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THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER

Maternalism and American Indian Child Removal

in the American West, 1880–1940

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IN 1892 members of the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA), a white women's reform organization, discussed the need for temperance work among the Indians. One reformer, Miss Frances Sparhawk, "suggested...finding homes in good families for Indian children exposed to the vices seen in homes of intemperance." Mrs William Green asked, "Is it necessary that Indian children should be returned to savage homes?" Mrs Plummer replied, "It is difficult and perhaps wrong to evade the parental authority brought to bear to enforce their return." Finally, Mrs Frye "spoke of the great fondness for their children which she had observed in her visits among Western tribes."¹ Neither at this meeting nor at subsequent conventions did the WNIA ever come to a consensus about whether it was proper to remove American Indian children from their homes. Their polite exchange in 1892, however, reveals a little-known aspect of

white women reformers' work in the American West—their role in promoting, implementing, and sometimes challenging the policy of removing American Indian children to boarding schools. A rich historiography has accumulated regarding American Indian boarding schools and the experience of Indian children within them. Western women's historians have also studied many white women who were involved in efforts to advocate for American Indians. Yet, in general, these two historiographical tracks have developed along parallel lines without intersecting. This essay argues, however, that white women were integrally involved in the removal of American Indian children to boarding schools and that their involvement implicated them in one of the most cruel, yet largely unexamined, policies of colonialism within the American West.

Through a politics of maternalism, many white women reformers claimed for themselves the role of a "Great White Mother" who would save her benighted Indian "daughters."² Ironically, however, while these reformers venerated motherhood in their political discourse, they often failed to respect the actual mothering done by many native women. Instead, many reformers portrayed American Indian women as unfit mothers whose children had to be removed from their homes and communities to be raised properly by white women within institutions. And as white women articulated a sense of difference between themselves and native women as mothers, they helped to construct racial ideologies that deemed Indian peoples to be in need of "civilization" by their white benefactors. Thus, much of white women's advocacy for Indians in the West ultimately reinforced the very racial notions that contributed to the ongoing colonization of native peoples in the region.

In the late nineteenth century, after decades of Indian wars, government authorities turned to an assimilation policy as the solution to the so-called "Indian problem." Beginning about 1880, the U.S. government began to promote boarding schools for American Indian children, modeled on Captain Richard Henry Pratt's Carlisle Institute in Pennsylvania, as a primary means to assimilate Indian children.³ By 1900 the government had established about 150 boarding schools (including twenty-five off-reservation schools) as well as another 150 day schools for about 21,500

Native American children. Officials sought to remove every Indian child to a boarding school for a period of at least three years.⁴

The subject of Indian boarding schools has generated many scholarly and autobiographical works. Some scholars have focused on the origins of assimilation policy, the founding of boarding schools, and the often oppressive nature of the schools.⁵ Though critical of the overall assimilation policy, other writers have focused on the unintended and seemingly positive consequences of the boarding schools—the fostering of a strong peer culture and the accompanying emergence of a pan-Indian identity. Several scholars have demonstrated the ways in which Indian communities began to embrace and use some of the boarding schools for their own benefit and purposes.⁶ This literature has had a significant impact in moving the field away from seeing Indian peoples as simply passive and reactive victims of government policy. Yet, curiously, scholars have focused only briefly on how Indian children were taken to boarding schools.⁷ This essay and the larger project from which it derives—comparing the role of white women in the removal of indigenous children from their families and homes in the United States and Australia—is an attempt to examine Indian child removal not just as a by-product of the federal Indian policy of assimilation, but as a key practice of colonialism.⁸

Countless Indian autobiographies and archival records include accounts of the forced removal of children to boarding schools. For example, when she was growing up on the Navajo Reservation in the early twentieth century, Navajo (Diné) Rose Mitchell recalls: “the agents were sending out police on horseback to locate children to enroll [in school]. The stories we heard frightened us; I guess some children were snatched up and hauled over there because the policemen came across them while they were out herding, hauling water, or doing other things for the family. So we started to hide ourselves in different places whenever we saw strangers coming toward where we were living.”⁹ As a Hopi child growing up at the Oraibi village, Helen Sekaquaptewa remembers how, “Very early one morning toward the end of October, 1906, we awoke to find our camp surrounded by troops who had come during the night from Keams Canyon. Superintendent Lemmon...told the men...that the government

had reached the limit of its patience; that the children would have to go to school....All children of school age were lined up to be registered and taken away to school....We were taken to the schoolhouse in New Oraibi, with military escort.” The next day government authorities, along with a military escort, loaded Helen and 81 other Hopi children onto wagons and took them to Keams Canyon Boarding School.¹⁰

Yet not all Indian children’s journeys to the boarding schools were forced. Rose Mitchell relates in her autobiography, in fact, that she begged her parents to let her attend school, and she describes in later chapters her willingness to allow some of her own children to attend boarding schools.¹¹ Many Indian authors also recount their Indian school days with a degree of nostalgia and fondness for certain aspects of their experience.¹² Over time, as many scholars have shown, some Indian communities began to send their children to the schools willingly, even to claim the schools as their own.¹³

Although some Indian peoples grew to accept the schools, we should not lose sight of the initial motivation for establishing the schools and the ways in which the government forced many Indian children to attend them. The case of the Mescalero Apaches in the late nineteenth century illustrates the coercive nature of the assimilation policy in practice. When the acting Indian Agent at the reservation in New Mexico encountered resistance from “the men to having their hair cut, and from...the women to having their children compelled to attend school....The deprivation of supplies and the arrest of the old women soon worked a change. Willing or unwilling[,] every child five years of age was forced into school.”¹⁴ To compel Indian parents to send their children to school, government agents commonly withheld annuity goods, including food, that had been guaranteed by treaties.¹⁵

As evident in the methods government authorities employed, the policy of Indian child removal possessed a harshly punitive quality. In fact, government efforts to punish Indians for their past resistance and to prevent their future opposition appear to have strongly motivated officials to adopt Indian child removal as policy. Government officials and reformers believed that, as the WNIA put it, “The Indians at Carlisle

and Hampton [Institutes] are rising; and the more they rise there, the less uprising there will be on the Plains.”¹⁶ The government, in fact, targeted particularly recalcitrant Indian nations for child removal. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs expressly ordered Pratt to obtain children from two Great Plains reservations with hostile Indians, the Spotted Tail agency among the Lakotas and the Red Cloud agency of Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho people, “saying that the children, if brought east, would become hostages for tribal good behavior.”¹⁷

As American Indian child removal became systematized as federal policy, many white middle-class women became intent on addressing what they saw as the plight of Indian women. Several seasoned women reformers formed the WNIA in 1879, and it would play an influential role in moving the government to adopt an assimilation policy. Some of the historiography on the WNIA and other white women involved in Indian reform has characterized the women reformers in much the same terms as they represented themselves—as admirable champions for an oppressed race.¹⁸ Yet other women’s historians have critiqued the ways in which white women sought to impose a notion of nineteenth-century white middle-class ideals on Indian women.¹⁹ Many scholars have examined how native women understood and negotiated white women’s reform efforts, finding that native women strategically selected what they found useful in the white women’s reform agenda.²⁰ In general, most women’s historians have agreed that white women’s reform for Indian women was well-meaning but ultimately ethnocentric and limiting. An analysis of white women’s role in American Indian child removal, however, reveals a more sinister side to white women’s reform efforts.

In the face of ideologies that deemed women’s role to be in the home, white women often justified their political reform activity by asserting the need for their traditional feminine values and skills as mothers to be extended beyond the home into society to uplift women and children of other races and classes whom they characterized as oppressed. For example, the WNIA’s president, Amelia S. Quinton, in 1899 proclaimed the WNIA to be the “nation’s...motherhood for helping, saving the native race.”²¹ In recent decades, many women’s historians have dubbed

Quinton's perspective "maternalism" and gone on to examine maternalist discourse and politics. Except for the work of Benson Tong, Karen Anderson, and Peggy Pascoe, however, most American scholarship on maternalism has focused on middle-class white women reformers in the eastern United States and their activism on behalf of poor single mothers.²² As defined by Sonya Michel, *maternalism* is a "politics that claims a position of authority for women in their 'natural' roles as wives and mothers and seeks to protect the health and welfare of women and children."²³ Women's historians who have studied maternalism argue, as does Michel, that the "politics of maternalism...accepted the notion that mothers properly belonged at home with their children."²⁴ Indeed, much of the work carried out by eastern white women maternalists revolved around a campaign for mother's pensions, which enshrined in legislation the notion that poor single mothers belonged in the home with their children, not in the paid workforce.²⁵ As this essay makes evident, however, maternalism by white women on behalf of American Indian women in the American West manifested itself quite differently.

Instead of promoting the notion that "mothers properly belonged at home with their children," most reformers who advocated for Indian women supported the removal of the latter's children. Because motherhood and maternalism was such a crucial construct to white women's identities and reform efforts, one might expect to find such women in opposition to removing indigenous children to institutions. Instead, many reformers supported the position of reformer and government administrator Estelle Reel, who affirmed that "the Indian child must be placed in school before the habits of barbarous life have become fixed, and there he must be kept until contact with our life has taught him to abandon his savage ways and walk in the path of Christian civilization."²⁶

Many white women reformers who worked as teachers or matrons within the boarding schools envisioned themselves as the children's surrogate mothers, who would properly train indigenous children for their new roles in society. Eleanor E. Bryan, a matron at the boarding school in Grand Junction, Colorado, asserted,

I would raise the dignity of matronhood and compare it favorably with that of motherhood....

[The matron] of our Indian Government schools...must try to accomplish the same for her Indian girls and boys as the sweet and noble mothers of our land achieve for their children. When a little child at the tender age of 3 or 4 years is taken from its Indian mother, placed within a boarding school, and kept there until he has attained the age of 21, if, during that period, he has been deprived of a good school mother's refining influence and love, he has necessarily missed from his character an additional force he should have known.²⁷

In fact, the government's need for personnel to carry out assimilation policy dovetailed with white women's own ambitions. White women comprised the majority of boarding school employees and acted as the primary day-to-day contacts with indigenous children who had been removed and institutionalized.²⁸ The government seemed to agree with most reformers that middle-class white women were particularly suited to act as "the great white mother" to the Indian "race."

Some white women played an active role in Indian child removal—not just as caregivers of removed Indian children but as their actual *recruiters*, the euphemistic term reformers used. Alice Fletcher, a reformer and early ethnologist, hired on with Captain Pratt in 1882 to remove Plains Indian children to attend both Carlisle and Hampton Institutes.²⁹ It is hard to know exactly how many children Fletcher "recruited" over the course of several years. In 1882 alone, she removed at least thirty-six Omaha children. Amelia Stone Quinton lauded Fletcher for bringing these Omaha children to Carlisle and Hampton, "herself raising \$1800 with which to meet the expenses of other Indians who begged to join the party and seek an education. She persuaded General Armstrong to undertake at the Hampton school, the training of young Indian married couples, in cottages built by funds she raised for their training, and by the success of this experiment introduced the department of Indian Home Building into the Women's National Indian Association."³⁰

In her first decades of work with American Indians, Fletcher subscribed to a maternalist ideology, casting herself as mother to her Indian children. She repeatedly told audiences that she had first found the Omahas in 1881, “waiting for her to act ‘with all the confidence of children for their mother.’”³¹ Fletcher remarked in 1891, “The Indians cling to me like children, and I must and will protect them.”³² Joan Mark asserts that given Fletcher’s traumatic childhood, which showed signs of abuse by a stern stepfather, she had difficulty relating to other people in any way except as “a dependent child or as a mother.” Fletcher, according to Mark, felt “comfortable” in the role of mother, “bringing aid and giving instructions, firmly directing other people’s lives.”³³ Given the widespread practice of maternalism in the late nineteenth century among white women, Fletcher’s maternalist impulses should be examined as part of a broad social current rather than simply the result of individual psychological development.

Estelle Reel also played an active role in Indian child removal. Emerging from the women’s reform movements of the late nineteenth century, Reel was superintendent of Indian education from 1898 to 1910. One of her major efforts in her early years in office was the promotion of a compulsory schooling law for Indian children. “If the Indian will not accept the opportunities for elevation and civilization so generously offered him,” Reel asserted, “the strong hand of the law should be evoked and the pupil forced to receive an education whether his parents will it or not.”³⁴

Reel’s personal papers reveal her to be a consummate politician; she carefully crafted her public image by penning articles about herself in the third person, then having journalists print them under their own by-lines. In fact the paper that printed her obituary prefaced it by saying, “This article was written several years ago by [Estelle Reel], with the apparent intention that it be used as her obituary. It was completed except for a blank space where the date of her death was to be inserted.”³⁵

In her articles, Reel frequently referred to her role in taking Indian children to boarding schools. She often portrayed herself as a motherly figure who could easily convince the Indians to relinquish their children

to her care. In “Woman’s Great Work for the Government,” she claimed, “Miss Reel is popular with the Indians. She is known as the ‘Big White Squaw from Washington.’ So fond of her are some of the Indians that they are willing she should take their children away, and one Indian woman insisted that she should carry a pair of fat papooses to President Roosevelt. She doesn’t have to bribe the Indians with promises and presents to send their children to school now.”³⁶

Many other white women also actively promoted the removal of Indian children. Cora Folsom, for example, who worked in the Indian education division of Hampton Institute in Virginia for over forty years, made over a dozen “recruiting” trips to the west.³⁷ Thus white women played an integral role in the practice of Indian child removal, both as active “recruiters” and as the caretakers of the children removed to the schools.

Both reformers and officials employed a rhetoric of humanitarianism in justifying their policies of Indian child removal. They routinely characterized the removal of American Indian children as an act of benevolence aimed at “rescuing the children and youth from barbarism or savagery.”³⁸ This rhetoric rested on a racialized discourse that deemed indigenous peoples to be lower on the scale of humanity than white Anglo-Saxon, middle-class Protestants. As both reformer and anthropologist, Alice Fletcher played a key role in constructing this racial hierarchy. For example, in her lecture “Our Duty Toward Dependent Races,” Fletcher asserted,

In this march of progress thru the centuries the victory has been with the race that was able to develop those mental forces by which man is lifted above his natural life, which enabled him to discern the value of work....

Looking back over the ages, there is little doubt that to the white race belong the great achievements of human progress. The religions of the world have sprung from this branch of the human family, the higher arts and sciences are its children, and it is also true that this race has held possession of the best portions of the Earth’s surface.³⁹

While Fletcher and other reformers associated the “white race” with “the great achievements of human progress,” they often equated indigeneity with backwardness, poverty, immorality, and parental neglect. For example, the missionary John Lowrie argued that civilization “can only be effectually accomplished by taking [Indian children] away from the demoralizing & enervating atmosphere of camp life & Res[ervation] surroundings.”⁴⁰

Agreeing with Lowrie, many white women maternalists supported indigenous child removal based on several powerful and interrelated tropes. First, they portrayed indigenous women as the powerless drudges of their men. Mary Disette, who worked for many years at Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico, pronounced that in Indian tribes “the male is supreme and all that contributes to his comfort or pleasure is his by right of his male supremacy. The female is taught this from early childhood.”⁴¹ Helen Gibson Stockdell, a missionary for the Trinity Mission at Lemhi Indian Agency, in Idaho, believed that Indian women “make slaves of themselves for the men.”⁴²

This trope rested on another related one: the belief that sexual and marriage practices among indigenous groups particularly degraded indigenous women. In Alaska, the WNIA alleged, “girls from a few months old and upward are sold as wives,” and “girls from 10 to 15 years of age are rented by their parents to white men.” WNIA reformers took over the custody of some of these Native Alaskan girls whom they considered “deserted child-wives” because, they argued, such girls were “without kindred who care for [their] welfare.”⁴³ Helen Tyler Griswold claimed with alarm that among the Utes “Polygamy is common.... The men marry at 18 and the women at from 13 to 16. A Ute squaw who remains unmarried at 20 is a pariah in the tribe, and is well on the way toward being condemned to death as a witch ere she is 40 years old.”⁴⁴

In other contexts, white women reformers represented indigenous women not as the passive victims of indigenous male sexual privilege but as sexually immoral actors. In a typical comment, Amelia Quinton, the WNIA’s president, claimed that Navajo women were promiscuous and therefore “good morals are next to impossible. For children from

such homes, the day school can do far less than the boarding school.”⁴⁵ Many reformers believed it was essential to remove Indian children, particularly girls, from their families to protect them from what white women perceived to be oppression, abuse, and immorality.

Some white women regularly employed another common trope, alleging that indigenous women did not know how to properly care for their children. Catherine Haun, for example, as she traveled across the continent to settle in the West in the nineteenth century, described a scene of an American Indian mother and her child: “The squaws carried their papposes [sic] in queer little canopied baskets suspended upon their backs by a band around their heads and across their foreheads. The infant was snugly bound, mummy-fashion with only its head free. It was here that I first saw a bit of remarkable maternal discipline, peculiar to most of the Indian tribes. The child cried whereupon the mother... stood it up against a tree and dashed water in the poor little creature’s face.”⁴⁶ White female reformers and missionaries expressly condemned the use of cradle boards, these “queer little canopied baskets.” One missionary, Miss Howard, wrote, “I found a woman with a sick baby not yet three weeks old; of course it was strapped upon a board; and it was moaning with fever.”⁴⁷

Reformers also implied that indigenous women did not provide a proper home for the upbringing of their children. Loulie Taylor, describing her experiences at Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho, wrote,

we had...the advantage of seeing just how the Indian lives in his tepee, and what had been the life of these children before coming to the mission.

What a contrast! The smoking fire in the centre of the tepee, and on it the pot of soup stirred by the not over-clean squaw, whose black hair fell in as she stirred; men, women, and children lolling on the ground, a few blankets the only furnishing of the tepee; and then to think of the neat, comfortable home at the mission, with the uplifting of its daily prayer offered to their Great Spirit, our Heavenly Father. We realized what a blessed

work these faithful missionaries...were doing in giving to these poor, neglected children...some of the light and blessing that had been given to them.⁴⁸

Thus, at the same time as they sacralized and politicized white motherhood, many white women activists pathologized indigenous motherhood, constructing indigenous mothers as degraded and sexually immoral, misguided and negligent, and even cruel and unloving. Such representations contributed to justifying state policies of indigenous child removal. “If we do not educate Indian children to our civilized life,” argued the WNIA, “their parents will continue to educate them to their savagery.”⁴⁹

To many in the WNIA, and other reformers, Native American mothers had failed to fulfill their motherly role. It was thus necessary for white women to step in as surrogate mothers. As one WNIA article put it, the Indian “girl has never had a bath in her life; she has never slept in a bed or eaten from a table; was never in childhood taught to say a prayer or tenderly kissed and snugly tucked into bed.... She does not know a single letter of the alphabet, or a hymn. She has never been to a birthday party, nor a Thanksgiving dinner, nor a Fourth of July celebration; she has never heard the sweet story of Christmas.... Who will carry the light to these dark sisters?”⁵⁰ Many WNIA members and other reformers believed that white women, in either institutions or homes, would make better mothers for Indian children, at least until Indian women could be properly trained. Mary Watkins, a teacher at Mesa Grande School in California, fantasized, “Think of sending *true* women to teach the poor, ignorant, mothers whose babies are born but to *die* or grow up to disgrace their Ind. homes after \$2000.00 of Govt money has been spent on them.”⁵¹ As this comment suggests, many reformers seemed to evince little sympathy for the Indian women who were asked to relinquish their children. Indeed, many white women activists deemed Indian children to be free for the taking. In an article she titled “My Indian Children,” Alice Larery, a missionary at the Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho, asserted, “No longer are [the Indian children at the mission school] merely the children of a few isolated Indian tribes but...[they] have become members of the world’s great family of children.”⁵²

Maternalist discourse also rested on the notion that proper motherhood formed the basis for a sound, efficient, and orderly nation. Thus many reformers believed that if they could remove young indigenous girls and train the future mothers of an indigenous nation, they could radically transform the Indian “race.” Estelle Reel argued, “industrial training will make...the Indian girl more motherly. This is the kind of girl we want—the one who will exercise the greatest influence in moulding [sic] the character of the nation.... Thus will they become useful members of this great Republic, and if compulsory education is extended to all the tribes, there is little reason to doubt that the ultimate civilization of the race will result.”⁵³

Reel’s comment reveals another underlying motivation for promoting indigenous child removal: to make indigenous children “useful.” Through the “outing” program at most boarding schools, instructors trained the children in various menial labor, then placed them as servants and laborers in white homes.⁵⁴ One white woman corresponded with Alice Fletcher and Carlisle founder Richard Henry Pratt about obtaining an Indian girl as a domestic:

I was seriously thinking it was my duty to take one of the Indian girls—to train for usefulness.... Miss Fletcher wants Mary to have a friend that will be a mother to her perhaps you had as well send her to me....

There is only one thing that I do require, that is, an honest girl.... She is but a child and needs play as well as work. And several years more experience before I would expect her to bear any responsibility.

I do not keep servants, my family is small.... I can teach the Indian girl all the lessons she will want. And I will teach her all kinds of house work by having her assist me, also dress-making.⁵⁵

Although this woman cloaked her request in the rhetoric of maternalism, her remarks that she would “train [the girl] for usefulness” and would eventually expect the girl to bear some responsibility in the household, as well as her admission that she does not keep servants, all point

to this woman's intention to employ the girl as a servant, for little or no pay. Hence, alongside a desire to punish Indians for their recalcitrance and to prevent their future resistance, a belief that it was necessary to bring Indian people into the modern American economy as cheap laborers also motivated the enactment of child removal policy.

Although white women reformers emphasized the differences between native and white women as mothers, they also routinely evoked motherhood as the universal experience of women that bonded them together. Thus reformers proceeded as if they knew what Indian women wanted and that they could speak for them. Yet, as Patricia Hill Collins points out, "racial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context, not only for racial ethnic women in the United States, but for all women." Collins identifies three main issues that challenged the maternal empowerment of women of color: the struggle to control their own bodies, namely whether to become a mother; "the process of keeping the children that are wanted"; and "pervasive efforts by the dominant group to control children's minds." Collins astutely acknowledges that "physical and/or psychological separation of mothers and children, designed to disempower individuals, forms the basis of a systematic effort to disempower racial ethnic communities."⁵⁶ As Collins's analysis makes clear, motherhood, far from uniting women across lines of color and race as a universalizing experience of women, became a primary force for dividing white from indigenous women.

Many indigenous women fiercely resisted the removal of their children. Among the Mescalero Apaches, "Every possible expedient was resorted to by [the women] to keep their children from school." Agent V. E. Stottler claimed that Mescalero women "would brazenly deny having children despite the evidence of the accurate census rolls and the ticket on which they had for years drawn rations. Children were hidden out in the bushes; drugs were given them to unfit them for school; bodily infirmities were simulated, and some parents absolutely refused to bring their children in."⁵⁷

Many Indian women also bitterly contested the maternalism of white women. Her public persona as the "Big White Squaw" aside, Estelle Reel

admitted in her reports the great difficulty she had working with Indian women. The Indian mother, she wrote, is “much more opposed, as a rule, to allowing her children to accept the white man’s civilization, than is her spouse.”⁵⁸

One Omaha woman, Lena Springer, wrote in great anger to Captain Pratt at Carlisle regarding what she considered to be Alice Fletcher’s role in the death of her daughter, Alice, at Carlisle: “I had [no] idea of sending my children there, but Miss Fletcher got round Elsie and persuaded her to go and then Alice wanted to go with her. It was Miss Fletcher’s doings that they went, and now my husband is grieving all the time. I do not see why the government put so much power and confidence in Miss Fletcher, as we think she does no good to the Omahas but much harm. She cannot be trusted. Please do not deny our request, if you have any regard to a Father’s and Mother’s feelings.”⁵⁹

Other Native American women tried to appeal to white women using the very maternalist rhetoric favored by them. The Indian secretary of a local branch of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in Warm Springs, Arizona, for example, emphasized that “the mother, be she white or red, has the same heart-aches over her boys.”⁶⁰ Clearly motherhood became a primary battleground upon which native women fought to secure their rights to raise their own children. In doing so, they articulated a new type of maternalism. As Lisa Udel reveals in her article “The Politics of Native Women’s Motherwork,” motherhood and maternal politics have thus been integral to Native American women’s activism.⁶¹

As can be seen in the debate among white women of the WNIA that opened this article, some white women themselves contested the removal of indigenous children. White women care-givers and the indigenous children in their care often developed complicated relationships that sometimes undermined colonial aims. Miss Worden, who worked at the Santee School in Nebraska, believed that her “highest aim is to fit these boys and girls for work among their own people. We do not believe in having them absorbed in Eastern civilization. We propose to teach the fifth commandment at Santee. And how can boys and girls honor their fathers and mothers if they are not where their parents are?”⁶² Within

these “intimacies of empire,” as Ann Laura Stoler refers to them, colonial strategies of rule were enacted and reinforced, but they were also constantly negotiated and contested. Indeed, through their interactions with indigenous children and women, many white women developed their own critique of indigenous child removal policy, and by the mid-twentieth century they had taken steps to oppose it formally.⁶³

A few critics also came from the ranks of women reformers who had no association with the boarding schools. Constance Goddard DuBois became involved in the Connecticut Indian Association, a branch of the WNIA. In 1897 she ventured to southern California for a summer, where she worked to help the Luiseño and Diegueño peoples of the area. Thereafter she spent almost every summer with them and almost every winter advocating their cause. In the early 1900s, she conducted fieldwork on the Diegueños and other Mission Indians off and on under the direction of Alfred Kroeber, head of the University of California’s Anthropology Department in Berkeley and also recorded songs and myths and collected “specimens” for Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History.⁶⁴ Through her close association with a group of indigenous people, and no doubt through her exposure to the new anthropological theories of her day that promoted cultural relativism over a belief in cultural evolution, DuBois became vehemently opposed to child removal. She particularly targeted Reel’s proposed compulsory schooling law for Indian children.

Instead of relying on maternalist rhetoric, DuBois used what we might call a materialist and an equal rights discourse to counter Reel’s proposed law. First she argued that the law would “turn the Indians into a scattered remnant of homeless vagrants, cheap laborers, or paupers, without land.” Then, she challenged the notion that extending a compulsory school law to Indians was no different than similar laws for white children. “No white child can be forcibly carried from his home without the consent of his parents,” wrote DuBois, “taken to a school inaccessible and remote, and kept a prisoner under close restraint during the term of his education.” She concluded, “let no law be placed upon our statute books that shall mete out to the Indian treatment which would

outrage every sentiment of humanity if applied to ourselves.” DuBois agreed that Indians should be provided with education, but she insisted that “the school should be brought to the Indian, not the Indian to the school.”⁶⁵ DuBois’ opposition to Indian child removal did not stem from maternalist sentiment, which emphasized differences between native and white women; instead, it was grounded on the principle that Indian children and their parents deserved equal treatment under the law.

As we scrutinize the work of white women who advocated the removal of American Indian children to institutions, we can see the inadequacy of maternalism as it is currently defined. For all their maternal rhetoric, the maternalism practiced by many reformers in the West looked quite different from that practiced by white middle-class women in the East. Rather than promoting a motherly and domestic role for American Indian women, reformers participated in dispossessing Indian women of their children. White women maternalists in the West did not “accept the notion that mothers properly belonged at home with their children.” This does not mean, however, that the concept of maternalism is useless in studying western women’s history; rather, it reveals the limited nature of many current studies of maternalism and the need to redefine and transform the concept. Further work on maternalism in the West will challenge dominant narratives about maternalism that have derived primarily from studies in the East and have largely focused on class rather than race. The distinctive racial dynamics of the American West—that complicate and transcend the black-white dichotomy of the East—shifted maternalist efforts in a different direction than similar campaigns in the East that targeted working-class women.

At the same time, attention to maternalism may enrich the field of western women’s history. The politics of maternalism enabled many white women in the West to gain positions of power and influence, but often this was achieved by denying the actual practice of mothering to the Indian women for whom they supposedly spoke. Through their work on behalf of Indian women in the West, reformers often couched their work in benevolent and charitable terms. As historians we would be shirking our scholarly responsibilities if we simply accepted these women’s

pronouncements as proof of their concern for Indian women. A steadfast belief in the superiority of white womanhood and a desire to reform and control Indian women permeated white women's pronouncements about rescue work.

For some historians it is easy to dismiss these charges by asserting the "woman of her times" argument. As this argument goes, these women were simply unable to escape the racial ideologies of their era, and it is therefore wrong to judge them by contemporary racial ideologies. Yet the active participation of white women in shaping these ideologies, as well as the presence of other white women activists who challenged maternalist practices, shows that the "woman of her times" argument holds up little better than the man of his times thesis. As Louise Newman puts it, "racism was not just an unfortunate sideshow in the performances of feminist theory. Rather it was center stage: an integral constitutive element."⁶⁶ Notions of racial difference and hierarchy were fundamental to white women's maternalism in the American West and, in turn, maternalism was a key element in shaping racial ideologies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

NOTES

1. *Annual Meeting and Report of the Women's National Indian Association*, hereafter cited as *WNIA Report* (Philadelphia: December 1892).
2. This phrase derives from an article in the *WNIA's* publication, *The Indian's Friend* 16, no. 5 (January 1904): 5. The *WNIA* must have been playing on the common phrase the "Great White Father," a term the government often asserted that Indians used to refer to the federal government.
3. Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, ed. Robert Utley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964).
4. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 57-58.
5. See, for example, Robert Utley's introduction to Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*; Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Adams, *Education for Extinction*; Robert A. Trennert Jr., *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Clyde Ellis, *To Change Them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding School, 1893-1920* (Norman:

- University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Scott Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School, 1898–1933* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999). More general histories of Indian education that include material on the boarding schools include Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination, 1928–1973* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974); David H. DeJong, *Promises of the Past: A History of Indian Education in the United States* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993).
6. See, for example, Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Michael Coleman, *American Indian Children at School, 1850–1930* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993); Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1971). For a beautifully produced and moving book that represents all these approaches, see Margaret Archuleta, Brenda Child, and Tsianina Lomawaima, eds., *Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences, 1879–2000* (Phoenix, AZ: Heard Museum, 2000).
 7. I became interested in this issue when I began to do comparative work on indigenous and women's history in the United States and Australia. On my first research trip to Australia in 1998, I became immediately aware of the "Stolen Generations" as a contemporary and a historical issue in Australia. Aboriginal historians' focus on the actual removal of children helped shift my attention away from looking at assimilation policy or boarding schools, per se, to the actual motivation, justification, and practice of white officials taking Indian children to boarding schools. Moreover, my research into indigenous child removal in Australia encouraged me to look at the Indian boarding school system as a practice of colonialism, not just as American federal Indian policy.
 8. See Margaret Jacobs, "Indian Boarding Schools in Comparative Perspective: The Removal of Indigenous Children in the U.S. and Australia, 1880–1940," in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences*, ed. Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Margaret Jacobs and Victoria Haskins, "Stolen Generations and Vanishing Indians: The Removal of Indigenous Children as a Weapon of War in the United States and Australia, 1870–1940," in *Children and War*, ed. James Marten (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 227–41.
 9. Rose Mitchell, *Tall Woman: The Life Story of Rose Mitchell, a Navajo Woman, c. 1874–1977*, ed. Charlotte J. Frisbie (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 61–62.
 10. Helen Sekaquaptewa, *Me and Mine: The Life Story of Helen Sekaquaptewa*, as told to Louise Udall (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1969), 91–92.
 11. Mitchell, *Tall Woman*.
 12. See, for example, Francis La Flesche, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*, foreword by David Baerreis (1900; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); Sekaquaptewa, *Me and Mine*; Polingaysi Qoyawayma (Elizabeth Q. White), *No Turning Back: A Hopi Indian Woman's Struggle to Live in Two Worlds*, as told to Vada Carlson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964).
 13. See, for example, Child, *Boarding School Seasons*; Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light*; Ellis, *To Change Them Forever*; Riney, *Rapid City Indian School*.

14. *The Indian's Friend* 10, no. 1 (September 1897): 10. See also Eve Ball, with Nora Henn and Lynda A. Sánchez, *Indeh: An Apache Odyssey* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 219. Ball notes that at Mescalero, after building a boarding school on the reservation in 1884, agents took children forcibly to school and “incarcerated” them there; “To prevent their escape the windows were nailed shut” (219).
15. See, for example, Leo Crane, *Indians of the Enchanted Desert* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1925); Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education, 1871–1982* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1997).
16. *The Indian's Friend* 3, no. 4 (December 1890): 4.
17. Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 202; also see 220 and 227.
18. See particularly Valerie Mathes, “Nineteenth-Century Women and Reform: The Women’s National Indian Association,” *American Indian Quarterly* 14 (1990): 1–18; Helen Wanken, “‘Woman’s Sphere’ and Indian Reform: The Women’s National Indian Association, 1879–1901” (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1981); Valerie Mathes, *Helen Hunt Jackson and Her Indian Reform Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).
19. See Helen M. Bannan, *‘True Womanhood’ on the Reservation: Field Matrons in the U.S. Indian Service*, Southwest Institute for Research on Women, working paper no. 18 (Tucson, AZ: Women’s Studies, 1984); Lisa Emmerich, “‘To respect and love and seek the ways of white women’: Field Matrons, the Office of Indian Affairs, and Civilization Policy, 1890–1938” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1987); Theda Perdue, “Southern Indians and the Cult of True Womanhood,” in *The Web of Southern Social Relations*, ed. Walter J. Fraser et al. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 35–51.
20. Lisa Emmerich, “‘Right in the Midst of My Own People’: Native American Women and the Field Matron Program,” *American Indian Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1991): 201–16; Carol Devens, “‘If We Get the Girls, We Get the Race’: Missionary Education of Native American Girls,” *Journal of World History* 3, no. 2 (1992): 219–37; Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light*; Devon Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851–1909* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Margaret Jacobs, “Resistance to Rescue: The Indians of Bahapki and Mrs. Annie E. K. Bidwell,” in *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women’s West*, ed. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 230–51; Margaret Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879–1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Amanda J. Cobb, *Listening to Our Grandmothers’ Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Girls, 1852–1949* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
21. *The Indian's Friend* 1, no. 5 (January 1889).
22. Benson Tong, *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.: Omaha Indian Leader and Reformer* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 61; Karen Anderson, “Changing Woman: Maternalist Politics and ‘Racial Rehabilitation’ in the U.S. West,” in *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, ed. Valerie J. Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 148–59; Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*. For literature on maternalism in the East, see Sonya Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Gwendolyn

- Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917–1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), especially 5–6; Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and Diane Taylor, eds., *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).
23. Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, footnote 16, 311.
 24. Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, 3. See also 18–20, 73–87, 89.
 25. See particularly Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*.
 26. “Her Work for the Indians: Miss Estelle Reel, Genl Supt of Indian Schools, talks interestingly regarding Indian matters, Favors compulsory education and industrial training,” n.d., Estelle Reel papers, H6–110, Box 1, “Articles” folder, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, WY (hereafter cited as wsa).
 27. Report of the Supt of Indian Schools for 1898 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 33, Papers of Estelle Reel, MS 120, Box 2, Folder 70, Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture (formerly Cheney-Cowles Museum), Spokane, WA (hereafter cited as EWSHS).
 28. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 82–94.
 29. “Draft of publication, ‘Going Home with the Indians,’” 1882, Alice Fletcher Papers, Box 6, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Fletcher Papers).
 30. Amelia Stone Quinton, “Care of the Indian,” in *Woman's Work in America*, ed. Annie Nathan Meyer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1891), 376.
 31. Quoted in Joan Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 107–08.
 32. Quoted in Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*, 197.
 33. Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*, 3–16, quote 14.
 34. Report of the Supt of Indian Schools (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), 15, Papers of Estelle Reed, MS 120, Box 2, Folder 72, EWSHS. For more on Reel, see K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “Estelle Reel, Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1898–1910: Politics, Curriculum, and Land,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 35 (Spring 1996): 5–31.
 35. “Mrs. Cort Meyer Prepared Own Obituary,” *Toppenish (WA) Review*, 6 August 1959, Papers of Estelle Reed, MS 120, Box 1, Folder 6, EWSHS.
 36. “Woman's Great Work for the Government,” draft of article, n.d., Estelle Reel Papers, Box 1, “Articles” folder, wsa.
 37. Donal F. Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877–1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 199, 250–52.
 38. T.J. Morgan, “Indian Contract Schools,” *Baptist Home Mission Monthly* 18, no. 2 (December 1896): 392.

39. Alice Fletcher, "Our Duty Toward Dependent Races," draft of lecture, n.d., Fletcher Papers, Box 11.
40. Quoted in Devens, "If We Get the Girls," 158.
41. Dissette to Miss Willard, 3 March 1924, Indian Rights Association papers (Glen Rock, NJ: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1975), reel 40.
42. Helen Gibson Stockdell, "Woman's Work for Women on the Lemhi Reservation," *The Woman's Auxiliary* 67, no. 1 (January 1902): 53–54, MSS 91, Box 64, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Idaho, Special Collections, Boise State University, ID.
43. *The Indian's Friend* 1, no. 7 (March 1889).
44. Helen Tyler Griswold, "Utes of Colorado," *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, 26 January 1902, Papers of Estelle Reed, Box 1, Folder 41, Newspaper Clippings, EWSHS.
45. *The Indian's Friend* 3, no. 10 (June 1891): 4.
46. Catherine Haun, "A Woman's Trip Across the Plains in 1849," in *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, ed. Lillian Schlissel (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 174–75.
47. *WNIA Report* (Philadelphia: November 1884), 33–34.
48. Loulie Taylor, "What a Diocesan Officer Saw on an Indian Reservation," *The Woman's Auxiliary* 67, no. 3 (March 1902): 208–09, MSS 91, Box 64, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Idaho.
49. *The Indian's Friend* 2, no. 2 (October 1889): 1.
50. *The Indian's Friend* 12, no. 4 (December 1899): 10.
51. Letter from Mary Watkins, Mesa Grande school, to Charles Lummis, 1 August 1902, Papers of Charles Lummis, 1.1.4543, Braun Library, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, CA.
52. Alice M. Larey, "My Indian Children," *The Woman's Auxiliary* 87 (October 1922): 653, MSS 91, Box 64, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Idaho.
53. "Her Work for the Indians: Miss Estelle Reel, Genl Supt of Indian Schools, talks interestingly regarding Indian matters, Favors compulsory education and industrial training," n.d., Estelle Reed Papers, Box 1, "Articles" folder, wsa.
54. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 54, 155–63.
55. Mrs Young to Pratt, 12 May 1883, Fletcher Papers, Box 1.
56. Patricia Hill Collins, "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood," in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey (New York: Routledge, 1994), 45, 53, 54.
57. *The Indian's Friend* 10, no. 1 (September 1897): 10.
58. Untitled draft of article, beginning with "She believes in giving the Indian child..." n.d., Estelle Reed Papers, Box 1, "Articles" folder, wsa.
59. James Springer and Lena (signed Lenora) Springer to Pratt, 20 November 1883, Fletcher Papers, Box 1.
60. *WNIA Report* (1897), 26.
61. Lisa J. Udel, "Revision and Resistance: The Politics of Native Women's Motherwork," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12, no. 2 (2001): 43–62.
62. *Proceedings of the 11th Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indian* (1893), 30.

63. See Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 829–66.
64. See Kroeber to DuBois, 4 December 1902, 15 December 1902, 22 December 1902, 6 Feb 1903, 19 Feb 1903, 14 March 1903, 19 May 1906, 29 May 1906, 20 and 27 June 1906; and Wissler to DuBois, 23 June 1905; in Constance Goddard DuBois Papers, #9167, Division of Rare Books and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York, formerly located at the Huntington Free Library, Bronx, New York.
65. Constance Goddard DuBois, "A New Phase of Indian Education," *City and State* (7 June 1900): 363; Papers of Estelle Reed, Box 1, Folder 30, Newspaper Clippings, ewshs. As far as I can tell, DuBois was successful in preventing the passage of this law.
66. Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 183.

