indian Boy*. Photograph by John N. Choate, c. 1879. Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA. CS-CH-27.

The cartoonish illustration shows a figure caught in motion, holding a type of staff, with a mask-like face, long stringy hair, dark skin, white circular patterns painted head to toe, wearing only a loincloth with a furry tail attached to the back and ankle bracelets.

Pratt describes his recruitment visit to Ft. Berthold, where the Mandans were relocated, and he comments upon the successful “Christianization and education” of the

tribes that lived there, including a mention that some chiefs wore spectacles. The “first name on the list” of children arranged to go to CIBS was preparing for a ceremonial performance when he and Pratt were introduced. In his autobiography, Pratt describes the boy’s costume exactly as Catlin illustrated. Scholars have identified this costume as a ceremonial character who represents an evil spirit in the Mandan religion.²⁴ Pratt did not describe this boy actually traveling to Carlisle dressed this way, but did make a joke for the irony that the “first Indian boy” was painted black when the initial, brief home of Pratt’s educational efforts was Hampton Institute, a black college.²⁵ It seems likely that the boy did not wear a ceremony-specific costume to Carlisle. So, why then, would Choate include this illustration as a visual document of Indian education beginning with the wildest, most “savage,” and exotic body?

Cumberland County image historian Richard Tritt, who wrote the most comprehensive biographical essay on John N. Choate, uses the Mandan image as an example of Choate’s sense of humor.²⁶ Tritt includes other examples that show Choate playing with visual narrative and optical illusions, but those images were not created within his CIBS service. I struggle to find a tone of humor in Choate’s Catlin reproduction. It seems that Choate encouraged a “real” reading of the image since he gives no credit to Catlin and instead includes “as seen in the picture” in his caption as if to reference the photograph as reassurance of its own truth. Choate’s branding and advertisements

²⁴ Antonia Valdes-Dapena, “Marketing the Exotic: Creating the Image of the “Real” Indian,” in *Visualizing a Mission: Artifacts and Imagery of the Carlisle Indian School, 1879 - 1918*, ed. Phillip Earenfight (Carlisle, PA: Dickinson College, 2004), 36.

²⁵ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 198.

²⁶ Richard Tritt, “John Nicholas Choate: A Cumberland County Photographer,” *Cumberland County History* 13, no.2 (Winter 1996): 88.

certainly indicate that he took his practice seriously, calling his studio an “Art Store and Photograph Room” and some of his insignias featured a painter’s palette and brushes. Like many provincial photographers of the era, Choate aimed to produce work that showed technical skill and artistic creativity in the craft.²⁷ There is also the matter that in both Pratt’s autobiography and Choate’s caption, this Mandan boy is unnamed, indicating that this image is not concerned with “the first boy” as an individual. Instead, it seems the Catlin image is a caricature of Indian existence for Choate and fulfills the significant contrast he needed between tribal and civil presentation in CIBS propaganda.

Choate is mentioned often in the CIBS student newspapers during his career. Mentions range from advertisements for his studio to news snippets of campus happenings, however, almost all have a sales pitch voice to remind the reader that the scenes described are for sale. A paragraph from one of the student newspapers, published in 1892, tells of visiting Piegan chiefs and also doubles as an ad:

The Piegan chiefs of Montana, while here, were photographed in Indian dress by Mr. Choate...Those wishing to see the real Indian dress, a more striking photograph could not be secured. It is an encouraging fact that the civilization of the Indian is fast driving this style of dress out. Seldom these days do we have such a representation of chiefs dressed in buck-skin shirt, fringed and beaded leggings, wampum [beaded belt], bears’ claws and moccasins.²⁸

In this example, Indianness is condemned as outdated or ignorant, while in the same breath the exoticism is hyped for sale. In another *Indian Helper* issue, the correlation between Indianness and consumer value was so striking that Choate “could

²⁷ Hayes Peter Mauro, *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 58.

²⁸ *The Indian Helper*, January 29, 1892.

not possibly furnish” it for the usual subscription rate.²⁹ The attitude of the value for these portraits is clear; CIBS portraits were exotic entertainment for an audience unfamiliar with and curious about “real” Indians.

Throughout the development of the United States, portraits of “others,” people not identified as Christian and white, were used to propagate assumptions about those peoples’ race and culture.³⁰ Public interpretation of Choate’s imagery was crucial to the public perception of boarding efforts. The Catlin copy presented a visualization of a Native American body in a stereotype culturally opposite to white bodies. Regardless of the seriousness with which Choate reproduced Catlin’s illustration, it is substantial evidence that he was aware of his role as an author of the visual narrative of Pratt’s assimilationist agenda.

²⁹ *The Indian Helper*, May 27, 1892.

³⁰ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School*, 1.

CHAPTER 1 THE VISUAL NARRATIVE OF ASSIMILATION

In the lived experience of boarding school students, change to appearance was the “true” beginning of their assimilation, which reveals much about the priority Pratt set on aesthetics for identifying ideology on a body. Luther Standing Bear, early CIBS student and later renowned author, recognized the significance of hair cutting as an introductory action in the boarding school system, “The fact is that we were to be transformed, and short hair being the mark of gentility with the white man, he put upon us the mark.”³¹ Haircuts and school uniforms were the first implementations of prospective citizenship into white society. The first issue of the first CIBS newspaper *Eadle Keatah Toh* (January 1880) stated, “All were eager to learn, but it was soon evident that the barber and tailor must take precedence in the work of civilization.”

Out of Choate’s CIBS oeuvre, the “before and after” sets received the most attention as the primary visual record of the school and continue to today. “Before and after” sets show students “as they arrived” to the school and then again photographed some months or years later (fig. 2). The intent is to display great contrast between before schooling and after assimilation has been successful. All of the elements within the frame, backdrop, posture, clothing, even expressions, contribute to an audience’s psychological judgment of the narrative implied in “before and after” imagery. The formal aesthetics of the “before” portraits find roots in Native American portrait painting.

³¹ Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, new ed. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 189.

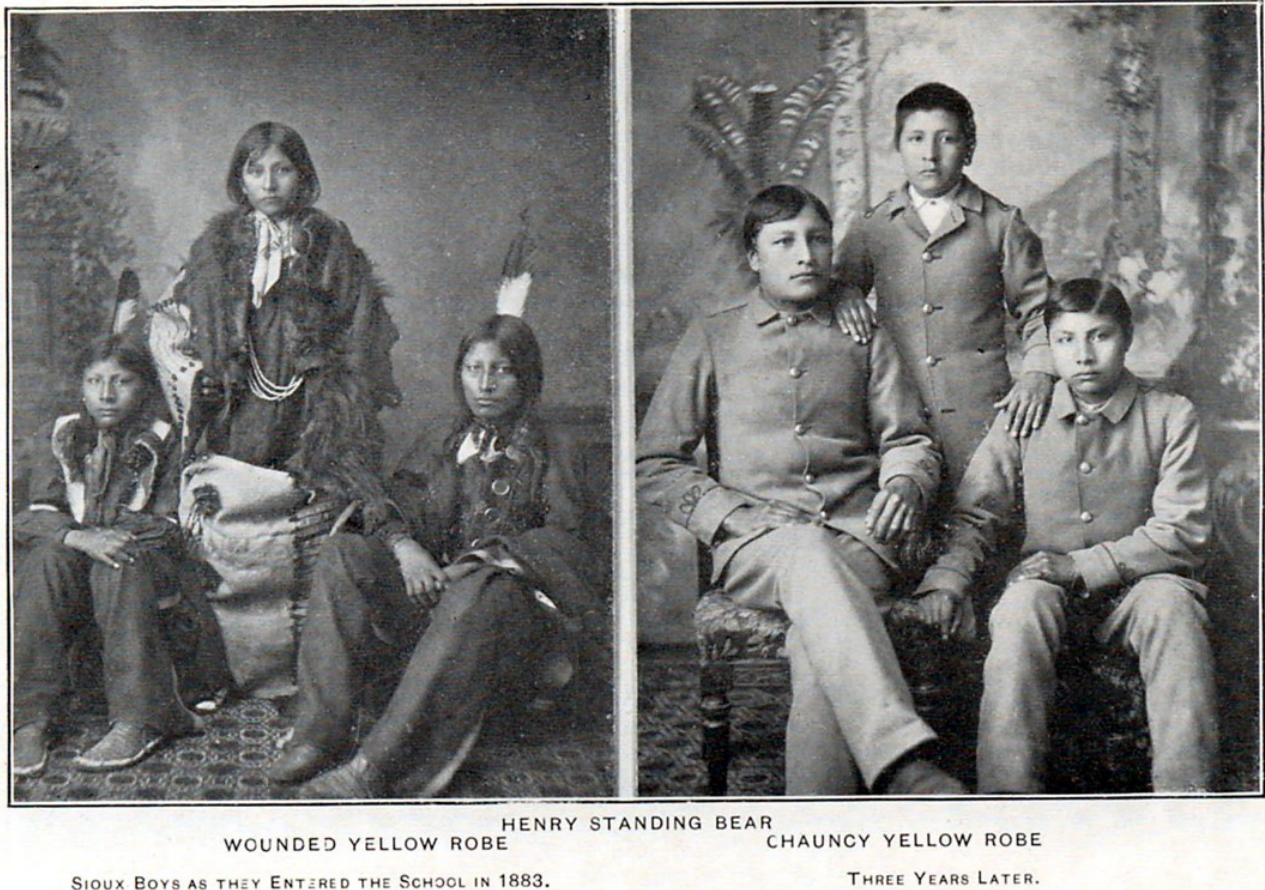


Figure 2. *Chauncey Yellow Robe, Henry Standing Bear, and Wounded Yellow Robe.* Photographs by John N. Choate, 1883 and 1886. Page from *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School (Carlisle, PA: J. N. Choate, 1902)*. Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA. CIS-I-0039. Chauncey Yellow Robe on the right in “before” and on the left in “after.”

Schemas of Transformation in Portrait Painting

Art historian Richard Brilliant identifies the artist’s social perception, and therefore depiction, of the sitter as the consolidation of “socio-artistic conventions into specific verbal-visual images [that allow] both the artist and the viewer to categorize the person portrayed in general terms.”³² Brilliant calls these general terms “schemas,” constantly

³² Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 37.

flexible and dependent on social definitions particular to the viewer and artist and “loaded with significance.”³³ To fully understand the schemas present in the photographs Choate made for CIBS, they must be recognized within the timeline of Native American portraiture.

The visual semiotics of Indianness were crucial to white society’s attitude towards an understanding of the relationship between Native and Euro-Americans³⁴ For nineteenth-century white Americans, many who had little idea of indigenous peoples outside of the Indian Wars, portraits of Native Americans were canvases onto which imagined exotic “Otherness” was applied.³⁵ Native American portrait painting in the nineteenth century commonly adhered to schemas which have a “very narrow range of physiognomic variation” in which sitters are instead “particularized by details of ethnic costume and hair treatment” according to Brilliant.³⁶ The aesthetics of and on the sitter become the predominant communicator of the sitter’s individuality. The commercial appeal for an exaggeration of Indianness through costume and props has an infamous role in the history of Native American portraiture.

While accessories have always been intentional inclusions in portrait painting, the treatment of the Native American sitter as merely a model to display Indianness is in stark contrast to conventions of Western portraiture. European paintings prioritized recognizable individuality and intensive attention to facial expression in the likeness of

³³ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 37.

³⁴ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School*, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 13 – 14.

³⁶ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 107.

important persons.³⁷ Even in portraits of famous Native Americans where recognizable likeness was somewhat applied, cultural decoration and accouterments have a dominant presence as visually highlighted by the artist. Westward expansion painter George Catlin highlights Indianness in his portrait of the famous Sauk chief, Black Hawk (fig. 3). Catlin may have spent more effort in the likeness of Black Hawk than in his many ethnographic portraits, but the jewelry, regalia, and bird take visual priority due to the brightness and sharpness of their rendering. Regardless of Native American sitters' use of accessories as personally or politically meaningful objects, the white public was trained to interpret Native American portraits by the ethnographic, particularly the shockingly different, evidence of their Otherness.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid, 99, 111 – 112. William Truettner, *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710 – 1840* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 5.

³⁸ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 107. For an essay on agency in Catlin's portraits see Elizabeth Hutchinson's "From Pantheon to Indian Gallery: Art and Sovereignty on the Early Nineteenth-Century Cultural Frontier" (2013) in *Journal of American Studies*.



Figure 3. *Black Hawk, prominent Sauk Chief*. Painting by George Catlin, 1832. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. SAAM.1985.66.2.

Romantic Primitivism in Choate's Oeuvre

The commercial appeal of “traditional” Indians in painting and photography was so pervasive and popular it earned the genre label “Romantic Primitivism.” Romantic Primitivism is a “mythical construction” of Euro-Americans understanding of Native Americans beginning in the eighteenth century. Senior curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum William Truettner claims that Romantic Primitivism can only be understood “through the images that represent” it, meaning that the stereotypes of Native Americans, even those prevalent today, were created through visual media.³⁹ The term ‘romanticism’ comes from a photographic style that harkens back to pictorialism painting

³⁹ Truettner, *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America*, 12 – 13.

and was coupled with a desire to imagine Native Americans in a “primitive” sense.⁴⁰ Rather than documenting indigenous reality, white photographers created scenes that romanticized pre-colonial contact Indians.

Choate used Romantic Primitivism aesthetics in many CIBS student portraits. Choate’s “before” portraits, especially in the first few years, were taken outside on the grounds of the school campus. In these outside “before” portraits, students are standing or sitting in grassy areas, wrapped in blankets, and with their personal belongings on the ground next to them. Perhaps photographing them this way gave credence to the claim that the students were photographed truly as they first stepped onto school property.

When “before” portraits moved to his studio, Choate almost always included versions of “as they arrived” in titles and captions, a sentiment that harkens back to his photocopy of the “first boy” who was “called out of the medicine lodge” and delivered directly into Pratt’s possession as a wild, exotic Indian. The studio backdrop, although not intended to delude the viewer into believing a real space, functions as an implication of the socio-spatial “reality” the sitter occupies.⁴¹ In my research at the Cumberland County Historical Society and Dickinson College archives, I observed at least seven painted backdrop canvases in Choate’s studio. Four were Victorian domestic interior scenes and three were an eclectic variety of woods and gardens.⁴²

The woods and gardens backdrops are frequently, albeit not exclusively, used in “before” student portraits. By choosing a backdrop which features exotic plants and dense

⁴⁰ William H. Lyon, “The Navajos in the American Historical Imagination, 1868 – 1900,” *Ethnohistory* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 259 – 260.

⁴¹ Lucy Lippard, “Frame of Mind,” *Afterimage* 24, no.5 (March/April 1997): 8.

⁴² It is difficult to determine if backgrounds are separate canvases or different sections of the same canvas.

forest, Choate makes a stereotypical connection between Indianness and (untamed and wild) nature within the tradition of Romantic Primitivism. Choate exaggerated an imaginary wilderness to imply primitive states of being for children in their “before” attire, conjuring stereotypes of Indianness associated with wildness.⁴³ In “before” images, Choate often posed sitters on the studio floor, wrapped in blankets, and leaning against faux-rock forms. Regardless if the children actually arrived at Carlisle with blankets, photographing them wrapped up plays into the derogatory term, one which Pratt used, “blanket Indian.” This term carries connotations that deem Native Americans as “purely atavistic,” judged as unclean and poor.⁴⁴ Choate often included furs and copious amounts of loose straw on the floor, sometimes covering furniture with straw. Although it is tempting to apply strict symbolic associations to props as ideologically driven, such as straw associating with unclean spaces like barns, some of Choate’s “before” props appear in “after” portraits, too.

Most early Choate portraits use Indianness as an indexical opposite to Victorian sensibility by presenting children as dirty, haggard, and impoverished, yet, a particular portrait of a student in beautifully fancy regalia recurrently appears in Carlisle souvenir photobooks and school newspapers, especially as advertised for purchase. No portrait glorifies a student’s “traditional” Indian appearance more than the “before” portrait of White Buffalo (fig. 4).

⁴³ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 55.



Figure 4. *White Buffalo, #1, 1881 [before]*. Photograph by John N. Choate, 1881. Dickinson College Archives and Repository, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA. CIS-P-0022.

A London newspaper reviewed the photograph in 1881:

Another photograph shows a lad in entire Indian costume. It was his war dress. He brought it with him from the camp, which he has left forever, to take up his American citizenship. He desired to secure this likeness of himself before he gave up his Indian life. Curiously picturesque it is, with the tall crown of feathers, some two feet high, and the moccasins, while the long hair, perfectly white, we are told, streams over his shoulders. It can hardly be without a regret that we contemplate the disappearance of these romantic figures.⁴⁵

This description is undeniably Choate's 1881 portrait of the Cheyenne young man with stunning long, grey hair. The article states that White Buffalo "desired to secure this likeness of himself," however photographing students at the beginning of their CIBS career was common practice by 1881 and it is hard to imagine that Choate would pass up photographing a student who "arrived" dressed so impressively. Author of *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School*, Hayes Peter Mauro criticizes Choate's photograph of White Buffalo as exotica with "zoological" exploitation. White Buffalo's stiff seated posture on top of a rock, the woodland backdrop, and the straw covering the floor contribute to this "zoo" exhibit sense.

While Choate's commission was to document the ideological mission of the school for publicity, he did not lose out on a lucrative opportunity to privately sell "Indian pictures." The CIBS newspaper frequently featured ads for Choate's studio, which used phrases such as 'Indian pictures' and 'Old Indian negatives' and 'never before seen.'⁴⁶ Choate sold cabinet cards at various sizes between twenty to twenty-five cents each, evident throughout years of advertisements in the CIBS newspaper, and even charged students

⁴⁵ *Eadle Keatah Toh*, July 1881.

⁴⁶ *The Arrow*, December 1, 1904.

twenty-cents to have their portrait taken at his studio in later years.⁴⁷ The Romantic Primitivist aspects that appear in Choate's work were perhaps more driven for an appeal to consumer demands rather than a masterminded symbolic system. This may explain why props, backgrounds, and regalia which would seem to fit into a strict indexical "before" or "after" appear in both portrait types.

There is no doubt that the tension between romantic views of "traditional" and assimilated Native American identity was on Choate and Pratt's minds while orchestrating the visual publicity of the school. Choate's CIBS portraits trafficked well as souvenirs, but Pratt needed grander public outreach for his portraits to function as propaganda. There was no greater platform for visual display in the late nineteenth century than the World's Fair expositions. Pratt's determination to distinguish his students as assimilated 'Americans' and the threat he perceived of "wild" Indians was made clear in his dealings with the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Being the leader of Indian education, Pratt consulted as a co-planner of the Indian education exhibit. Quickly, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) commissioner found himself dissatisfying Pratt's staunch vision for his assimilationist utopia to be the only indigenous presence at the exposition. The BIA commissioner granted multiple other exhibits approval for using Native American peoples and artifacts, such as the Ethnological Bureau's exhibit that included a large "Indian village" where performers acted out pre-colonial indigenous ceremonies, a "mummified papoose" (infant), and clothing and accessories from alleged Ghost Dancers from the Wounded Knee Massacre only a few

⁴⁷ Tritt, "John Nicholas Choate," 80.

years prior.⁴⁸ Pratt was deeply offended by the BIA's approval and financial support of ethnographic exhibits. As Pratt wrote in his autobiography, "exalting" Indianisms was "opposite and inimical" to assimilationist efforts.⁴⁹

One month before the grand opening of the fair, Pratt pulled out of all participation in the BIA-sponsored exhibit and instead created an exhibit titled "Into Civilization and Citizenship."⁵⁰ The large Bureau of American Ethnology exhibit and performances, Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, and a commercially-run "Cliff-Dwellers" archeology sideshow stole the limelight in most reviews of the fair, indicating that the public was still heavily attracted to "wild" or "primitive" Indian culture.⁵¹

Although it would seem more typical of Pratt to outright deny any inclusion of traditional Indianness in the official portraits of his students, Choate selectively used the schema of Romantic Primitivism to set up the drama of the "before and after" portrait diptychs. Without the context of "before," audiences would not have the necessary visual context to be impressed by Pratt's success in the "after." Two portraits of the same student(s) side-by-side encourages this difference to be read as a narrative.

Reading "Before" and "After"

The "before and after" sets were powerful policy tools because social reformers believed they were witnessing the staging of evolutionary time in the physical changes

⁴⁸ Robert Trennert Jr., "Selling Indian Education at the World's Fairs and Expositions, 1893 – 1904," *American Indian Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 205 – 211; David W. Messer, *Chauncey Yellow Robe: A Biography of the American Indian Educator, ca. 1870 – 1930* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2018), 50 -52.

⁴⁹ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 303.

⁵⁰ Trennert, "Selling Indian Education," 209.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 211 – 212.

between the portraits. Indeed, the school newspaper reinforced this Social Darwinist paradigm of Indian education, seeing white civilization as farther down the evolutionary road than Indian society, i.e. “remember once [white] people were just as the Indians are now,” and suggesting that if a “dumb animal” can be educated then so can Native Americans.⁵² President Jefferson described indigenous tribes in the American West as “... a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy of creation to the present day.”⁵³ Artist and historian Coco Fusco asserts in her essay, “Racial Signs, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors,” that phrenology, the pseudo-science of the era responsible for this evolutionary narrative between races, relied on visually “linking physical traits with invisible group characteristics.”⁵⁴

Photography was a springboard for phrenology, which was the study of physiognomy as distinctions in racial and class intellects and social behaviors, often which adopted disturbingly racist overtones.⁵⁵ Visual presentation of Native American children, such as Choate’s “before” portraits, interpreted through a phrenological lens contributed to the legitimacy of forced assimilation in the conscience of the American public. Pratt saw assimilation as a progression for Native Americans into civility. Puritan values in the late-nineteenth century heavily influenced assimilation ideology based on the morals of hygiene.⁵⁶ Tribal society appeared radically oppositional to a society that defined itself as advanced through measurements of “comfort, convenience, productivity,

⁵² *Indian Helper*, December 10, 1886.

⁵³ Roy H. Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965), 155.

⁵⁴ Coco Fusco, “Racial Signs, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors,” in *Only Skin Deep* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 33 – 34.

⁵⁶ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 3 -4.

⁵⁶ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 3 -4.

health, affluence, and hygiene.”⁵⁷ The appearance and posture of students in “before” images (long hair, wrapped in blankets, and sitting on the floor) communicated lack of hygiene to a Puritan audience hyper-concerned with cleanliness as a rule for social progress. Indeed, Pratt was acutely concerned with the hygiene of his first arrival students. In a report to the Indian Office about the development of the school in 1880, only months after their arrival, he quipped that some of the building projects were put on hold for the “labor of getting the children free from vermin, and into habits of cleanliness...”⁵⁸

Pratt did not establish an officially Catholic school, but Christian dogma was a crucial ingredient in the crusade towards full Native American citizenship. The first issue of the school newspaper *Eadle Keatah Toh* (January 1880) listed the daily agendas for students and the relevance of the activity to the goal for assimilation. Religion had nearly as dominant a presence as academic time. The students attended mass “every week day morning, Sunday afternoon and evening, and occasionally on a week day evening.” Many of the early teachers were Quaker women.⁵⁹

The deeply ingrained Christian metaphor of proverbial darkness was influential to the development of the school’s curriculum. That first issue of *Eadle Keatah Toh* goes on to say that the group was “beginning to respond to the earnest and kindly efforts of the teachers to instill into their darkened minds Christian truths, and a desire to seek God and

⁵⁷ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁸ Richard Henry Pratt, “Description of the Grounds, Buildings, Industries and Aims of the Carlisle Indian Training School,” 1880, National Archives and Records Administration.

⁵⁹ Kate Theimer, “A Very Correct Idea of Our School:” *A Photographic History of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School* (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2018), 34.

to know His word.” The aforementioned 1881 London article repeats similar language... “Light is surely breaking in upon the beclouded minds of our western Indians... We feel our hearts throb with delight, while looking upon the breaking of the warm light of God’s love through the black clouds of superstition, which have for so many years darkened the hearts of our red brothers...”⁶⁰

In an essay that looks at “before and after” sets as precursors to Wild West films, Joanna Hearne identifies cinematic aspects and strategies of CIBS portrait diptychs. Unlike film which shows change in time, the viewer is left to decipher the events which cause the change between two still photographs. Two images side-by-side create an accelerated “past-to-future trajectory.”⁶¹ Hearne identifies two codependent strategies in “before and after” imagery: exhibition and suppression.⁶² Exhibition is what is revealed on either side of the “change” within the sitters. Suppression is the omitted interval between the portraits, the “change” itself. The greater contrast the portraits exhibit, the greater the suppression is dramatized.

Serial narrative, the cinematic composition of showing change between two images, was a strategy already familiar to Native American portrait painting. George Catlin’s famous painting of Assiniboine dignitary Ah-jon-jon uses a bifurcated composition to show the man before he went to Washington D.C. (left) and as he returned home (right) (fig. 5).

⁶⁰ *Cheyenne Transporter*, December 1879, reprinted in *Eadle Keatah Toh*, January 1880.

⁶¹ Joanna Hearne, “Stills from a Film That Is Missing: Indigenous Images and the Photographic Interval in Early Cinema,” in *Corporeality in Early Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 105.

⁶² *Ibid.*



Figure 5. *Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light) going to and returning from Washington*. Painting by George Catlin, 1839. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. SAAM.1985.66.474.

Catlin depicted Ah-jon-jon's Euro-American dress as an adaptation from his stay in Washington for over a year. Catlin also depicted this change of dress as a signifier for a change of character. Catlin portrayed this change as morally rotten by including the liquor bottle in his pocket and frivolous accessories (the umbrella and fan) that were signs

of a “dandy” (conceited fellow).⁶³ Art historian William H. Truettner interprets the painting as a “warning” to society from Catlin that Native Americans mixing with white civilization was not only a loss of Native culture but morally and physically dangerous to Native Americans who spent too long in the white world.⁶⁴ In Catlin’s writings, he connects the eventual murder of Ah-jon-jon by another tribal member as an ultimate price for “crossing over” and playing white.⁶⁵

Choate’s portraits of Sioux chief Spotted Tail are very reminiscent of Catlin’s diptych of Ah-jon-jon. The portraits are a “before and after” presentation of Spotted Tail, before (taken while he was visiting his children at CIBS) and after his trip to Washington in 1880.⁶⁶ In the “after” portrait, Spotted Tail is still wearing earrings, moccasins, and appears to have the same large blanket from the first portrait, but, interestingly, he is without his large eagle feather in his hair, which is a sacred Sioux symbol of leadership and battle achievements.⁶⁷ Choate’s “after Washington” portrait does not have *vanitas*-style vices like Catlin’s. However, subtle changes in clothing and hair and Choate’s inclusion of “after his return from Washington” to the “after” portrait’s title is enough to suggest to an audience that Spotted Tail was “changed” by his time in the white man’s city.

⁶³ Smithsonian American Art Museum, “Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light) Going To and Returning From Washington,” accessed March 13, 2019, <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/wi-jun-jon-pigeons-egg-head-light-going-and-returning-washington-4317>.

⁶⁴ Truettner, “Selling Indian Education, 116.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 236 – 238.

⁶⁷ Akta Lakota Museum & Cultural Center, “Holy Eagle,” accessed March 13, 2019, <http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8590>.

The “change” that Pratt wanted the public to understand was the metaphysical advancement within his Native American students, and that understanding relied on visual semiotics with cinematic strategies. The cooperation between Choate and Pratt for aesthetic choices in portraits is unknown. However, Pratt did not seem to object to portraits that depicted Indianisms, such as White Buffalo’s “before” portrait, being replicated in so many different school publications. Peter Hayes Mauro argues that White Buffalo’s “before” portrait was an important pawn in Pratt’s agenda because extreme Indianness equated extreme wildness, which “could only bolster Pratt’s claims of mastery over the savage.”⁶⁸ The display of taming the “savage” Other was the core of “before and after” sets as powerful publicity tools. Comparison diptychs were effective for Pratt’s mission because, as Hearne describes, their “visual moral order” allowed him to “selectively [highlight] issues of time and transformation.”⁶⁹ And, Pratt did selectively moderate the public narrative of his students supplemented by portraits.

⁶⁸ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 84.

⁶⁹ Joanna Hearne, *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 25.

CHAPTER 2 STUDENTS AS SPECIMENS: ILLUSTRATIVE USES THEN AND NOW

The article published in London in 1881 is an explicit example of the popular, and intended, response to Choate's "before and after" sets:

As we write, we have before us an interesting series of photographs vividly illustrating the process which these Indians – and there are adults as well as children among them – are passing through. Here is a picture of 'Sioux boys, as they arrived at the Indian Training School,'... And here again, is another, which shows them a year and a half afterwards. The change is marvelous. It must be seen, to be fully appreciated. We can only say that it surpasses the change from a crowd of country bumpkins to a drilled regiment, though this would seem to be about as great as human nature could admit of.⁷⁰

The article begins as a rebuttal to the growing concern that Native Americans on reservations were maltreated by the U.S. government. Despite the article describing CIBS students as having "scarcely any beauty" or intelligence and as being "inferior to the average of our rural children," the article spends a great deal of time defending Pratt's mission as a valiant and worthwhile one.⁷¹ The article acknowledges the "after" result for assimilation as creating Native American civilians who are not "very clever" but are, in fact, "quite civilized." Assuming the English author had not visited Carlisle, the 1,300-word article used Choate's portrait diptychs as the logical substantiation for its claims.

White social reformers expected to reaffirm long-existing prejudices towards Native Americans within the "before and after" sets. Mauro identifies this concentric use of "before and after" portraits as "positivist logic," a philosophy popular in the early twentieth century and then widely abandoned for various criticisms (one being that

⁷⁰ *Eadle Keatah Toh*, July 1881.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

scientific verification should not be quarantined to observable evidence).⁷² In a logical positivist paradigm, “before and after” portraits were the observable evidence of Social Darwinism, a racial theory, supported by phrenology, with pro-Euro-American bias for evolutionary hierarchy.⁷³ The schemas of “before and after” excited the “evolutionist, aesthetic, and cultural” positivist associations in a social reformer audience already adept at comparing scientific specimens side-by-side.⁷⁴ It does seem that CIBS regarded Choate’s “before and after” sets as work with almost anthropological seriousness, describing one composite print of students’ faces as “a fascinating study showing so many tribes and as many degrees of intelligence.”⁷⁵

Pratt’s Perfect Specimen

Pratt had favorites in the early CIBS years and one of those students, Chauncey Yellow Robe, arguably provided Pratt with his most significant narrative for CIBS public relations. Yellow Robe came from the Sioux Nation and entered CIBS in 1883.⁷⁶ David W. Messer’s biography of Yellow Robe described him as “thriving” in Pratt’s school environment, despite arriving allegedly scared of white people and not knowing English.⁷⁷ Yellow Robe was a shining success story for Pratt. He graduated in 1895 with honors,

⁷² Michele Marsonet, “Philosophy and Logical Positivism,” *Academicus International Scientific Journal* 19 (March): 32 – 36.

⁷³ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 31.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 72.

⁷⁵ *Eadle Keatah Toh*, August 1881.

⁷⁶ Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, “Chauncey Yellow Robe (Killed in the Tiner) Student File,” Dickinson College, accessed March 13, 2019, http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/student_files/chauncey-yellow-robe-killed-timber-student-file. Student records also refer to him as “Chauncy,” “Timber Yellow Robe,” and “Killed in the Timber.”

⁷⁷ Messer, *Chauncey Yellow Robe*, 42 - 44.

went on to work for several different Indian training schools, was active in the Society of American Indians (a pro-assimilationist policy lobbying group), married a white woman (Pratt saw intermarriage as peak assimilation), and frequently gave speeches and published articles arguing positively for assimilation and Christian conversion for Native Americans.⁷⁸ Messer echoed a sentiment from Yellow Robe's daughter, Rosebud, by describing him as "a person who knew both worlds."⁷⁹

Pratt chose Chauncey Yellow Robe to represent the school as a perfect example of assimilation by sending him to grand events, such as assigning him as lead docent at the CIBS exhibition at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and for a short time as an interpreter for the Indian Office in Washington in 1890.⁸⁰ Pratt used scientific language when expanding on his affinity for Yellow Robe; his choice for Yellow Robe to be at the World's Fair was because he was "a fine specimen of gentlemanly young manhood [and] was part of the exhibit as a sample..."⁸¹ In a short news clip announcing Yellow Robe's run for Congress in 1927, the description of him as "... one of the Indians brought here by General Pratt in the early days of the Carlisle Indian School..." also poignantly included that "his picture was frequently used in Indian School publications to depict the difference between his appearance when he arrived in Indian costume, and after he was educated."⁸²

The most common "before" portrait of Yellow Robe is a cropped vignette from a group photo from 1883 (Figure 2), while the older portrait of Yellow Robe, still a student,

⁷⁸ Ibid, 52, 61, 69, 82, 88.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 10, 88.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 45, 49.

⁸¹ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 307.

⁸² *The Evening Sentinel*, December 12, 1927.

is a single portrait from 1894. The group photo includes Henry Standing Bear and Wounded (Richard) Yellow Robe, Chauncey's brother. The Yellow Robe brothers sit on the floor, dressed in modest pants and button-up shirts, but are mostly obscured by blankets, and their moccasins are displayed prominently in the foreground. The brothers' large eagle feathers that stick up straight from their hair are visually striking as they frame young Henry, who is so layered in furs, scarf, and shawl that he is almost overwhelmed.

After three years, in the "after" portrait, gone are the heavy furs, moccasins, blankets, and eagle feathers. Now, the boys wear the CIBS uniform, an unadorned army surplus suit, and their hair is very short and neat. It is interesting to observe that Choate maintained the formal arrangement of the sitters between many of his "before and after" sets and encouraged a continuity between bodies.⁸³

Although taken three years apart, both feature the exotic garden backdrop, however different sections of the canvas, and both have a Victorian tile flooring. The semiotic contrast between the set lies in the boys' clothing and posture. The Yellow Robe brothers are again positioned on either side of Henry Standing Bear. However, in the "after" arrangement, the boys no longer have to sit on the floor. Chauncey sits in an ornately cushioned wooden chair, cross-legged, while his younger brother sits on a lower stool. Henry stands behind them with a hand on each of the Yellow Robe brothers' shoulder.

⁸³ It appears that Choate may have confused the Yellow Robe brothers in the identification of the portraits. The presentation of the caption suggests that the arrangement of the boys is exactly the same between the portraits and that the seated left figure is Chauncey in both. Chauncey is seated on the right in the "before" image and seated on the left in the "after."

Carlisle historian, Lonna Malmshemer asserts in an essay on Choate's "before and after" sets that "any interaction between subjects clearly is engineered by the photographer... The portraits express an ideology of propriety and complete bodily control."⁸⁴ The Yellow Robe boys sit awkwardly on the studio floor in the "before" image, their arms limp between their knees, and there is no intimate contact between them. In the "after" image, each arm seems to be expressing its own sentiment, Richard's hand is on the seat of Chauncey's chair, Chauncey's arm rests authoritatively on the chair arm, and Henry affectionately connects the seated brothers with a hand on each of their shoulders. Posture and hand gesture are all semiotic elements that show "reform and sophistication" within sitters.⁸⁵

Yellow Robe's "before and after" set was popular for more than their immediate visual transformation. The set gained a narrative centered on the ideal transformation of his character. Historian Jacqueline Fear-Segal argues that this metaphysical significance of Yellow Robe's assimilation "success" is why his portrait was chosen for the cover of Choate's earliest surviving souvenir booklet (fig. 6).⁸⁶ A wonderfully ornate, hand-colored cover, Yellow Robe's "before and after" portrait set frame a bifurcated design that positions his "before" portrait above a scene of a teepee on the left half and scene of a modest Victorian brick house under his "after" portrait on the right half. The juxtaposed design creates a tension of opposition between indigenous and Euro-American lifestyles.

⁸⁴ Malmshemer, "Imitation White Man," 59.

⁸⁵ Molly Fraust, "Visual Propaganda at the Carlisle Indian School," in *Visualizing a Mission: Artifacts and Imagery of the Carlisle Indian School, 1879 – 1918*, ed. Phillip Earenfight (Carlisle, PA: Dickinson College, 2004), 20.

⁸⁶ Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 168.

Yellow Robe's handsome and composed presence, partially eclipsed by a dramatically windswept American flag, is meant to signify that the transformation of Native Americans is a patriotic, painless, and progressive one.



Figure 6. Cover of *United States Indian School Carlisle, Penna.* Photographs and booklet by John N. Choate, ca. 1895. Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA. CIS-I-0037.

Posterchild of Forced Assimilation

Out of the dozens of boarding and reservation day schools across the U.S. and Canada, the most common portraits in news stories, blogs, essays, and documentaries about forced assimilation are those taken by Choate. Perhaps in conjunction with the fact that CIBS was the most famous boarding school, the reason for Choate's popularity is

that his portraits are emphatically successful illustrations. When CIBS portraits reappear in contemporary art, they have the potential to challenge historical use of photographs as ideological tools for assimilation propaganda.

Choctaw artist Marcus Amerman creates images that honor the multivalence of southwestern Native American culture, combining personal and historical narratives (fig. 7). Amerman's work "Postcard" from 2002 mimics the formal aesthetics of a typical mid-twentieth century American postcard in coloring, font, and even the exact graphic of Indians dancing in the right-hand corner.⁸⁷ Instead of the picturesque New Mexican landscape scenes that filled the original, Amerman filled his postcard with portraits of stereotypical Indians, historical figures, and his own family.⁸⁸ Amerman juxtaposed these portraits with intense scenes of environmental disasters, such as tornadoes, a nuclear explosion, and Hokusai's "The Great Wave off Kanagawa." As in the original, each of these images fills the inside of boldface font that spells out the vibrant tourist destination, "Greetings from the INDIAN COUNTRY of the Great Southwest."

⁸⁷ John Paul Rangel, "Indigenous Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art, Indigenous Aesthetics and Representation" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2013), 132, accessed January 31, 2019, http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/educ_llss_etds/37.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 131 – 132.



Figure 7. *Postcard*. Marcus Amerman, 2002. Accessed January 31, 2019. <http://www.marcusamerman.com/creations/beadwork.html>.

Amerman stated that “Postcard” is a means to “hold a mirror to society,” in regard to Native American people’s relationship with dominant culture.⁸⁹ Wanting to see native identity in “three dimensions,” Amerman recognizes stereotypes, caricatures, and trauma as complicating the broader consensus of Native identity. Amerman appropriates the two-dimensional illustrative form of a postcard, shallow and glossy, and literally adds dimension to it by creating it in traditional beadwork.

Reclamation of Native American traditional crafts and aesthetics by contemporary artists is known to Native studies as “survance.”⁹⁰ The term was constructed from the

⁸⁹ Rangel, “Indigenous Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art,” 128.

⁹⁰ Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Survance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

need to acknowledge that indigenous culture survives despite genocidal and assimilation efforts, especially through the nineteenth century, and the suffix “ance” insists that this survival is an active choice that perseveres in Native communities.⁹¹ Amerman participates in survivance by beading and subverts an otherwise kitsch medium that has been the carrier for commercializing Indian land and people.

Positioned in the center of “Postcard,” two portraits fill the letters “U” and “N;” they are the famous “before and after” diptych of CIBS student Tom Torlino. Amerman intentionally placed Torlino inside those letters to reference the boarding school process of “un-Indianizing” and chose this student’s particular portrait as a “metaphor for the civilizing process.”⁹² Dark orange and red beads are used for the appropriated “before” portrait while light and dark blue beads make him appear as a zombie in the “after” portrait. The inversion between Torlino’s blue headscarf and red skin in the “before” and his blue skin and orange background in the “after” create an optical and metaphorical inversion. Resisting the assimilationist ideology which guided the “before and after” schema, Amerman asserts that Torlino’s transformation was a change consisting of loss, not progress.

It seems no other portrait, in all of Native American boarding school history, has been reproduced as much as the “before and after” set of Tom Torlino (fig. 8).

⁹¹ Vizenor, *Survivance*, 19.

⁹² Rangel, “Indigenous Perspectives,” 132.



Figure 8. *Tom Torlino, 1882 and 1885*. Photographs by John N. Choate. Page from *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School* (Carlisle, PA: J. N. Choate, 1902). Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA. CIS-I-0039. Caption: “Tom Torlino – Navajo” (center). Caption: “As he entered the school in 1882” (left); “As he appeared three years later” (right).

Torlino, age 22, came from Arizona and arrived at Carlisle in 1882; he attended CIBS until 1886.⁹³ National Public Radio’s Morning Edition and WNYC’s Radiolab included Torlino’s portraits as key illustrations in each of their recent stories about the forced assimilation era.⁹⁴ The Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center at Dickinson

⁹³ Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, “Tom Torlino Student File,” Dickinson College, accessed March 13, 2019, http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/student_files/tom-torlino-student-file.

⁹⁴ Charla Bear, “American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many,” National Public Radio, May 12, 2008, accessed January 31, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16516865>. Brenna Farrell,

College provides a grade school lesson plan for analysis and discussion of Torlino's portraits. Mauro dedicated an entire chapter to Torlino in *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian Boarding School*. David Wallace Adams featured the image set on the back cover of his book *Education for Extinction*. In Pratt's time, Torlino's portraits appeared in Choate's souvenir photobooks and were printed in the student newspaper as late as 1897, eleven years after he left Carlisle.⁹⁵

Torlino's portraits are the *epitome* of the "before and after" visual narrative. For the same reasons Choate photographed White Buffalo in regalia, Torlino appears "authentically" Indian in his "before" portrait. Torlino has long loose hair, large hoop earrings, a necklace with symbolic pendants, and a decorative tunic. Torlino's tribal affiliation may have also contributed to the "savagery" of his before portrait. The Navajo tribe, in particular, held a reputation for being "recalcitrant, isolated, or hostile" in the Eastern white imaginary due to resistance that outlasted many other tribes against the U.S. government.⁹⁶ In the "after," Torlino has been transformed into a "civilized" version of himself; he wears a button-up jacket and tie, his hair is short, and he lacks jewelry.

For possibly being the most famous "before and after" portrait, Torlino did not have the public character narrative close to what Yellow Robe achieved. Torlino's individual story is commonly lost in contemporary reproductions of his portraits, rather his "transformation" is purely illustrative of the ideologies, critiques, and dramas of the host

"Photos: Before and After Carlisle," WNYC Studios Radiolab, January 29, 2015, accessed January 31, 2019. <https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/photos-before-and-after-carlisle>.

⁹⁵ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 78.

⁹⁶ Malsheimer, "Imitation White Man," 66.

text. Torlino has effectively become a kind of “posterchild” of a colonized body in the history of forced assimilation.

Although many examples of the reappearance of CIBS portraits support critical thinking around the trauma of the boarding school era, some contemporary media and artworks perpetuate the singularly illustrative purpose of the portraits’ original intent. Mauro criticized even the most “discerning historians” as having gloss[ed] over” the Torlino diptych and failed to analyze its formal aesthetics and historical context for the sake of viewing the photograph as simply an illustration.⁹⁷ Essays, like *Morning Edition* and *Radiolab*, undoubtedly chose Torlino’s portraits over hundreds of others because his visual narrative of transformation is “shockingly” dramatic.

Controversy and Other Inaccuracies

The semiotic difference in the Torlino set that makes them sensationably enticing is the tonal change of his skin. The change from very sun-tanned skin to a light complexion seems to tempt authors to make metaphorical interpretations. Authors frequently use this portrait to illustrate the corporeal manifestation of assimilation ideology, such as *Radiolab*’s adjacent text to the images: “with the proper education, Carlisle students could literally blend in with white society.”⁹⁸ Often, authors claim that Choate “manipulated” either or both portraits to achieve different skin tones, as is the case in the *Radiolab* article, Hearne’s *Native Recognition*, Fear-Segal’s essay “White

⁹⁷ Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 74.

⁹⁸ Farrell, “Photos: Before and After Carlisle.”

Man's Club," artist Shan Goshorn's website, and Mauro's chapter on Torlino, to name a few.⁹⁹

While it is not impossible that Choate may have manipulated Torlino's skin tone, there is more evidence to support the idea that the tonal difference was due to a combination of the photographic process and a natural tan loss. Foremost, any analog photographic process is temperamental and can be altered by many factors, the most delicate being the temperature and time used in the negative's development and the light source during the negative's exposure.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, variations between portraits may happen. The photographic process Choate used needed albumen paper, a commercially produced paper. Although albumen paper was popular for its consistency compared to other processes in circa 1880, is not far-reaching to consider that in the three years between Torlino's portraits there could have been a difference in the papers' chemical make-up, saturation, or sensitivity.

If Choate manipulated the "before" portrait, it is at least clear that it was not "a trick of the light" which made Torlino's skin appear darker. We can see in a group photo taken most likely within the same week that Torlino's skin was dark, much darker than other students in the group photo (fig. 9). Despite Joanna Hearne even including "powder makeup" in a lengthy list of ways Choate artificially lightened skin, there is no solid evidence of such dramatic efforts by Choate that I have found.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Charla, "American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many." Shan Goshorn, "Artist Statement," <http://www.shangoshorn.net/resisting-the-mission-filling-the-silence>. Accessed Jan 9, 2019. Mauro, *The Art of Americanization*, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher James, *The Book of Alternative Photographic Processes* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2009), 388 -391.

¹⁰¹ Hearne, *Native Recognition*, 107.



Figure 9. *Richard H. Pratt with 12 Navajo students*. Photograph by John N. Choate, 1882. Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA. PC 2002.2, Folder 3. Tom Torlino is seated far left.

That leaves the theory that Choate may have used a colored lens to effect grey tones and intentionally “white-wash” Torlino in the “after” image. A photo-essay on the California Indian Education website claims that Choate used a green filter over the camera lens to make skin darker and then a red or yellow filter to lighten skin in order to create the dramatic contrast.¹⁰² The colored lens theory has not been credited to a primary source that I have found, yet is a common statement. Red, green, and yellow colored

¹⁰² Jon Allan Reyhner, “Indian Boarding Schools,” California Indian Education, accessed March 13, 2019, http://www.californiaindianeducation.org/indian_boarding_schools/.

glass placed over the camera lens can affect the contrast of greys, and this effect was known to at least European photographers due to the era's quest for inventing color photography.¹⁰³ It would be a quite laborious task and require enormous skill for Choate to apply a colored lens effect to only the faces of his sitters during exposure. This is also the main criticism for theories which use "overexposure" via the camera and "front lighting" as ways Choate made faces lighter. Again, even if these techniques were employed purposefully, it would be difficult only to apply them to the face during exposure. Furthermore, if Choate had an ideological goal with colored glass or other techniques, it seems *dramatically* lightened skin tones would be evident across all "before and after" diptychs, which is not the case.

The subtle changes in lighter skin tone, which is apparent across Choate's oeuvre, could be more plausibly explained by students' physical relocation from sunny southwest climates, such as the Navajos from Arizona, to chilly Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. Art historian Lonna Malsheimer offered that the sunhats frequently seen in CIBS photographs indicate new habits of sun protection adopted from white society, encouraging a reading of lightened skin tones as resulting from the environment rather than a carefully manipulated photo editing technique.¹⁰⁴

Disproving manipulation in Torlino's portrait is not excusing Choate of any foul play, however. There are examples where it is apparent Choate manipulated his negatives. From the "Noted Indian Chiefs" series, Choate photographed Mandan chief Poor Wolf partially nude, which was a highly unusual choice for Choate. Poor Wolf's chest

¹⁰³ Beaumont Newhall, *Photography: 1839 - 1937* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 82 – 83.

¹⁰⁴ Malsheimer, "Imitation White Man," 66.

is exposed, and on his chest, neck, and arms, there are “tattoos” in the style of tribal glyphs. Under close inspection, it is painfully clear that these marks were made by drawing on the glass negative and are not ink or paint on Poor Wolf’s actual body. A two-page article in *Eadle Keatah Toh* describes the chief’s visit at CIBS in 1880, presumably the same visit he went to Choate’s studio, but does not mention the exciting characteristic of tattoos, despite calling his eyeglasses as looking “ludicrous” on him.¹⁰⁵

If the added marks to Poor Wolf’s portrait are frivolous whimsy for commercial exoticism, that is not to say that Choate was not meticulous about the formal qualities of his images. In 1899, he secured a U.S. patent for improvements on a Retouching Frame apparatus that vibrated against the glass negative to create a “superior artistic effect.”¹⁰⁶ The patent record is a strictly technical description of the device’s mechanics, leaving Choate’s motivations or visualization for a “superior artistic effect” unclear. I found a few glass negatives in the Cumberland County Historical Society archive that have circular lines around the sitters’ heads. The similarity of the marks between the negatives suggests intentional retouching, perhaps to make faces clearer in prints.

Hand-drawing on portraits does appear elsewhere in Choate’s work, such as in a composite print titled “Our Boys and Girls,” but seems to have an objective for legibility of details in print rather than for the type of artistic embellishment seen in Poor Wolf’s portrait. It is perhaps not as important whether Choate did, and how he would have, artificially lightened or darkened Torlino’s skin. The belief that Choate manipulated Torlino’s skin tone is embedded in the portrait set’s significance and is a vital element of

¹⁰⁵ *Eadle Keatah Toh*, August 1880.

¹⁰⁶ John N. Choate, “Retouching Frame.” US Patent 632,643, filed October 31, 1898, issued September 5, 1899.

the set's continued use as an illustration. To a contemporary audience, this "manipulation" represents the unethical institutional control on colonized bodies.

CHAPTER 3 TWO EXEMPLARY USES OF CIBS PORTRAITS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Examining the reappearance of Choate's images in contemporary art and popular media is valuable for helping along the discourse on CIBS portraits towards "a radical, reinvented cultural practice," which should be the goal of critical theory on photography.¹⁰⁷ When used in contemporary art, the schema of CIBS portraits appears in a variety of perspectives. Marcus Amerman incorporated Torlino as an epitomic icon of assimilation. Annu Palakunnathu Matthew used the transformed bodies in "before and after" portraits as platforms to reflect her own racial and ethnic identity in the US. Shan Goshorn resisted the ideological mission of the portraits by literally using the images to continue Cherokee tradition, while also making statements of healing and spiritual connection to the forced assimilation era generation.

Illustration of a Colonized Body: Annu Palakunnathu Matthew

Contemporary artist Annu Palakunnathu Matthew treats Torlino's portraits as solely an example of a "colonized body" in a photographic series titled "An Indian from India." In this series, Matthew compares the experience of her "Indianness" to that of various well-known romantic portraits of Native Americans from the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Matthew felt compelled to create this series after experiencing the American phenomenon of having to distinguish herself as an "Indian from India" (apart

¹⁰⁷ Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," in *Only Skin Deep* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 82.

from the misnomer “Indian” commonly used for Native Americans).¹⁰⁸ Matthew intended to assert solidarity between Indians and Native Americans by using visual mimicry to conflate the colonial gaze of British and Euro-American photographers, respectively.¹⁰⁹ Matthew dresses and poses herself and edits the photo to have the aesthetics of the original to present herself as another kind of “Indian” and to create a parallel between the portraits.



Figure 10. “Tom Torlino, Navajo, on entry to Carlisle School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania / Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Indian on entry to the United States of America.” Photograph by Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, 2001-2007. Accessed January 31, 2019. <http://www.annumatthew.com/gallery/an-indian-from-india/#6>.

Whereas most person’s portraits appear once, Matthew used both of Torlino’s CIBS portraits, paired with two of herself, in the “before and after” composition. In both sets, Matthew mimics Choate’s original title taken from the 1902 catalog to again present

¹⁰⁸ Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, “Perception and Projection: Dual Identity as an Indian Artist in the US,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2002): 67.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 68.

herself as a parallel to Torlino; “on entry to Carlisle” becomes “on entry to United States.” Matthew as “before” has with long, thick hair flowing down over her shoulders, large earrings, multiple necklaces, a bindi, and wears a decoratively patterned tunic (fig. 10). Her “before” appearance is meant to imitate Torlino’s in extreme “Indianness” but as extremely (South Asian) Indian. In an essay for India International Centre Quarterly, Matthew wrote, “It irks me that I can be called primitive and exotic just because I am different...”¹¹⁰ For Matthew it seems that the moniker “Indian” replaces or absorbs the sociopolitical concept of Other. Matthew parallels her own exoticism to that of Torlino’s perceived “savagery” to establish both as Others within white dominant culture.



Figure 11. “Tom Torlino, Navajo three years later, Carlisle / Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Indian Nine years later, Providence.” Photograph by Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, 2001-2007. Accessed January 31, 2019. <http://www.annumatthew.com/gallery/an-indian-from-india/#7>.

¹¹⁰ Matthew, “Perception and Projection: Dual Identity as an Indian Artist in the US,” 68.

Matthew's "after" portrait again resembles Torlino's transformation: hair pulled back tightly, oversized collared button-up jacket, modest feminine jewelry, and without her bindi (fig. 11). It is not clear if Matthew is mimicking Torlino's infamous skin tone change, as hers does not have the same dramatic difference.

Matthew states in her artist statement that she finds the colonial gaze of photographs of nineteenth-century Native Americans to be similar to the photographs taken by British photographers in India during the same era.¹¹¹ By drawing this parallel, Matthew presents her own racialized and colonized body as a continuation of an "ongoing systemic and systematic violence" of the white settler nation-state. Critical Muslim Studies professor Dr. Shaista Patel reviewed "An Indian from India" in 2016, in which she recognized Matthew's comparisons of racialized and colonized bodies as a "horizontal reading of settler colonialism."¹¹² Although her images match the vintage toning and framing of the originals, Matthew presents herself as the most recent case in the native/settler continuation. Patel argues that Matthew presents the "Brown Indian" as the new victim of "contemporary atrocities" while atrocities done to the "Red Indian" belong to the past.¹¹³

While Patel goes on to dissect other problematic aspects of Matthew's likening between herself and nineteenth-century Native American portraits, the sentiment which Patel raises that is most important to this essay is that this form of use does not "confront

¹¹¹ Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, "An Indian from India," accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.annumatthew.com/gallery/an-indian-from-india/>.

¹¹² Shaista Patel, "Complicating the Tale of 'Two Indians': Mapping 'South Asian' Complicity in White Settler Colonialism Along the Axis of Caste and Anti-Blackness," *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

or transform the conditions under which we come to encounter one another.”¹¹⁴ Matthew uses Torlino’s portrait as a surface for which she can reflect upon her own racialized identity, the same way Euro-Americans were anxious to reflect upon themselves as the forceful indigenizing population in postbellum America.¹¹⁵ In Matthew’s series, as in the original context, Torlino’s diptych is an illustration of a historical event and an epitomic example of Native American portraits of the era.

Re-weaving History: Shan Goshorn

The Trout Gallery at Dickinson College in Carlisle honored the 100th year anniversary of the closing of CIBS with an exhibition of selected works by Cherokee artist Shan Goshorn. The flagship series of the exhibit, “Resisting the Mission; Filling the Silence,” consisted of fourteen traditional Cherokee baskets. These fourteen baskets, each about 21 inches tall, were created with paper printed with photographs of Native American boarding school students (fig. 12). The baskets were created as pairs and displayed as diptychs, following the format of “before and after” photographs. Goshorn weaved student portraits with text from the speech in which Pratt coined “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” Goshorn considers the aesthetics of the inside of the baskets with equal emotional weight as the exteriors. In their interior, Goshorn printed every name from the CIBS enrollment records against a deep red color.

Rather than painting images on top of the basket weave, the typical decorative method, Goshorn weaved splints made of a photographic image that re-appears visually

¹¹⁴ Patel, “Complicating the Tale of “Two Indians.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

legible in the end product, a formal choice which brilliantly symbolizes the complex and interdependent layers of identity contained in the original portrait. Choate's portraits were transformed from their original purpose as illustrations of history and mascots of an idea, into three-dimensional objects.



Figure 12. Detail of *Resisting the Mission; Filling the Silence*. Baskets by Shan Goshorn, 2017. Image from "Art: Exhibition commemorates closing of Carlisle Indian School," by Joseph and Barrie Ann George, *The Sentinel*, October 3, 2018. Accessed January 9, 2019. https://cumberlink.com/entertainment/local-scene/art-exhibition-commemorates-closing-of-carlisle-indian-school/article_37e5632e-5996-5e00-bfb4-8323b008e49d.html.

Representing student portraits as literal containers is perhaps a metaphorical remembrance of these children as the bearers of this traumatic history. In her artist statement, Goshorn calls the children taken to boarding schools “prisoners of war.”¹¹⁶ The title of the series positions the act of viewing as resisting the ideology of assimilation and the discussions that result from viewing as filling a “silence” in a minority’s history in the United States. This position also suggests that the images in their original context are the truly “empty” objects and the process and impact of their transformation is a filling, healing action. With the intent to create “work that educates young America about the impact [forced assimilation] policies still hold on [Native Americans],” Goshorn found through exhibitions that her baskets engaged non-native audiences to learn more about and empathize with the trauma of the assimilation era.¹¹⁷

Goshorn’s practice is recognized as indigenous survivance and a political act of resistance because she was only the fourteenth modern person recorded to create a traditional Cherokee double-woven basket as of 2014.¹¹⁸ For Goshorn, baskets became “perfect vehicles for political statements” about the forced assimilation era because the material records of the attempt to eradicate indigenous culture became a part of a surviving and precious Cherokee craft.¹¹⁹ American Indian Magazine described

¹¹⁶ Goshorn, “Artist Statement,” accessed January 9, 2019, <http://www.shangoshorn.net/resisting-the-mission-filling-the-silence>.

¹¹⁷ Shan Goshorn, *Intertwined Exhibition Catalogue* (Tulsa, OK: Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa, 2015), 20.

¹¹⁸ Theresa Barbaro, “Shan Goshorn: Re-weaving History.” *National Museum of the American Indian Magazine* 15, no.2 (Summer/Fall 2014): 28. Sherry Farrell Racette, “Tuft Life: Stitching Sovereignty in Contemporary Indigenous Art.” *Art Journal* 76, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 122.

¹¹⁹ Lee Allen, “An Activist’s Baskets: The Unique Art of Shan Goshorn,” *Indian Country Today*, December 4, 2013, accessed March 13, 2019,

Goshorn's career as "re-weaving history," poetically summarizing her ability to utilize a medium which has "carried aspects of [Native American] culture for centuries" to now carry retrospection of the painful era of forced assimilation.¹²⁰ Goshorn hoped that her baskets would "give audiences – especially native people – an opportunity to overcome the silences that has been suffered too long" in the wake of intergenerational trauma caused by forced boarding school policies.¹²¹

<https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/an-activist-s-baskets-the-unique-art-of-shan-goshorn-16-photos-ESKdPQr1hUK0KspSSYvi4Q/>.

¹²⁰ Barbaro, "Shan Goshorn: Re-weaving History," 35.

¹²¹ Goshorn, "Artist Statement."

CONCLUSION

The portraits from CIBS will always be valuable to scholarship because they document some of the United States' darkest and most complex events. The examples I chose from the hundreds of negatives Choate produced – White Buffalo, Chauncey Yellowrobe, and Tom Torlino – contain more aspects of the history of CIBS and of the students themselves too numerous to mention in this essay. Every CIBS portrait by Choate has layers worthy of complex art historical analysis.

Perhaps regardless of problematic uses, such as Annu Palakunnathu and some journalism media, there is still important exposure to gain from audiences witnessing the history of Native American boarding schools through portraits. Kate Theimer wrote in her book on CIBS photography that “Pratt would be proud that the power of his ‘propaganda’ continues to this day,” however, it is not the kind of persuasion he envisioned.¹²² To recognize the formal and aesthetic choices Choate made and how Pratt used those images is to disempower the original propagandistic purpose.

The “power” Choate’s portraits, particularly the before-and-after sets, continue to hold is now one of sorrow, not admiration, for the attempted loss of indigenous culture. This painful period in the history of Native American art is one that artist and Native Studies professor Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie states, in an essay titled “Compensating Imbalances,” is something contemporary indigenous artists are constantly confronting.¹²³ Thanks to Native American artists such as Marcus Amerman and Shan Goshorn, the

¹²² Theimer, “A Very Correct Idea of Our School,” 149. Original emphasis.

¹²³ Tsinhnahjinnie, Hulleah, “Compensating Imbalances,” *Exposure* 29 (Fall 1993):

“battlefield” of representation that plays out within CIBS portraits can be a retrospective tool for teaching and healing the trauma of the forced assimilation era.¹²⁴

CIBS portraits are restored as personal objects in Amerman and Goshorn’s work by the intimate connection that inspired the use of the portraits, and because images do not simply stand as a visual placeholder for forced assimilation in their work. The restorative use of CIBS portraits is “compensating the imbalances” of the pretenses under which those portraits were created. I believe tracing the decades of use of CIBS portraits and analyzing their place in the context of Native American portraiture is another way of compensating the imbalance of the harm that the CIBS portraits foremost represent.

¹²⁴ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 31.

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ABSTRACT**CARLISLE INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL PORTRAITS: FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO CONTEMPORARY ART**

by

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This essay examines how Carlisle Indian Boarding School portraits portray transformation in students and the aesthetic history that perception holds with portrait painting, the ideological use of student portraits as illustrations of assimilation, and the continued emotional weight those portraits carry in contemporary media. Formal and aesthetic choices by the official school photographer and propagandistic uses by the school's founder determine the role of nineteen-century assimilationist and racist ideology in the commission and dissemination of CIBS student portraits. Additionally, the appearance of these images in contemporary media and art provide a continued analysis of CIBS portraits as visual representatives of the traumatic history of the boarding school era.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Nina Fiorucci earned her Bachelor's degree in Art Education from Northern Michigan University. After completing the Art History Master's degree program at Wayne State University, she returned to Michigan's Upper Peninsula where she is a teacher of K-12 Visual Arts. She happily lives in a small northwoods town with her fiancé and two tuxedo cats.