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“ABORIGINALLY YOURS”: THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN INDIANS  
AND U.S. CITIZENSHIP, 1890-1924

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degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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AND U.S. CITIZENSHIP, 1890-1924

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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## Abstract

In 1890, the last spasm of Indian-U.S. military conflict at Wounded Knee convulsed Pine Ridge reservation. A Santee Sioux physician, Charles Eastman witnessed the massacre of approximately three hundred members of a Minneconjou Sioux band led by Big Foot, mostly women and children. He doubted the complaints of one faction of reservation tribal leaders and later recounted how several residents regaled him with “wrongs, real or fancied,” committed by responsible officials on the reservation, or by their connivance.” Eastman disavowed the stories and retained his belief that “a great government” like the United States cherished its guardianship of “a race made helpless by lack of education and of legal safeguards.” He published these interpretations of the Ghost Dance movement in 1917, after years of firsthand experience with federal Indian policy. Almost three decades after the incident, Eastman acknowledged his naiveté. “At that time,” he recollected, “I had not dreamed what American politics really is, and I had the most exalted admiration for our noted public men.”<sup>1</sup>

His public life had been dedicated to improving the condition of Native people. Eastman worked with progressive reformers who, like himself, believed in the power of Christian civilization and democracy to improve the condition of Indians. These “Friends of the Indian” organizations abhorred massacres of Indians and the institutional disgrace that Indian reservations signified. During the Progressive Era 1890-1917, Eastman helped found a political organization of Native

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of An Indian*, (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1917), 117-118.

Progressive reformers, the Society of American Indians (SAI), in 1910. They came to know the political and racial power structure of the United States as it was shaped by two wars, the Spanish American War and World War I. The SAI pushed for assimilation with consent, a racial uplift created with Indian participation and with respect for Indians as human beings. With a lifespan of less than fifteen years, the SAI's anti-climactic implosion revealed the elusiveness of full citizenship and the dismal record of social reform during World War I.

Civilizing an Indian--shifting him from "savagery into citizenship"--was a dangerous undertaking in 1895, but a moral obligation, nonetheless, stated Merrill Gates, president of both Amherst College and the Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indian. Change his identity, take him "out of the blanket and into trousers," teach him the value of work and of private property—these alterations will make the Indian ready for United States citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Superficial symbols perhaps, but such thinking dominated assimilationist thought well beyond Gates' term, and into the twentieth century.

The process of granting U.S. citizenship to Native Americans defied easy solutions. The transformation appears, at first glance, to be another example of creating the white man's Indian. Students of American Indian history generally regard the era of assimilation, 1890-1933, as the time when white reformers and the federal government pressured native peoples to learn English, adopt Christianity, wear "white" clothes, and abandon tribal communities; to reformers these changes represented the racial progress of the "red race." Ironically, these pressures produced

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<sup>2</sup> Merrill E. Gates, Presidential Address, *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian* (Lake Mohonk: Lake Mohonk Conference, 1896), 11-12.

the first coherent group of Indian political activists in the twentieth century, the SAI. Native professionals and intellectuals emerged after 1890, the year of the Wounded Knee massacre, mostly educated in eastern non-reservation boarding schools. They came together to challenge federal control and to assert a place for Indians in American society. They chose as one of their primary goals, full United States citizenship for all Native Americans. They thus asserted that the legal definition of a citizen Indian was a matter of law, but that it had yet to be determined.<sup>3</sup>

The SAI emerged as the first national Indian-controlled political movement in Indian and United States history. Its activist goal, full citizenship participation, an accommodation to modern American society *on Indians' terms*, remains remarkable, not for its success or failure, but because it demonstrates the convergence of Indians as Indians and as Americans into U.S. political life. The positions that SAI leaders took began to define right for Indians to define an Indian agenda for self-help and racial uplift within the context of American democratic institutions.

Native intellectuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Margot Liberty concluded, had experienced “alien indoctrination” into mainstream American life, while their “traditional” counterparts had not. Her assemblage of Indians “poised between old and new ways of life” imposes a dichotomy that the SAI leaders challenged in their own debates.<sup>4</sup> The leaders of the Society of American Indians, (Liberty’s anthology includes biographies of Charles Eastman and Arthur Parker), were products of Indian boarding schools and white higher education. They never

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<sup>3</sup> See Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 3-14, for a discussion of the formation of a Native intellectual tradition, beginning with the founding members of the SAI.

<sup>4</sup> Margot Liberty, ed., *American Indian Intellectuals of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978, 2002), viii-ix.

saw themselves as intellectuals in possession of “alien” ideas. In fact, American democratic ideals appealed to them. The Native-led organization they helped found pursued inclusion in the civic life of the nation, but without abandoning “Indianness” as they understood it.

More recently, Philip J. Deloria’s emerging body of scholarship on Indian identity addresses what the SAI debated throughout its existence. Native Americans, he notes, lived marginalized from the “Euro-American discourse” on Indian images. He explores the “performative traditions of aboriginal Indian identity” over time, and recognizes that the early twentieth century was a period in which Native Americans attempted to participate in those traditions.<sup>5</sup> While the SAI explores the legal and political terrain for the possibilities of American Indian citizenship, they rejected the peripheral role of ward in favor of a democratic tradition of participatory citizen.

This study examines the issues of cultural identity and rights of access to full participation in American society for American Indians. Leaders of the SAI pushed for Indian assimilation through U.S. citizenship, which is in one respect, a legally defined status and one that the federal government retained the constitutional power to grant. SAI leaders, however, were divided on many issues--policy, assimilation, and the proper path for the development of a viable, modern Indian identity. The official rhetoric of the SAI changed little over its thirteen years of activity. However, the philosophies of its key members did. As tribal members from across the country joined the SAI in an effort to form a pan-Indian “voice” on federal Indian policy, they found disagreement over the process of gaining citizenship for Indians. Issues of tradition versus acculturation challenged the SAI’s philosophy of a unified agenda

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<sup>5</sup> Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 8.

beneficial and representative of all citizen Indians in the United States. On both a philosophical and a personal level, leaders of the SAI had to confront their own issues of Indian identity and the stereotypes of Indians that influenced federal policy. Ultimately, the Society of American Indians foundered on the issue of identity, even as it identified political issues that continue to be important for contemporary communities.

## Introduction

[T]he conduct of the United States Americans toward the natives was inspired by the most chaste affection for legal formalities. It is impossible to destroy men with more respect to the laws of humanity.

-- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*<sup>6</sup>

Over one hundred years ago, Congress debated how it should govern a foreign country whose inhabitants Americans little understood. The conduct of the U.S. military was under scrutiny while, at home, the Senate discussed the justification for their treatment of an initially welcoming population. One senator scanned history for a precedent. He cited a successful domestic war of genocide and racism as the template for a foreign policy of imperialism. Senator Albert Beveridge, a Republican from Indiana, explained as much to the Senate in 1900. While embroiled in a discussion over the proper governance of the Philippines, Beveridge worried the government's will might falter. "Today," he proclaimed, "we have one of the three great ocean possessions of the globe located at the most commanding commercial, naval, and military points in the eastern seas, . . . peopled by a race which civilization demands shall be improved. Shall we abandon it?" He cautioned Americans that the Indian wars served as a warning; citizens failed to exercise patience and hindered the military's war efforts. Only a "continuous and decisive war" was best, but the federal government pursued paradoxical Indian policies. Instead he concluded, "We acted toward the Indians as though we feared them, loved them, hated them—a mingling of

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<sup>6</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, J.P. Mayer, ed., translation by George Lawrence (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 339

foolish sentiment, inaccurate thought, and paralytic purpose. Let us now be instructed by our own experience.”<sup>7</sup>

Political elites, such as Supreme Court justices and members of Congress, defined the civic status of Indians. The process of consolidating the power of a modern nation-state required industrial might, military prowess, imperial initiatives, and a coherent national identity. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States undertook this process of modernization. To generate a sense of “peoplehood,” disparate races, ethnic groups, and immigrants required assimilation into the American civic identity.<sup>8</sup> Whether Indians were fit for such a “civilization” process, remained a topic of dispute. The SAI leadership believed they could refashion Indians as American citizens and challenge the racial hierarchies of the time. But they were not radicals. The Society of American Indians sought admission of the Indian “race” into the body politic instead of a renaissance of tribal sovereignty.

The two most important studies in American Indian history for this time period are from Frederick Hoxie and Hazel Hertzberg. Hoxie saw two distinct phases of Indian assimilation into mainstream American society. He suggested that the promise of full citizenship for Native Americans before 1900 was replaced with partial citizenship of the Progressive Era. Federal Indian policy remains grounded in this inherent civic inequality for native peoples. Reformers worked for an end to the ward status of Indian tribes; allotment posed the solution to the backward tribal

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<sup>7</sup> Congress, Senate, 54<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* (1900), vol. 33, pt. 1, 707.

<sup>8</sup> Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 6.

affiliation that Indians maintained. Once the allotment process proved cumbersome, bureaucratically slow, and rife with corruption, the Indian Bureau, the Secretary of the Interior, and western congressmen joined forces to support the 1906 Burke Act which delayed U.S. citizenship for allottees, and re-affirmed the guardianship role of the federal government over Indians.

Hoxie's focus was on federal Indian policy and non-Indian institutions. He recognized the stories of native activism during this period needed scholarly attention. Federal Indian policy, from its inception a top-down, hierarchical phenomenon, must be seen from native perspectives. The Society of American Indians formed to generate and publicize a pan-Indian voice for policies historically formed without the consent or participation of the tribes. Hoxie also detailed the political culture in which assimilation policy developed from 1800 to 1920, however he gave scant attention to the most important political phenomenon of the early twentieth century for the West: World War I. American entrance into the Great War altered the progressive movement, heightened anti-immigrant and racist sentiments, and challenged free and open discourse. Author David M. Kennedy located within Woodrow Wilson's administration an "overbearing concern for 'correct' opinion, for expression, for language itself, and the creation of an enormous propaganda apparatus to nurture the desired state of mind and excoriate all dissenters."<sup>9</sup> The pressures to prove one's patriotism shaped the SAI leadership and their declaration of Indian readiness for citizenship.

Significant as well were the lingering specter of Reconstruction and the ascriptive citizenship status of African American. By 1877, fully institutionalized

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<sup>9</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 62.



racism characterized civic life in the United States. Reconstruction, the period in which freedmen received citizenship and the right to vote, appeared discredited to white Americans and politicians. The advent of Jim Crow laws signaled outright hostility of the federal government, states, and whites to the concept of civic equality for non-whites. Indian assimilation policy must be understood within the larger framework of racial intolerance. The Congress and the Supreme Court, with the assent of white Americans, had no intention of granting full citizenship to African Americans; therefore, why should Indians, wards of the government, receive it? Numerous examples exist in congressional debates and Supreme Court rulings to indicate the concept of civilization's progress was not abandoned as an overall defining feature of U.S. national identity—the “white race” embodied that success. The reservation policies, grounded in the wardship status of Indians, shifted to assimilationist policies as Hoxie explored them. Christianity, Indian education in boarding schools, piecemeal citizenship under allotment—these features of assimilation emphasized the successful formula of the Christian nation, its inherent superiority to other countries, and its capitalist economic expansion.

Hoxie has also observed that Indian removals and reservation life for “backward” tribes formed the basis for U.S. Indian policy, a kind of domestic imperialism that created dependencies, or wards as Chief Justice John Marshall described Indians. Wardship, the most salient feature of Indians' political status, served as perpetual reminders of defeat and social death for an inferior group unable to counter American expansionism. White Americans preferred to interpret their nation's formation as manifest destiny, a sign of the country's uniqueness and place

in the world. Hoxie, when he looked at Indian citizenship, perceived the centrality of federal guardianship over tribes as possessing the most relevance to federal Indian policy. Guardianship, in his analysis, compromised full citizenship. Instead of supervision and protection of native citizens, “the guardianship concept” had negative consequences for tribes. Hoxie concluded, “It would justify undermining the civil rights of individual Indians and excuse a wide range of state statutes that limited their legal prerogatives.”<sup>10</sup>

Hertzberg’s work, *The Search for an American Indian Identity*, was published in 1971 and presented the first study of pan-Indian movements in the twentieth century. Her study focused on the phenomenon of pan-Indianism as a response to contact with white mainstream pressures for Indian assimilation, or, as white reformers termed it, the “vanishing policy.” Hertzberg emphasized the challenges that reform and religious pan-Indian movements, specifically the SAI and the Native American Church, posed to white America and the nation’s identity as a “melting pot” of cultures where equal opportunity and individual freedom served as the hallmarks of American democracy. As a result of the eastern boarding school experience and contact with Christianity, two movements, one secular, the other religious, emerged in the early 1900s. The author suggested the Indian activists who organized these movements sought to meld “aboriginal and white elements” to forge a modern American Indian identity for themselves. They sought to create for Indians

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<sup>10</sup> Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 213-214.

a “new Indian,” one who, in Hertzberg’s view, would offer a “workable definition of being an Indian and a member of modern society.”<sup>11</sup>

Herzberg wrote with the conviction that the history of pan-Indian movements constituted both Indian history and American history; the accommodation of Indian cultures would produce a syncretism, a complementary blending of the best that native peoples and the nation had to offer each other. Indian activists were deeply committed to the betterment of their people and reflective upon their place in American society. She found the members of the SAI optimistic and hopeful about the contributions Native Americans would make to enrich and invigorate American life in the early decades of the twentieth century. In contrast to Hoxie’s findings on the growing pessimism of federal Indian policy after 1900, Hertzberg found optimism forged by faith in human progress as a defining feature of the SAI, and similar to that of other progressives in education, civil service reform, and the settlement house movement. The “Red Progressives” engaged white institutions with accommodation because they carried, in Hertzberg’s words, “confidence in the essential promise of American life.”<sup>12</sup> Most important the effects of World War I remain almost unexplored in both Hoxie’s and Hertzberg’s works.

In addition, the quest for full citizenship for Native Americans must be placed within the context of United States imperialism. The nation orchestrated a domestic imperial prerogative by military force, what many writers call genocide, of eradicating tribes from North America. Those Indians who survived the onslaught, and yet unwilling to accept conquest congregated on reservations. Infestations of

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<sup>11</sup> Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 58 and 324.

corruption and poverty subsequently overwhelmed most Indians confined to small federally regulated and subsidized land. Once the nation entered the Cuban rebellion against Spanish imperialism, U.S. annexation of other strategically important islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean signaled a growing political and economic interest in creating a global presence for the United States. Founded in a national mythology of manifest destiny and Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, the domestic imperialism paralleled the foreign imperial policy that emerged in the United States in 1898. American politicians, businessmen, and corporations harnessed the industrial muscle of the country to participate in World War I and enter the global stage as a new democratic, capitalist world power, a model for other nations. An exploration of homegrown imperialism and its logical outcome--overseas trade and investment, particularly during World War I-- shaped the civic identity of the United States. Patriotism, 100% Americanism, military service, and unquestioning support for the government's policies provided the context for exploring the search for Native American citizenship. This political identity was forged out of the wartime experience and altered the progressive agenda of the Society of American Indians. Its leadership fractured under internal and external pressures; accommodation would never go far enough, particularly in a racist age.

The task of granting U.S. citizenship to American Indians might appear to clarify the matter because citizenship--the identity, the rights, and responsibilities--had specific parameters. A political identity as a citizen entailed voting rights, constitutional protection, taxation, and possibly military service--in short, a participant and investor in the nation. The SAI engaged the dilemma of how an

Indian as an Indian could be a U.S. citizen. Historically, tribes and their members have existed outside the realm of citizenship. The federal government negotiated with tribes as separate nations, autonomous political and legal entities until *Cherokee v. Georgia* codified the military superiority of the fledging nation, the United States, into law in 1832. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Marshall, defined tribes as “domestic dependent nations” and “wards of the U.S. government.” The Supreme Court, in its capacity for judicial review, articulated what the Executive and Legislative branches accepted already: the federal government limited tribal sovereignty. As tribes, Indians were distinct from states and functioned outside their jurisdiction.

The status of Indians within the United States received a different interpretation from Chief Justice Roger B. Taney in his 1856 opinion for the Court. Dred Scott, a slave, claimed he was a freedman once his owner took him to live in Illinois, a free state. Scott’s case moved to the Supreme Court, where Taney expressed the Court’s ruling: that Scott was a slave and that blacks were ineligible for citizenship in the United States. Taney, while exploring the construction of citizenship in the Constitution, mentioned Indians in two important areas. First, he paralleled the situation of slaves to that of the “Indian race.” Though bound by geography, their respective political identities were so distinct that it was “as if an ocean had separated the red man from the white.” His interpretation of colonial history led him to conclude that, “although they were uncivilized,” Indians remained “a free and independent people, associated together in nations or tribes, and governed by their own laws. These Indian governments were regarded and treated as foreign

governments.” Twenty-five years prior, however, Taney’s predecessor, Chief Justice John Marshall employed the phrase “domestic dependent nations” to describe Indian tribes. Taney’s revision aligned Indians with foreigners from other countries who were eligible for state and U.S. citizenship through naturalization, a process under congressional authority. If an individual Indian abandoned his “nation or tribe” and lived among whites, “he would be entitled to all the rights and privileges which would belong to an emigrant from any other foreign people.”<sup>13</sup> Supreme Court Justices, descendants of immigrants, demonstrated their power to define reality with the ironic designation of Indians as foreigners. Indians had to request admission into that new nation; the old tribal nations were irrelevant, merely prologue to the manifest destiny of the United States.

Absent any consensus on whether Indians would ever be U.S. citizens, piecemeal attempts to incorporate certain tribes appeared in specific treaties and legislation. During the 1870s the Grant administration implement an Indian “Peace Policy” with the intention of a cessation of U.S. military clashes, the peaceable expansion and settlement of the West, and the “civilization” of Indians with the help of churches and missionaries. Eastern reformers, missionaries, and government officials worked together and succeeded where the U.S. military had failed. The means were different, but the end was the same: the pacification and assimilation of tribes.

The alternative to extermination would be the civilization process, embodied in a phrase attributed to Richard Henry Pratt: “kill the Indian and save the man.” His experiment in Indian education, in preparation of citizenship, began in 1879 with the opening of the Carlisle Indian in Pennsylvania. Religious reform organizations also sprang up during the Gilded Age such as the Boston Indian Citizenship Committee, the Women’s National Indian Association, both founded in 1879, and most important, the Indian Rights Association, formed in 1882. Members of these organizations

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<sup>13</sup> Dred Scott v. Sanford 60 U.S. 393, 403, 404 (1856).

attended the Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indian from 1883 to well into the twentieth century. In the verdant woods of New York, the Friends of the Indian debated the goals and evaluated the success of civilizing the Indian. Educated in boarding schools, and imbued with the reform philosophy of the Progressive Era, the founding members of the Society of American Indians emerged to take a leadership role in the formation of federal Indian policy.

From this civilization process emerged the first political group of Indian intellectuals. They articulated a vision of Indian assimilation, or “progress,” in tune with the Progressive reform movement. They founded the Society of American Indians at a pivotal point in the history of the United States in 1911. Federal Indian policy, a domestic agenda, set the precedent for a foreign policy of imperialism during the early twentieth century, the time the United States prepared for its debut as a global power.<sup>14</sup> The country was emerging as an industrial, capitalist nation-state bent on establishing its imperial mandate in Latin America and the Pacific. The assimilation of African Americans, immigrants, and Indians coincided with the domestic and foreign policies of nation building.

From the Progressive Era came three “Red Progressives”--Charles Eastman, Carlos Montezuma, and Sherman Coolidge. Their efforts, along with the encouragement of Professor Fayette A. McKenzie, helped found the Society for American Indians. McKenzie, a sociologist from Ohio State University, invited educated Indians to Columbus, Ohio, in 1911 with the organizational purpose of working with fellow American citizens to improve Indian welfare and the well being of humanity. The SAI contained the handful of middle class, educated Indians in the

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<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 224-256.

country. They envisioned Indians would participate in the democratic process and work cooperatively to better the nation. Their slogan was, “The honor of the race and the good of the country will always be paramount.”<sup>15</sup>

The SAI hoped to provide more educational opportunities for reservation Indians, better legal services, citizenship, and improved economic conditions for their “race.” However, factionalism began to plague the organization in 1915 with differences emerging over the Indian Bureau role in native peoples’ lives and peyote use. By 1916 the SAI was in disarray as it split openly over peyote use and suffered from lack of funding. A year later when the United States entered World War I, the group struggled to maintain an active membership, with much disillusionment reaching its members. The First World War, and specifically U.S. participation in it, easily co-opted the Progressive reform movement, the SAI included.

This first major Indian reform movement was primarily an urban phenomenon, unlike the religious pan-Indianism that arose at the same time. The period of 1890 to 1924 encompassed the point at which U.S. domestic and foreign policy were in harmony. Racial and ethnic distinctions were in opposition to a unified, national identity as American citizens. The intellectual and political climate of the Progressive Era stressed education, Christianity, temperance, and the Protestant work ethic: outward signs of “civilization.” For Indians, “civilization” appeared to be the alternative to extinction, and civilized whites had a moral obligation to prepare the less “advanced” races for the responsibilities of citizenship. The SAI aspired to be the native voice of that civilizing process and to shape the institutions that made the process legitimate. The legal system was a key institution in the SAI’s view.

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<sup>15</sup> Hertzberg, 36, 109.



Throughout the twentieth century the legal status of Indians became paramount in struggles over land, religious freedom, tribal sovereignty, and national identity. It is through the courts, particularly the Supreme Court, that Indians found their identity as Americans defined for them. Attempts to fit Indians into the Western legal tradition began upon “Discovery.” Since that time, the “conquered” status of Indians in the eyes of Western European law, has exhibited a duality: one of racism which relegated Indians to the status of inferiors and savages, and one of sovereignty, that of nations with which European countries, and later the United States (until 1871), treated and conducted, some would say, foreign relations. Part of the civilization process for Indians was the application of United States federal law and its accompanying courts over Indian Territory and Indians in general. The law could protect them where the federal government and agents on reservations had been unsuccessful. Each Indian needed to be a “*person* before the law,” and thus closer to the definition of an American citizen.<sup>16</sup>

The SAI members encouraged U.S. citizenship for Indians as the most fruitful approach to pressures to abandon a communal way of life, supposedly encumbered by tribal customs and religions. Founding members Charles Eastman, Carlos Montezuma, Henry Roe Cloud, and Arthur C. Parker, four of the most prominent assimilated Indians in America, joined other Indians, the majority educated in boarding schools, to participate in a political dialogue with the federal government. The organization and its contribution garnered the most attention during what has become a watershed in Native American history. Often seen as a miserable interlude

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<sup>16</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), vols. 1 & 2 unabridged, 677-678.

before the renaissance of the Collier-Indian New Deal era, it deserves a revision. Much of what has been written on the period is either dominated by a discussion of the so-called reformers who found support from the federal government, or missionaries and government officials who vied for sectarian and partisan interests. To the SAI, the government should abandon failing reform efforts and endorse the constitutional rights of American citizenship for Indians. The need for such legislative reform had to begin with an examination of the United States Constitution.

The document addressed Indians in two areas: one, in defining tribes' relationship to Congress, and two, in the Fourteenth Amendment. A requisite for U.S. citizenship, according to Section I of the document, was the submission to taxation, an ordinary responsibility for a citizen, and necessary for membership in the body politic. A noted Indian scholar and legal expert, Vine Deloria, Jr., explained that Indians "immune from state and federal taxes" display primary political allegiance to their tribe or society. Historically, this led to a condition where Indians remained outside American sovereignty.<sup>17</sup> Deloria and another legal scholar, Clifford M Lytle, concluded that the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 recognized dual citizenship for Indians because it stated that such status complements tribal and other property rights Indians maintain as tribal members. They possessed civil rights and tribal rights. This is a revisionist interpretation. The SAI embraced a view of citizenship compatible with their historical context. With the advent of World War I American citizenship functioned to affirm the homogeneity of the civic identity. Dissent and seemingly divided allegiance were incompatible with the tenor of the Wilson administration and

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<sup>17</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 3-4

the imperialist cant of white, Anglo-Saxon superiority. The SAI settled on an accommodationist political status for American Indians; an interpretation otherwise teeters on anachronism.

The Fourteenth Amendment contained no exclusions of Indians in its stipulations for American citizenship. It stated that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States . . . .” In 1866 Senators debated the wording of what would become the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Senator James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin proposed exclusion of “Indians not taxed” from citizenship, consistent with constitutional wording. Without such a qualifier, he warned the Senate, “[A] constitutional amendment you propose [will] declare the Utes, the Tabahuaches, and all those wild Indians to be citizens of the United States, the great Republic of the world, whose citizenship should be a title as proud as that of king, and whose danger is that you may degrade that citizenship.”<sup>18</sup> Another senator, Lyman Trumbull from Illinois, raised a separate problem. Citizenship required more than ability to tax an individual. Indians were not subject to federal jurisdiction “in the sense of owing allegiance solely to the United States.” He cited as an example the tribes living in unorganized territories of the country who “roam at pleasure, subject to their own laws and regulations, and we do not pretend to interfere with them.” In response, Senator Hendricks asked whether U.S. laws should be extended over the Indians and whether Congress had the power to do so. Trumbull responded that it was possible, just as it was possible to extend the laws over Mexico (“if we had the power to do

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<sup>18</sup> Congress, Senate, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., *Congressional Globe* (May 30, 1866), pt. 4, 2892-93.

it”). However, he noted a difference between Mexico and Indian tribes: “I think it would be a breach of good faith on our part to extend the laws of the United States over the Indian tribes with whom we have these treaty stipulations, and in which treaties we have agreed that we would not make them subject to the laws of the United States.”<sup>19</sup>

The definitive history of Reconstruction written by Eric Foner asserted that the Fourteenth Amendment must be understood with the context of Republican ideology in 1866. Despite protracted debate in Congress, the guiding principle of the Amendment remained “a national guarantee of equality before the law.” It was borne of national crises and altered American nationality. Foner also pointed to the shift in power regarding protection of citizens’ civil rights. “Congress,” he found, “placed great reliance on an activist federal judiciary for civil rights enforcement.” Regardless of which party predominated in Congress, regardless of discriminatory state laws, the Supreme Court placed constitutional definitions of citizenship above state laws and partisan agendas.<sup>20</sup>

The Senate Judiciary Committee, on instruction from a Senate resolution, inquired into the status of Indian in light of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1870. It found that Indians who maintained tribal relations were not U.S. citizens because they fell under tribal jurisdiction and not the *complete* jurisdiction of the United States. The report construed a relationship of mutual recognition between tribes and the federal government. When tribes requested U.S. citizenship or ratified a treaty

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2894.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Journey, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 257-258.

pertaining to that status, then the federal government could consider the issue. The Fourteenth Amendment failed to meet those criteria.<sup>21</sup>

At the federal level, the status of separate Indian nations within the United States proved politically unpopular to white Americans. The year 1871 was the nadir of tribal sovereignty; Congress terminated the treaty-making system as the means of negotiating with Indian tribes. However, this view does not take into account the subsequent actions of Native peoples, such as those in the SAI, who worked with and against white reformers and federal officials to interpret the assimilation policies of the early twentieth century. Out of the rhetoric comes a more complex, and compelling story of dialogue and negotiation, albeit on unequal footing.

Many Indian tribes maintained U.S. citizenship before 1924. An 1817 treaty with the Cherokee stipulated that within the set-aside reservation, a life estate was available for each head of a family who wanted to become a U.S. citizen, and the tract would pass in fee simple to the heirs. Few Indians received these land grants, and most were removed to Indian Territory during the 1830s. The Pueblos became U.S. citizens by default. Under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the residents of former Mexican territory could elect to retain their Mexican citizenship. Without such a declaration, residents would become U.S. citizens. The General Allotment Act of 1887(also commonly called the Dawes Act) conferred U.S. citizenship upon individual Indians who received allotments and to those who had left the reservation to become residents of a state or territory. In 1890 Congress passed the Indian Territory Naturalization Act which provided that any member of a tribe in Indian Territory could apply to federal court for American citizenship. Under this

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<sup>21</sup> Deloria and Lytle, 219-220.

statute, the applicant would maintain tribal citizenship or the right to received tribal assets. By 1924, non-citizen Indians made up only one third of the total Indian population.<sup>22</sup>

Concerted federal will to make all Indians citizens materialized with the passage of the Dawes Act. Its purpose was a systematic break up of reservations and allotment of communal land as private property to individual Indians, thus severing tribal and communal identity, and forcing the model of individual, self-sufficient property ownership upon native peoples. Surplus land could be sold and the proceeds given to individual allottees. Property ownership was central to Congress's ideal of the American citizen, and as the guardian of the best interests of Native Americans, an end to the disgraceful state of inhabitants of reservations was needed. Theodore Roosevelt, in his powerful, domineering rhetoric, proclaimed allotment "a vast pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass." All allottees and Indians would earn United States citizenship upon receipt of the allotment, thus completing their "civilization" process. The Five "Civilized" Tribes of Oklahoma dodged allotment until 1898 when the Curtis Act called for the termination of tribal governments and the beginning of allotment in Indian Territory. Other native tribes who received exemption from the act were also in Indian Territory such as the Osage, Miami, Peoria, Sac and Fox. In addition, the Seneca of New York and Indian living on Sioux lands in Nebraska were exempt.<sup>23</sup> Indian Territory stood as an aberration in contrast to a larger assimilationist federal Indian policy. Congress, the Board of Indian Commissioners (BIC), and friends of the Indian groups such as the Indian

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<sup>22</sup> Wilcomb Washburn, *Red Man's Land/White Man's Law*, 2d ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971, 1995), 62-63, 139-140, 164; Deloria and Lytle, 220.

<sup>23</sup> Prucha, 668-69.

Rights Association (IRA), heartily endorsed allotment and full citizenship as the most effective protection of the Indian as an individual. By 1901, Congress amended the Dawes Act to grant every Indian in Indian Territory U.S. citizenship

The study of U.S. citizenship must also consider the historical context and the changing definitions of civic identity in American history. Rogers M. Smith, a political scientist, undertook a monumental task of documenting the mutable visions of U.S. citizenship from the 1780s to the Progressive Era in his work *Civic Ideals*. His study contradicted most accepted tenets of liberal and republican thinking on the American civic identity. He found that American citizenship laws “manifested passionate beliefs that America was by rights a white nation, a Protestant nation, a nation in which true Americans were native-born men with Anglo-Saxon ancestors.”<sup>24</sup> The SAI conceded that point. Indians, in the wake of military defeat and cultural decay, needed to recast their image to white Americans, both the public and politicians. The racially antagonistic tenor of the times, best articulated in the Jim Crow laws and the U.S. military expansion beyond the country’s borders, provided the context in which Indian progressivism developed. The SAI, self-appointed representative of native peoples’ interests, considered itself the model “civilization.” Nostalgia for the past meant a death sentence to Indians who wanted meaningful, prosperous livelihoods in the early 1900s.

The definition of U.S. citizenship underwent change from 1880 to 1924. This time period witnessed the incorporation of Jim Crow laws to limit the participation of black Americans in the body politic. Women’s suffragists worked for their inclusion into full citizenship, something they achieved a mere five years before all Native

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, 2-3.

Americans. Certain ascriptive characteristics, as well as republican values, mingled to provide a definition of full citizenship in the United States. A citizen, by birthright or naturalization, was a white, Protestant male, member of a self-governing populace, with access to the franchise, whose allegiance was to the United States of America. State citizenship laws reflected the starker hierarchies of civic identity: exclusion based on race, ethnicity, and gender. Rogers Smith's research confirms that during the Progressive Era, the nation's upper class, both affluent and educated, harbored reservations about the masses and their competence. He points to the social climate of racial Darwinian thought and imperial designs of the industrialized nations, which appeared to confirm the idea of superior and inferior races.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 468-469.



**Chapter One:**  
**An Indian Before the Law: The Political Definition of Indians in the United States Supreme Court, 1880-1916**

Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians,  
provided the end be their improvement.

-- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*<sup>26</sup>

Scholars of federal Indian law and the political status of tribes consistently note the inherent inequality of American Indians. In his survey of U.S. citizenship laws, Rogers M. Smith found native peoples relegated to a status of inferior, second-class citizenship, usually without their consent. He concluded, “Despite the studied ambiguity in U.S. documents on the status of Native Americans, government officials showed that they thought they were dealing with inferior peoples who should be subject to their sovereign authority.”<sup>27</sup> The process of incorporating Indians, first as tribes, then as individuals, into the American citizenry, could be achieved through assimilation. Reformers, including the SAI, called this process “civilizing” the Indians, rhetoric that emerged most frequently during the years after Reconstruction. The Supreme Court rulings from 1880 through 1916 provide the legal and constitutional backdrop for the SAI’s efforts.

Political recognition of native tribes by imperial powers dates back to the Era of Conquest. Spain, France, and England imposed a political identity upon Indian peoples in North America, an identity based upon western European notions of Indian savagery and the supremacy of Old World civilization. These assumptions formed the historical basis for the conquest and colonization of North America. After the War of Independence, the fledgling United States government codified the political

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<sup>26</sup> John Stuart Mill, “*On Liberty*” *In Focus*, John Gray and G.S. Smith, eds. (London: Routledge, 1991), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 108.

status of Indians as sovereign nation that existed outside the American body politic. The U.S. government's choice of treaty making as the official means of negotiation with Indian nations signaled the recognition of Indian nations' equality and power in relation to the United States.

But this acknowledgement of tribal sovereignty proved fragile. Legal scholar, Robert A. Williams, Jr., found the "doctrine of discovery" the foundational concept for the laws of Western colonialism. The doctrine proved "a perfect instrument of empire."<sup>28</sup> The founders of the United States based their understanding of their political and legal relationship with Indian tribes upon a European legal heritage, one that posited the Europeans as the "discoverers" of the lands in North America. With the formation of the United States after 1776, the U.S. Constitution reflected the "doctrine of discovery" approach manifest in the emergent federal Indian law. United States sovereignty enveloped Indian tribal sovereignty over the land, but Indian tribes retained an identity as political entities, albeit, inferior and debased, in the eyes of Americans. U.S. Supreme Court decisions, starting with the rulings of Chief Justice John Marshall, are built upon the doctrine of discovery, and legally institutionalized the racism and discrimination against native peoples, their tribal sovereignty, and their cultures.<sup>29</sup>

To begin with, the United States Constitution referred to Indians in Article I, Section 2 when it defined the scope of Congress' representative constituency and its power of taxation. It stated, "Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned

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<sup>28</sup> Robert A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 325.

<sup>29</sup> David H. Getches, Charles F. Wilkinson, and Robert A. Williams, Jr., *Cases and Materials on Federal Indian Law*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Group, 1998), 41-42.

among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other persons.” From this statement derives the first definitive boundary of Indians’ status with the newly formed United States: only Indians who pay taxes will be counted in determining representation in Congress. Indians who pay taxes cast their lot with the nation. Taxation is a facet of civic identity, a signal that the individual, in part, forms an allegiance to the nation. However, in Section 8, Congress, among its delineated powers, regulated “commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.” Untaxed Indians existed outside the civic body; Indian tribes were a political entity, unique and in a relationship with Congress for trade purposes. At that time, an American citizen, by definition, was a male individual and a property owner who paid taxes. During the late 1780s, taxpaying represented political allegiance to the United States, and therefore inapplicable to a sovereign Indian nation.<sup>30</sup>

The end of the Civil War marked a second pivotal moment in the definition of the American citizenry and of the country as a capitalist nation-state. Rogers M. Smith declared the Reconstruction Era Republicans’ efforts to empower and enfranchise freed slaves “the most extensive restructuring of American citizenship laws in the nation’s history, apart from the adoption of the Constitution itself.”<sup>31</sup> The Radical Republicans dramatically pushed through the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1868, which stated in Section One that “all persons born or

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<sup>30</sup> Deloria and Lytle, *The Nations Within*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, 286.

naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State where in they reside.” This section warned states that they may not lawfully abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens, deprive them of life, liberty, or property without due process, nor deny a citizen equal protection before the law, and has proved one of the most controversial and most adjudicated portions of the Constitution. Historian Eric Foner described the entire Amendment as a statement of principle, “giving constitutional form to the resolution of national crises, and permanently altering American nationality.”<sup>32</sup>

In 1866, members of Congress debated the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment as it applied to Indians. Senator Lyman Trumbull from Illinois interpreted the statement on jurisdiction to be “complete” jurisdiction, that is, all encompassing. He asked, “Now does the Senator from Wisconsin [James R. Doolittle] pretend to say that the Navajoe [sic] Indians are subject to the complete jurisdiction of the United States? Not owing allegiance to anybody else. That is what it means. Can you sue a Navajoe in court? Are they in any sense subject to the complete jurisdiction of the United States? By no means. We make treaties with them, and therefore they are not subject to our jurisdiction.” He queried, “Would the Senator from Wisconsin think for a moment of bringing a bill into Congress to subject these wild Indians with whom we have no treaty to the laws and regulations of civilized life? Would he think of punishing them for instituting among themselves their own tribal regulations?”<sup>33</sup> The Senate, lacking consensus, put the question to the Committee on the Judiciary four years later.

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<sup>32</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, 257.

<sup>33</sup> Congress, Senate, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Globe*, pt. 4, (1866), 2893.

The Committee carefully combed through the Amendment and noted the congressional revision of the Constitution only applied to former slaves. Their finding concluded, “During the war slavery had been abolished, and the former slaves had become citizens of the United States; consequently, in determining the basic representation in the fourteenth amendment, the clause ‘three-fifths of all other persons’ is wholly omitted; but the clause ‘excluding the Indians not taxed’ is retained.” They inferred, then, that tribal members lacked the status of citizens and advised Congress that their designation as tribes or nations was wrongheaded, too. Ghosts of their former political structure, scattered members of tribes had “merged in the mass of our people, and become equally subject to the United States.” Treaty-making with “fragmentary, straggling bands of Indians who had lost all just pretensions to the tribal character” perpetuated a false tribal sovereignty in comparison to that of the United States.<sup>34</sup>

After the Constitution, its interpreter, the Supreme Court, has played an integral role in defining the status of Indians in America. Ambiguity and uncertainty “have been hallmarks of the Supreme Court’s rulings, the “very *sine qua non* of judicial review” as it has functioned in the United States.<sup>35</sup> This is also true as applied to Indians. How could an Indian become part of the American body politic? The answer lay in the recognition of the Indian as an individual person instead of exclusively a tribal member, yet the constitutional route to that synthesis remained obscure.

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<sup>34</sup> *Index to the Reports of the Committees of the Senate of the United States*, 41<sup>st</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 1870-1871, Report no. 268 (Washington: GPO, 1871), 10-11.

<sup>35</sup> Robert McCloskey, *The American Supreme Court*, revised by Sanford Levinson, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 77.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the foundations of Indian law rested upon two “lines” of Supreme Court opinions. Each line interpreted the status of Indian tribes differently. The first line stressed the autonomy of tribal governments; they were subject to federal authority, but immune to the power of states. The second line recognized both the unlimited federal power over tribes, and congressional prerogatives to change treaties and extend federal laws over Indians.<sup>36</sup> These rulings prepared the legal “terrain” upon which all interested parties (the Society of American Indians, Congress, the Executive, reformers, states, and tribes) had to negotiate. These opinions also defined for Indians and the legal system the extent of native peoples’ integration or lack thereof into the national identity. The debate over citizenship for Indians must begin with the Supreme Court and its contribution to the body of federal Indian law and policy.

The first line of Supreme Court opinions originated with the so-called Marshall Trilogy the Court ruled on between 1823 and 1832. In these rulings, *Johnson v. McIntosh*, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, and *Worcester v. Georgia*, Chief Justice John Marshall interpreted the status of Indians tribes in the broad sense of “domestic, dependent nations.” This meant tribes functioned free of state control, tribally autonomous, and subject to federal authority. Two later opinions, *Ex parte Crow Dog* and *Talton v. Mayes*, follow this line of thinking. The *Crow Dog* case of 1883 denied federal jurisdiction in the case of a murder of one Indian by another since Congress had never asserted that federal authority.<sup>37</sup> In the wake of the *Crow Dog* case, the Board of Indian Commissioners objected to creating a separate code of

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<sup>36</sup> Charles F. Wilkinson, *American Indians, Time and the Law: Native Societies in a Modern Constitutional Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 23-26.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

law for Indians. Such separation perpetuated the “reservation mentality” that prevented Indians from absorbing the influence of white “civilization.” In the Board’s 1884 report they state, “We believe that the laws which are good enough for all other kindreds and peoples and tribes and nations are good enough for Indians.”<sup>38</sup>

The *Talton* decision, handed down in 1896, ruled that the Fifth Amendment requirement of grand jury proceeding did not apply to tribes because their tribal powers existed before the Constitution and the passage of the Fifth Amendment. These rulings suggest that tribes function as sovereigns outside of constitutional requirements and federal laws unless Congress expressly limits tribal powers. This set of rulings, known in federal Indian law parlance as the *Worcester-Crow Dog-Talton* line, emerged over time.<sup>39</sup>

The second line of federal Indian law appeared in its entirety during the turn of the century as the assimilationist period unfolded. It reflected the mainstream views of Native peoples and their political power as sovereign nations. *United States v. Kagama* supported Congress’s power to pass the Major Crimes Act, and therefore eroded the power of tribal governments to adjudicate and control their jurisdictions. *McBratney* further limited tribal sovereignty by allowing state courts jurisdiction over the murder of a non-Indian by a non-Indian within Indian country, despite the lack of a congressional grant of authority to the states. The *Lone Wolf* decision granted Congress the sweeping power to abrogate Indian treaties and recast tribal property rights into individual allotments. Importantly, federal and state power precluded and replaced tribal sovereignty. This line of Supreme Court opinions contains recurrent

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<sup>38</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 678; U.S. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners* (hereafter BIC), 1884, 6

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

themes: the unlimited scope of federal power and the federal government's ability to alter, at will, tribal jurisdiction, property, and treaties without tribal consent. These rulings also present tribal sovereignty as outdated, just as Indians were: vanishing and pressed into the American "mold."<sup>40</sup>

Historian Frederick Hoxie noted this change in political identity in his study of Indian assimilation entitled *The Final Promise*. He stated,

In the nineteenth century, the United States government considered itself the guardian of tribes. In the twentieth century, as the government worked to destroy tribal life, the meaning of guardianship changed. Rather than a device to protect the interests of a group, guardianship was now applied to individual Indians. In its modern form, guardianship enabled the government to oversee the behavior of members of a 'backward' race.

White reformers supported the extension of U.S. citizenship to Native Americans (with all its rights and privileges) because the law could better protect Indians than could Indian agents or missionaries. Hoxie's research allowed him to construct a linear retreat from full citizenship that extended to limited citizenship for permanent wards. He concluded that the redefinition of Indian citizenship was complete by 1920.<sup>41</sup> Actually the re-definition remained on-going.

The American judicial system, specifically the Supreme Court, has, since the 1830s, been inextricably linked with the political identity of Indians. Chief Justice John Marshall used the legal system to re-define tribes, no longer completely sovereign, and officially incorporated into the United States.<sup>42</sup> The premise of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>41</sup> Hoxie, 235, 212.

<sup>42</sup> Scholar David E. Wilkins works from the perspective of the erosion of tribal sovereignty as the overarching theme of Supreme Court rulings. He selects works that address this issue and treats rulings that do not fit his theory as the exception or less influential in federal Indian policy and law. He



government by consent raises an unsettling question when applied to citizenship for Native Americans. The best indicator of Indians' imposed inferior status within federal Indian law is the lack of consent. Once the authors of the Constitution codified their political vision for the new nation, they assigned Indians an anomalous status, essentially tenants of land. Americans defined the terms of the relationship and federal Indian law reflected the inequalities of that union. During a time of governmental and social reform in U.S. history, Native Americans entered public discourse over the issue of Indians' political status; they claimed a stake in the future of Indian peoples in the United States and sought full U.S. citizenship as a remedy for many of the evils visited upon tribes. Military actions were unfashionable to the Christian humanitarians of the Progressive Era. Reservations, formerly the solution to the "Indian problem" were discredited for their endemic corruption and degradation of the Native inhabitants. These assertive advocates of Indian rights, Indian fitness for citizenship, and Indian worth appointed themselves the spokespeople for a historically despised group.

At the heart of this issue of full citizenship, in the case of Native peoples, was more than racism. The lines were not so firmly drawn as in the case of African Americans. The trajectory took Indians, in theory, off the reservation, into boarding schools where pupils were infused with basic education, Christianity, and often manual or vocational skills, and finally placed into society as farmers or skilled

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supports the idea that Indian tribes have sovereignty, function as independent and separate nations, and therefore maintain inherent rights as governments outside the United States Constitution, a body of rights and laws they did not help create, nor consent to follow. See *American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

laborers, their traditional Indian ties severed. The process of assimilation would make Indians fit for citizenship and capable of protecting their property interests.

Perhaps the failure of allotment and the ease with which reformers and federal officials modified assimilation, can be understood in light of the abandonment of Reconstruction policies for former slaves, complete by 1877. Secretary of the Interior Lucius Lamar made such a statement in November 1885 to a committee at the Lake Mohonk Conference. When asked about making Pueblos U.S. citizens he replied, “After swallowing four million black slaves and digesting that pretty well we need not strain at this. We could do that; but in my opinion it would be most sad service to the Indian, and there would not be much of him left if that were done suddenly.”<sup>43</sup> “Digesting” blacks and Indians as citizens, however, provided no guarantee of equality. White Americans complained of a tummy ache.

At the Lake Mohonk Conference the following year, in 1886, Philip C. Garrett, a Philadelphia lawyer and member of the Indian Rights Association’s executive committee, marveled:

We did not hesitate to set millions of Negro slaves free in one day, and confer on them all the rights possessed by the wealthiest citizen in the land. They *had* a hard struggle, but the churches and the Freedman’s Aid Societies came to the rescue, and they are bravely working out the problem. And yet we are doubtful about trusting these manly aboriginal owners of the soil to take care of themselves. And the churches are ready again, the Indian Aid Societies and the Indian Rights Associations are ready to come to the rescue and help them to defend themselves against avaricious and unprincipled oppressors.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> BIC, 1885, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *Americanizing the American Indian: Writings by “Friends of the Indian,” 1865-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 62-63

Just ten years later in 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the landmark decision in favor of “separate but equal” for black and white facilities and institutions—the legal validation of Jim Crow laws and racial segregation.

Creating Indian citizens required a new definition of Indian identity in modern American jurisprudence. Indians had to be integrated in the courts, and, just as Congress and the Supreme Court had done for freedmen and freedwomen, Reconstruction policies were close in the minds of politicians and reformers. Reformers considered Indians a special group, whose relationship with the federal government was that of ward and guardian. The interpretation of Indians as sovereign nations fast eroded before the federal government, burgeoning settlement and statehood in the West, and the imperial demands of the nation.

By the 1870s, the federal government had modified its view of Indian nations; they were dependents as Chief Justice John Marshall labeled them, therefore, not fully sovereign, and entirely conquered. Just as immigrants and African Americans were to be assimilated, Indians should follow that route. The means would be citizenship, but not by one sweep of legislation, like the Fourteenth Amendment. The process would be gradual, and required careful attention from the Indian Bureau, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Secretary of the Interior, Congress, reformers, and Indians themselves.

Indians possessed little meaningful tribal power when confronted with the federal bureaucracy that intruded upon them. Federal Indian policies chipped away at tribal self-government. One of the greatest blows to Indian tribal status was the legislation of 1871 that ended U.S. treaty-making with Indian tribes. Congress

accomplished this in a rider to an appropriations act (16 Stat 566, ch 120), stating that “no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States, shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty,” but still honoring the obligations of past treaties.<sup>45</sup> In 1873, Edward P. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, bemoaned the “anomalous relation of many of the Indian tribes to the Government, which requires them to be treated as sovereign powers and wards at one and the same time.” The myth of diplomacy between equals had created “a kind of fiction and absurdity” in the country’s “Indian relations.”<sup>46</sup> He recommended the extension of United States law over crimes by Indians and, therefore, punishable in U.S. courts. In addition, the gradual application of the U.S. court system to Indian territories was to supplant tribal laws and methods of traditional governance. Reformers and politicians agreed: this gradual process presented the best means of civilizing Indians, ending the crises of reservation policy, opening reservation land to white settlement, and protecting Indians from further predations and violent encounters. Extend the protection of law and the U.S. Constitution around Indians, and as citizens, the Indian problem would be solved.

The premise of U.S. citizen before the law, however, emphasized the rights and responsibilities of *the individual*, not the tribal member and ward of the government. Commissioner Smith suggested that the extension of U.S. law over Indians should be accompanied by private property ownership. He held Native

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<sup>45</sup> John R. Wunder, “No More Treaties: The Resolution of 1871 and the Alteration of Indian Rights to Their Homeland,” in *Native American Law and Colonialism, Before 1776 to 1903*, edited by John R. Wunder (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 195-212.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Smith, U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report* (hereafter CIA AR), “Report to Interior,” November 1, 1873, 3.

cultures in contempt. Smith analyzed the difference between Native Americans and white civilization:

A fundamental difference between barbarians and a civilized people is the difference between a herd and an individual. All barbarous customs tend to destroy individuality. Where everything is held in common, thrift and enterprise have no stimulus of reward, and thus individual progress is rendered very improbable, if not impossible. The starting point of individualism for an Indian is the personal possession of his portion of the reservation.<sup>47</sup>

Before the law, as reformers envisioned it, the Indian would embrace a Christian identity, devoid of attachments to the tribe and its community. The situation of the Ponca exemplifies these federal assimilationist sentiments.

In 1876 Congress sought to rectify the mistaken inclusion, according to treaty, of the Ponca tribe on the Great Sioux Reservation. The remedy, removal of the Ponca to Indian Territory, caused tremendous unrest and misgiving among the tribal members. Ten headmen, including Standing Bear, made an official visit in 1877 to select land for their new reservation. Standing Bear and seven others attempted to return on foot from a visit to their new homelands, but made it only to the Otoe Agency in southern Nebraska. After he recovered, Standing Bear voiced his opposition to removal. Secretary of the Interior, Carl Schurz, demanded the removal begin under desperate conditions: storms, a tornado, and cold weather, which resulted in many fatalities.

In the fall of 1877, Standing Bear appealed to President Rutherford B. Hayes and Secretary Schurz for relocation. He asked the President if the Ponca could either return to their former reservation or join the Omaha tribe in Nebraska. Hayes and Schurz denied his requests and, after 160 Ponca died on their new reservation

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 4.

(including his only remaining son), Standing Bear led a small group of Ponca on a ten-week trek to the Omaha reservation. On orders from Schurz, Brigadier General George Crook arrested and detained the Poncas at Fort Omaha. A newspaper editor named Thomas Henry Tibbles interviewed the Ponca and, with Crook's help, filed a friendly law suit to demand a writ of habeas corpus and the group's release from custody.

*Standing Bear v. Crook*, a U.S. District Court decision in 1879, garnered national attention and galvanized the sympathy of eastern reformers such as Helen Hunt Jackson. The presiding district court judge, Elmer S. Dundy, reflected the predominant view of Indians as the "vanishing race." In his opinion he described the Ponca as "the remnants of a once numerous and powerful, but now weak, insignificant, unlettered, and generally despised race." He posited the United States as "one of the most powerful, most enlightened, and most Christianized nations of modern times." Judge Dundy stated that the writ of habeas corpus described applicants for the writ as "persons" or "parties" without a description of the applicant as a citizen. What, then, was a person? The judge consulted Webster's Dictionary for a definition of "person." He recalled it defined a person as "a living soul; a self-conscious being; a moral agent; especially a living human being; a man, woman, or child; an individual of the human race." Revealing his ethnocentric and racist perspective, the judge determined, "This is comprehensive enough, it would seem, to include even an Indian." And a few sentences later he magnanimously summarized his conclusion, "On the whole, it seems to me quite evident that the comprehensive

language used in this section is intended to apply to all mankind—as well the relators as the more favored white race.”<sup>48</sup>

The issue at hand, in Judge Dundy’s mind, paralleled expatriation. If, he reasoned, part of the Ponca tribe severed their tribal relations, adopted “white habits,” and became self-supporting, Crook had impinged upon their liberty. Therefore, tribes were like foreign nations, and a member, once he abandoned tribal life and the reservation, may appear as a “person” before U.S. law and expect the protection and rights of the U.S. court system, in this case, habeas corpus. According to Dundy, the United States remained a country where “liberty is regulated by law” instead of sympathy.<sup>49</sup> If he hoped his ruling would impose an orderly and lawful incorporation of native peoples into civic life, he proved overly confident in the judicial system.

The Judge cited section 1999 of the Revised Statutes passed in 1868 in which Congress agreed to receive “all emigrants from all nations” and grant them the rights of citizenship. The application of this act to the individual Indian seeking U.S. citizenship recognized the separate status of the tribal nation as distinct from the United States and equal to a foreign country. Indians who renounced their ties to the tribe were similar to immigrants from Europe who left their homeland to become American citizens and any attempt to preclude expatriation the Judge declared “inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the republic.” By definition the word “American” meant a “self-sustaining” individual without federal support. An Indian, while “heathen in origin,” could sever ties with his tribe, pledge allegiance to the United States by fulfilling the demands of mainstream American society and earn

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<sup>48</sup> *Standing Bear v. Crook*, 25 F.Cas. 695; 1879, Circuit Court, Nebraska; 697

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

a living and adopt “civilization.”<sup>50</sup> The United States and Indians tribes, if still defined as “domestic, dependent nations,” could employ diplomacy as used successfully with foreign governments. But, if Chief Justice John Marshall’s ruling no longer applied, according to Dundy, “It can make little difference, then, whether we accord to the Indian tribes a national character or not, as in either case I think the individual Indian possesses the clear God-given right to withdraw from his tribe and forever live away from it, as though it had not further existence.” Regardless of their status as wards, he lingered over the issue of expatriation and sanctioned the military officers for acting contrary to the “fundamental principles of the republic.”<sup>51</sup> Congress should offer citizenship to Indians just as it had immigrants from foreign countries.

The Ponca flight from Indian Territory and the subsequent *Standing Bear* case occurred during the “Peace Policy” period. The reservation system increasingly received criticism from reformers who cited the corruption and patronage of the spoils system as a threat to government and the protection of Indians. The Indian Rights Association strongly supported this approach. Henry Pancoast’s pamphlet *The Indian before the Law*, printed in 1884, articulated this point of view. After his visit to the Sioux reservations in 1882 he stated, “Acknowledge that the Indian is a man,

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<sup>50</sup> Dundy quoted the statute in part: “Whereas, the right of expatriation is a natural and inherent right of all people, indispensable to the enjoyment of the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and, whereas, in the recognition of this principle the government has freely received emigrants from all nations, and invested in them the rights of citizenship. Therefore, any declaration, instruction, opinion, order, or decision of any officer of the United States which denies, restricts, impairs, or questions the right of expatriation, is declared inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the republic.” See *Ibid.*, 699.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



and as such give him that standing in our courts which is freely given us a right and a necessity to every other man.”<sup>52</sup>

In 1883 the Supreme Court decreed that the murder of one Indian by another was beyond the reach of federal authorities; the tribes were separate entities whose internal affairs were their own concern. Crow Dog, a Brulé Sioux, was sentenced to death by the territorial court of Dakota for the murder of Chief Spotted Tail, Sin-ta-ge-le-Scka. The Supreme Court ruled on December 17, 1883, that Crow Dog was to be released immediately because the United States had no jurisdiction over crimes committed by one Indian against another. Since Congress claimed no jurisdiction over Indian crimes, the murder was not punishable in U.S. courts and he was released.

The ruling provides a definition of “Indian Country” as distinct from the remainder of the United States, as described by the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 (4 Stat. 729). This designation holds so long as Indians retain their original land title to the soil, and ceases to be Indian country whenever they lose that title, unless a provision or act of Congress states otherwise. Crow Dog was in the custody of the U.S. Marshall of Dakota Territory under a sentence of death, and scheduled for execution on January 14, 1884. His attorneys applied for a writ of habeas corpus and requested their client’s release from prison. Crow Dog’s attorneys claimed that the United States courts did not have jurisdiction to try him, that his actions were not an offense under the laws of the United States. In his “Brief for Petitioner,” Crow Dog’s chief counsel, Adoniram J. Plowman, argued that Indians who maintained tribal

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<sup>52</sup> Henry S. Pancoast, *Impressions of the Sioux Tribes in 1882; With Some First Principles in the Indian Question* (Philadelphia: Franklin Printing House, 1883), 22; see also his pamphlet *The Indian before the Law* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1884); CIA AR, 1883, serial 2191, 7-10, and BIC, 1884, 6.

relations possessed and exercised “the right of self government.” In his view, Indians functioned as sovereign tribal entities unless the federal government abrogated tribal laws with the application of U.S. federal law. If federal law were extended over tribes, Indian laws ceased to apply, tribal relations were severed, and Indians became “part of the body politic of the United States.” They became citizens.<sup>53</sup>

The Court’s opinion quoted from the treaty of 1868 with the Sioux and was used to guide its decision. The treaty defined the U.S. jurisdiction over the Sioux. The Justice concluded that the goal was to “naturalize” and “civilize” the Sioux in hopes they would develop a government and regulate their domestic affairs, and administer their own laws and customs. The terms of the treaty encouraged “self-government,” the regulation of their own “domestic affairs,” and the administration of their laws and customs, in other words, tribal sovereignty. However, the Sioux were subject to the laws of the United States, *but not in the sense of citizens*. Instead, they were still wards under U.S. guardianship, “not as individuals, constituted members of the political community of the United States, with a voice in the selection of representatives and the framing of the laws.” Indians constituted a “dependent community” still in a state of pupilage and “advancing from the condition of a savage tribe to that of a people who, through the discipline of labor and by education, it was hoped might become a self-supporting and self-governing society.” The Sioux, then, were not separately “responsible and amenable” in personal and domestic relations

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<sup>53</sup> 109 U.S. 556 (1883), “Brief for Petitioner,” 7.

with one another, to the general laws of the United States, other than those addressing them as members of an Indian tribe.<sup>54</sup>

The Supreme Court moved carefully because the Senate had only a few years earlier, in 1881, avoided granting U.S. citizenship to all Indians, in a vote of twenty-nine to twelve.<sup>55</sup> The Court suggested that the United States deal with the Sioux, and all Indian tribes, as tribes, not individuals. The Indians were “separated by race and tradition” from white society, deemed moral in comparison to the “free though savage life” of Indians. White laws were foreign to Indians, inscrutable, and contrary to the “customs of their people,” and no precedent or intention, as defined in the Indian Intercourse Act or in the Treaty of 1868 extended U.S. law over Native peoples otherwise. Finally, as a cue to Congress, the Supreme Court found no intention that the laws extend over Indian Country, and therefore the Justices ruled a “clear expression of the intention of Congress” was needed to find otherwise. Justice Stanley Matthews concluded that Lakota Sioux tribal law covered Indian-to-Indian crimes and the federal government retained no criminal jurisdiction.<sup>56</sup>

According to Hoxie, “The debate over citizenship changed dramatically” in 1884 when the Supreme Court handed down *Elk v. Wilkins*. The case centered on the actions of John Elk, who attempted to vote in the local elections in Omaha, Nebraska, for the election of city council members and other officers. Registrar Charles Wilkins refused to allow Elk to register as a qualified voter. He complained that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution applied to him, made him a citizen of the United States, and that he was entitled to vote. He also met the

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<sup>54</sup> 109 U.S. 556 (1883), 568-569.

<sup>55</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., (January 26, 1881), 1064.

<sup>56</sup> Wilkins, 212.

voting requirements for the state of Nebraska, but Wilkins claimed that Elk was not a citizen, he was an Indian, and therefore ineligible for the franchise. John Elk challenged this interpretation of his civic status. He claimed he had abandoned his tribal relations and moved to Omaha, Nebraska, where he lived a “civilized” life. When he was blocked from voting, the case went to the Supreme Court where it ruled that despite his life as a “civilized” person, he could not become an American citizen and exercise the voting franchise because the federal government had not recognized him as a citizen.<sup>57</sup>

The Court ruled that Indians cannot, by their own action, become U.S. citizens without “the action or assent” of the United States. In order to change their status to U.S. citizens, Indians would have to follow a process of naturalization, and demonstrate “fitness” for “civilized life.” Indian tribes were an “alien, though dependent powers.” The Fourteenth Amendment was inapplicable to Indians as individuals born in the United States. Instead, they required naturalization through a process set up, most likely, by Congress. Congress had in the past, naturalized members of particular tribes such as the Delawares on July 4, 1866, various Kansas tribes in 1867, the Pottawatomie, and the Sioux in April 1868.<sup>58</sup>

The reaction? Prucha described the response as one of great consternation.<sup>59</sup> Based on the research of law professor Sidney L. Haring, the consternation most likely emanated from the BIA and eastern reformers who wanted the U.S. legal system extended over tribes, and thus pushed assimilation at the expense of tribal

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<sup>57</sup> Deloria and Lytle, 220.

<sup>58</sup> 14 Stat. 794, 796; 15 Stat. 513, 532, 533, 637

<sup>59</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 678

sovereignty.<sup>60</sup> The distinction between Indians and whites, at least before white men's law, was vanishing. The Indians were vanishing, too, it appeared, and the change was inevitable. Distinctions between Indians and whites were unacceptable. While the IRA proposed a separate system of courts to adjudicate criminal matters on reservations, reformers pushed for one system of law, the United States system, for both Indians and whites.

The Board of Indian Commissioners concurred; separation of Indians from whites perpetuated the lawlessness, corruption, poverty, and backwardness evident on reservations. That these unacceptable conditions on reservations existed because of faulty institutions and racism never occurred to these reformers and politicians; at least it did not appear in their public writings. The Board of Indian Commissioners objected to a separate code of law that would impede the assimilation of Indians into white "civilization," such as their legal system. Two years later, a member of both the legal and reform efforts concurred. At the same Lake Mohonk conference where he reflected on the weakness of Indians without federal paternalism to protect them, Philip A. Garrett reminded his audience, "But the great mistake has been one which it is now too late to avoid, that of dealing with these numerous races of savages within our borders as nations, as if there could be nations within nations without some organic provisions of constitutional law, such as that which regulates the relations of the States of our Union to the Federal Union."<sup>61</sup> Congress shared his regret.

Congress responded with the Major Crimes Act, passed on March 3, 1885, which extended federal criminal jurisdiction over the Indians for seven major crimes:

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<sup>60</sup> Sidney L. Haring, "Crow Dog's Case: A Chapter in the Legal History of Tribal Sovereignty," in *Native American Law and Colonialism, Before 1776 to 1903*, edited by John R. Wunder, 260-261.

<sup>61</sup> Prucha, ed., *Americanizing the American Indian*, 64.

murder, manslaughter, rape, assault with intent to kill, arson, burglary, and larceny. The Five “Civilized” Tribes were excluded, as were many other tribes, because they were deemed advanced and civilized enough to adjudicate such crimes. But was the extension of federal law over tribal law constitutional? Kagama and Muhawaha, also known as Pactah Billy and Ben, respectively, were two Indians from the Hoopa Valley reservation in Humboldt County, California. They had been indicted for the murder of another Indian. The murder occurred on the Hoopa Reservation, three months after the Major Crimes Act was passed.

Joseph Redding, the attorney for the two accused, argued that the Major Crimes Act broke with legal and congressional precedent. Generally the United States articulated that it possessed no authority over crimes committed by one Indian against another, especially on reservations, as expressed in the *ex parte* Crow Dog case. Redding argued that “The very idea of the reservation system is predicated upon the theory that the Indians are not citizens, are not foreign subjects, are not subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, except where a question of commercial intercourse is an element in the offense committed.”<sup>62</sup> The opposition held that the 1871 rider, which abandoned treaty making between the U.S. and tribes, signaled that Indian tribes were no longer considered sovereign nations. The Supreme Court upheld this legislation, and truncated tribal sovereignty in *United States v. Kagama* (May 10, 1886). Congress and the Court affirmed the extension of U.S. federal law over Indian tribes.

The following year, Congress passed the Dawes Severalty Act, the culmination of efforts to break up the tribal land base and assimilate Indians through

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<sup>62</sup> United States Supreme Court, *Records & Briefs, Ex Parte Crow Dog*, “Brief of Joseph Redding,” 8.

the grant of U.S. citizenship. Congress and the Supreme Court were acting in concert to force Indian tribes to conform to U.S. federal law, which found Indian sovereignty to be obsolete and uncivilized. Indians should appear before federal law as individuals, and someday, as American citizens.

One Indian tested the limits of her blossoming individuality; the exposure to a white, eastern educational system made life with her mother a grinding ordeal and she ultimately re-entered the white world. Gertrude Bonnin had returned to the Yankton Reservation in 1887, but only stayed a year and a half. Her three years away at White's Manual Labor Institute, a Quaker boarding school in Indiana, had alienated her from her mother. The young girl's intellectual curiosity roused, reservation life grew barren of possibilities. Bonnin hurried from South Dakota and attended a few schools. During her time at Earlham College she nourished her writing and oratorical skills, but left due to poor health<sup>63</sup>. She found employment as a teacher at Carlisle Indian School. Ambitious and restless, Bonnin chafed under her stern supervisor, General Richard Henry Pratt. But her fortunes improved, seemingly, when the Supreme Court resuscitated tribal sovereignty. At that point still learning the white ways of politics and public activism, Bonnin possessed little awareness of how this ruling would shape her life in later years.

In 1896 *Talton v. Mayes* was appealed from the circuit court of the United States. Talton was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang on December 31, 1892 in a special Supreme Court of the Cherokee Nation, Cooweeskoowee District. The appellant claimed he was deprived of due process as guaranteed by the Fifth

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<sup>63</sup> Zitkala-Sa, *Zitkala Sa: American Indian Stories, Legends, and other Writings*, Edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), xvii.

Amendment, which was a violation of the U.S. Constitution and the laws of the Cherokee Nation. Writing for the majority, Justice Edward White explained that the murder of one Indian by another was not an offense against the United States, but against the laws of the Cherokee Nation; a grand jury trial was not required for a trial in the Cherokee Nation, which currently maintained a judicial system and “powers of local self-government” before the creation of the U.S. Constitution. Legal scholar, David E. Wilkins, concluded that the Supreme Court carefully analyzed Cherokee law and its history before they unanimously concluded that Cherokee law originated before the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, the Fifth Amendment and the Bill of Rights did not apply to tribes. However, Congress remained the “dominant authority” over Indian tribes. In ambiguous language the Court defined native tribes as “semi-independent” and not “possessed of the full attributes of sovereignty, but as a separate people with the power of regulating their internal and social relations” since they had yet to be brought under U.S. laws.<sup>64</sup> However, this ruling stands as an exception to the larger body of Supreme Court law at that time. The ability of small politically alienated groups such as Native Americans to shape their tribal politics proved no match for the larger racial sentiments of the time. That same year, the Supreme Court upheld racial segregation based upon a “separate but equal” doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Clearly, the white majority demonstrated a preference for white supremacy in federal and state laws as well as public facilities.

The Indian Rights Association, one of the most influential organizations in Indian affairs, worked to improve the political power of Indians and to enact legal reforms to improve their opportunities for advancement. Active supporters of the

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<sup>64</sup> 163 U.S. 376 (1896): 384; Wilkins, 307.



Dawes Act, one of its founding members, Henry Pancoast, dedicated his legal training to Native peoples. Upon a visit to the Great Sioux Reserve in 1881, he remarked, “The Indian is separated from the rest of our population by two great barriers—the difference of race and the difference of his political position from every other man’s in this community. These two things have from the first worked together to make him a stranger in his own country.”<sup>65</sup> The following year, Pancoast and his traveling companion, fellow Philadelphian, Herbert Welsh, founded the IRA.

The organization inadvertently played handmaiden to one of the most devastating setbacks to tribal sovereignty. In *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* in 1903, the Court ruled unanimously that Congress held complete power to allot tribal lands, and neither past treaties nor a tribe’s wishes limited this plenary power.<sup>66</sup> The case centered around Indians on the Kiowa, Comanche, and Kiowa Apache reservations who retained a lawyer, and with IRA funds, an additional lawyer, to block white settlement on remaining surplus land slated for allotment. Three years earlier, Congress had approved a fraudulent land cession from the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache, called the Jerome Agreement.<sup>67</sup> While the Interior Department prepared to open the reservation to white settlement on surplus land, the Kiowa’s principal chief, Lone Wolf, asked the federal court for an injunction to halt the Department’s plans.

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<sup>65</sup> Pancoast, 6, in Indian Rights Association Pamphlets, 1883-1892 in Indian Rights Association Papers, Western History Collections (hereafter WHC), University of Oklahoma.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Wilkinson explains the meaning of plenary power as “the sense that Congress can exercise broad police power, rather than only the power of a limited government with specifically enumerated power, when legislating on Indians affairs. Used in this manner, *plenary* refers to general as opposed to delegated, power. Nevertheless, plenary also means absolute or total . . . .” The term *plenary power* also carries a pejorative connotation among Indians and their advocates, referring to federal authority as “unreviewable and potentially autocratic.” Quoted in *American Indians, Time, and the Law*, 78 and 79.

<sup>67</sup> Blue Clark discusses the history of the *Lone Wolf* decision and the treachery surrounding the Jerome Agreement in his book, *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock: Treaty Rights and Indian Law at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 38-49.

The case proceeded to the Supreme Court with devastating results. The Court issued a landmark ruling on the status of tribes. The justices ruled against the tribe, refused to stop white settlement on the reservation, and, most importantly, articulated the plenary power of Congress over tribal relations, with the ability to intervene at will. The successful prosecutor in the case, Willis Van Devanter of Wyoming, had worked as Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Interior until 1903. He moved into the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, and in 1911, the same year the Society of American Indians was founded, accepted President Taft's nomination to the Supreme Court.<sup>68</sup>

Later, when Interior Secretary Ethan A. Hitchcock attempted to negotiate with the Sioux on the Rosebud Reservation for the purchase of 410,000 acres of land, the House Indian Committee concluded that *Lone Wolf* effectively eliminated the need for Indian consent. Ironically, at the same time the reformer rhetoric pushed for Indian citizenship and full assimilation, the Supreme Court handed down a decision that further eroded the power of tribes and placed them under the complete control of Congress; Congress could pass legislation without the consent of tribes, while the Supreme Court supported such action, assuming that the "guardian" would always act in the best interests of the "ward."<sup>69</sup>

Besides land allotment, liquor consumption gained the attention of Christian reformers and friends of the Indians. They, along with the Indian Bureau, played important roles in shaping federal Indian policy toward Prohibition. Prohibitions against the consumption and sale of alcohol on Indian reservations have a long,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>69</sup> William Hagan, *Theodore Roosevelt and Six Friends of the Indian* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 103-104.

controversial history.<sup>70</sup> Progressive Era reformers supported Prohibition in general, and eastern reformers who specifically considered themselves “friends of the Indian” believed alcohol one of the worst evils of modern life. The Prohibition crusade was integral to moral reform of urban areas and of modern life, in general. The Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1895, sought, for the first time, the *legal* eradication of alcoholic beverages. Commissioner Hiram Price boiled when the issue of alcohol on reservations came up. “What must an Indian think of a Government claiming to be governed by the principles of Christianity and urging them to abandon their heathenish practices and adopt the white man’s way, which at the same time allows the meanest and vilest creatures in the persons of white men to demoralize and debauch their young men by furnishing them with that which brutalizes and destroys them?”<sup>71</sup> The Indian Bureau launched numerous efforts to contain the threat and eradicate the presence of alcohol among Indians. In 1901 Commissioner Jones announced, “Illicit traffic in liquor with the Indians should be utterly stamped out—not merely suppressed.”<sup>72</sup>

In 1905 the Supreme Court rendered a devastating ruling against the temperance movement and its advocates, the “friends of the Indian,” and the Indian Bureau. In the *Matter of Heff*, the justices struck down the conviction of Albert Heff, a white man who sold liquor to John Butler, a member of the Kickapoo tribe, and an allottee. Heff was convicted in the U.S. District Court of Kansas for violation of a 1897 federal statute that prohibited the sale of liquors to Indians whose allotted land

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<sup>70</sup> Beginning with the colonial era and trade among Indians, see Peter C. Mancall, *Deadly Medicine: Indians and Alcohol in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price quoted in Prucha, *Great Father*, 653.

<sup>72</sup> CIA AR 1901, serial 4290, 51.

was held in trust by the federal government, or who was still a ward of the government.<sup>73</sup> The Solicitor General based the power of the federal government to restrict the sale of alcohol to an Indian back to section 8, Article I of the Constitution, which empowered Congress “to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian tribes.” Ironically, this same clause supported the distinction of Indian tribes as sovereign powers. Justice Brewer noted, “In the early dealings of the Government with the Indian tribes the latter were recognized as possessing some of the attributes of nations, with which the former made treaties. . . .” This federal recognition of tribal sovereignty, or, as Brewer described it, “the practice of dealing with Indian tribes as separate nations,” ended in 1871 with congressional termination of treaty making with Indian nations.<sup>74</sup>

Heff’s counsel, A.E. Crane, presented an argument based upon legal precedent: the General Allotment Act’s promise of full citizenship at the moment allotment occurred. Indians, he determined, became citizens upon receipt of the allotted land, instead of after the twenty-five year trust period. Crane also presented a definition of a citizen, to further buttress his argument: “A citizen is one who owed the Government allegiance, service and money by way of taxation, and to whom the Government in turn grants and guarantees liberty of person and conscience, the right of acquiring and possessing property, of marriage and the social relations of suit and defense, and security in person, estate and reputation.” For support, he cited one of the *Slaughterhouse cases*, *U.S. v. Cruikshank*, and *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, among others rulings. In his survey of the rulings to the contrary, including *U.S. v. Kagama*,

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<sup>73</sup> 29 Stat. 506 (1897); Wilkins, 123.

<sup>74</sup> 197 U.S. 488 (1905), 498.

Heff's counsel concluded that they proved incompatible with the status of citizen Indians. Allotment legislation granted Congress the power to regulate Indian land, while, concurrently, Indians could "be citizens as to their personal rights and obligations. . . ."<sup>75</sup> The defense argued that Butler, upon receipt of his allotment, not his patent, became a U.S. citizen subject to federal law and Kansas state law.

The Solicitor General sought a novel interpretation of the federal-Indian relationship, one that justified the infringement of federal authority into the commerce of alcohol among citizen Indians. First, in a sweeping negation of tribal sovereignty, he determined, "From the adoption of the Constitution the Indians have been under the exclusive control of the nation" and states had no authority over them. This assertion of congressional plenary power persisted even if an Indian became a U.S. citizen. An Indian may possess citizenship, yet "the continuance of the relation as wards relates both to property and to personal protection." According to the prosecution, the citizen Indians were not "citizens of full competence, just as . . . citizens under personal or legal disabilities are not *sui juris* in other respects." The federal government had an obligation to protect Indians as they made "their first tentative steps as citizens."<sup>76</sup> Indians could sever tribal relations, assert individual citizenship, and still need the federal government's protection. This legal interpretation sought an extension of the wardship status for Indians in perpetuity, without the consent of Indians themselves.

The Court ruled otherwise. Justice Brewer, author of the Court's opinion, interpreted the Solicitor General's argument to mean "the United States can never

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<sup>75</sup> 1905 U.S. Lexis 1163; 49 L. Ed. 848, 9-10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

release itself from the obligation of guardianship” and abrogate the state laws covering its citizens because they have Indian blood. The Justices, except Harlan, concluded that the federal government retained “no constitutional obligation to perpetually continue the relationship of guardian and ward. It may at any time abandon its guardianship and leave the ward to assume and be subject to all the privileges and burdens of one *sui juris*. And it is for Congress to determine when and how that relationship of guardianship shall be abandoned. It is not within the power of the courts to overrule the judgment of Congress.”<sup>77</sup> The ruling interpreted the General Allotment Act of 1887 to give Indians, once they receive their allotted land and its patent from the federal government, to be United States citizens with all of the benefits and privileges of a citizen. The condition of ward ended with the grant of citizenship. Further, the government could suspend the constitutional obligations of the ward-guardian relationship.

The Court ruled against the concept of partial citizenship for allotted Indians, thus placing Indians in full legal equality with other citizens. Yet, congressional plenary power remained unchallenged. Brewer bolstered Congress’s plenary power over tribes. Plenary power was impervious to judicial review, according to the Court’s interpretation. Yet, at the end of the opinion Brewer asked, “Can it be that because one had Indian, and only Indian blood in his veins, he is to be forever one of a special class over whom the General Government may in its discretion assume the rights of guardianship which it has once abandoned, and this whether the State or the individual himself consents?”<sup>78</sup> Citizen Indians and the government, together, must

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<sup>77</sup> 197 U.S. 488 (1905), 499.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 508.

consent to guardianship for Indians. Within one Supreme Court case lay the paradox of Indian citizenship. Theoretically, once they became U.S. citizens, Indians gained the inherent power of consent; it was a right of all U.S. citizens. Yet Congress still retained plenary authority over Indians whether they functioned in the civic body as individuals or as members of tribes. Brewer openly, but deferentially, prodded Congress to make its purpose clear with legislation that defined the parameters of the ward-guardian relationship. Alarmed by this ruling's implications, members of Congress, the Indian Office, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs—for different reasons—sought to circumvent this Supreme Court ruling. All shared concern about prohibition and moved to alter the terms of allotment. It would take eleven years to completely dismantle *Heff*.

The *Heff* decision came the same year, 1905, that the country inaugurated Theodore Roosevelt president. Roosevelt's fifth annual presidential message mentioned *Heff* and its relevance to his views on federal Indian policy. He denounced the ruling. It stood as a challenge to the prevailing progressive attitudes of his time on alcohol consumption and resultant moral degeneracy. He proclaimed *Heff* had "struck away the main prop on which had hitherto rested the Government's benevolent effort to protect [Indians] against the evils of intemperance."<sup>79</sup> The condition of Indians figured in his understanding of the nation's mission and identity. Theodore Roosevelt consistently mentioned Indians and the "betterment of the race" in his State of the Union addresses. His annual statements on domestic reform and foreign policy carried similar strains of paternalism and moralism.

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<sup>79</sup> U.S. Supreme Court, *Records and Briefs, Matter of Heff*, "Brief of A.A. Garland," 10.

In 1902, his second annual message called for the Indians' "ultimate absorption into the body of our people." This process would be incremental because tribes lived under various conditions; some had made "no perceptible advance toward. . . equality" with whites. Regardless of the uneven process of assimilation, Roosevelt concluded, "The first and most important step toward the absorption of the Indian is to teach him to earn his living."<sup>80</sup> Two years later, the President cited institutional weaknesses as the culprit in Native peoples' slow rate of advancement. "The distance which separates the agents—the workers in the field—from the Indian Office in Washington is a chief obstacle to Indian progress," he stated. Cooperation, efficiency, and well-paid, dedicated agents would "lift up the savage toward that self-help and self-reliance which constitute the man."<sup>81</sup>

Congress, with the support of the President and concerned reformers, heeded Justice Brewer's call for clarity in federal Indian policy. Chairman of the House Indian Affairs Committee and South Dakota Republican, Charles Burke proposed amendments to the original severalty act that would remedy the "demoralization" certain groups felt in *Matter of Heff*. Indians, stated Burke, were still "wards of the nation and subject to the jurisdiction only of the United States." He designed legislation that would make Indians citizens upon receipt of their fee-simple title to the homestead at the end of the trust period. The Secretary of the Interior should also have the discretionary power "at any time" to issue a patent to an Indian who he deemed "competent and capable of managing his or her affairs." Citizenship began when the trust period expired and the Native person received a patent in fee simple to

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<sup>80</sup> Fred L. Israel, ed., Theodore Roosevelt, "Second Annual Message," Dec. 2, 1902, *State of the Union Messages of the Presidents, 1790-1966* (New York: Robert Hector Publishers, 1966), 2070.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Theodore Roosevelt, "Fourth Annual Message," Dec. 6, 1904, 2122-23.



the allotted land. Congress passed the law on May 8, 1906. The Burke Act gave the Secretary complete control over Indian citizenship, a move that potentially delayed assimilation indefinitely. But it also accomplished something reformers desired: the complete extension of federal law over Indians, that is, wardship, until each Indian received the patent. The Board of Indian Commissioners, while pleased with the act's extension of U.S. law over Indians, worried that protection from liquor came at the price of Indian Bureau paternalism and a "prolonged period of exclusion from the duties and rights of citizenship. . . ."<sup>82</sup>

Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Francis Leupp, concurred with Burke's proposal, stating, "Citizenship has been a disadvantage to many Indians. They are not fitted for its duties or able to take advantage of its benefits." Leupp, with the *Lone Wolf* decision and the Burke Act as support, proceeded apace to break up tribal lands and allot them. The Indian Rights Association vocally opposed the quickening pace of allotment and split from Leupp over the matter. The organization had declared in 1905 that, "the Indian homestead . . . [was] the one asset that should be most scrupulously guarded."<sup>83</sup>

But federal Indian policy had yet to reconcile the protected status of the tribal land base and the push for assimilating Indians as individual American citizens. Supreme Court support of the plenary power of Congress to proceed with policies such as allotment, without the consent of tribes, completely undermined the concept of tribal sovereignty; allotment would eventually make U.S. citizens of Indians. The platform of the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1907 viewed the beginning of the

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<sup>82</sup> 34 *United States Statutes at Large*, 182-83; quoted in Prucha, *Great Father*, 876, in BIC, 1906, 8-9, 18.

<sup>83</sup> *Indian Rights Association Annual Reports* (1905), Indian Rights Association Papers, WHC, 72.

twentieth century with approbation. It praised the American people for “progress made in the education and development of the Indians in the last quarter of a century.” Although displeased with the Burke Act because they feared it prolonged the Indian Bureau’s existence, the Conference’s platform gushed and “heartily commend[ed] the greater emphasis on labor by Indians as a means of self-support and preparation for citizenship, and the effective measures adopted to protect Indians against the evils of illicit liquor traffic. To keep clean, honest and efficient that work of administration which is now the chief task of the Government, we look with confidence to a continuance of cooperation between the administrative officers and the intelligent friends of the Indian.”<sup>84</sup> Even though the Burke Act delayed citizenship for twenty-five years, the end result remained gradual citizenship and the absorption of individual Indians into the body politic. How then could Indians protect themselves? The Supreme Court would rule them U.S. citizens and the legal system would provide that remedy.

A succession of rulings between 1908 and 1916 culminated with *United States v. Nice*, another case dealing with alcohol consumption. The Supreme Court demonstrated its favorable disposition toward the powerful temperance movement and the preference of maintaining Indians’ status as wards, regardless of U.S. citizenship. The Indian Bureau voiced deep opposition to alcohol consumption. Coupled with the growth of the peyote movement and the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Heff*, it seemed there was little that reformers and the Bureau could do to stop the use of “intoxicants” such as alcohol. In 1916 a case came before the Supreme Court

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<sup>84</sup> *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples*, Reported by Lilian D. Powers. New York: Lake Mohonk Conference, 1907, 7.

involving the sale of alcohol to allottees on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. After two months of deliberation, the Supreme Court reversed the *Heff* ruling and stated that Congress could regulate and prohibit the sale of intoxicating liquors to Indians within a state. With both the extension of federal law over tribes and the erosion of tribal sovereignty, a new definition of the citizenship rights of individual Indians emerged. The individual Indian, upon receipt of an allotment, became a United States citizen. Tribal affiliation hindered the transition to full citizenship. An Indian could not therefore be a tribal member and a full and equal citizen because he was, essentially, still an Indian, a ward, and therefore unprepared for all of the rights and responsibilities of United States citizenship.

The Assistant Attorney General, Charles Warren, argued that an allottee, based on legal precedent, still needed the protection of federal law, as in the case of murder. Therefore, Indians still needed protection from the ravages of liquor consumption. He also proposed “the grant of citizenship do not *ipso facto* terminate tribal status. An Indian allottee, even though a citizen, is still an Indian, and an Indian ward as well.”<sup>85</sup> The prosecution’s statement reinterpreted the Dawes Act. Whereas the original intention of integration of Indians was as individuals into the nation as land-holding citizens, Warren re-defined the status of tribes to suggest that Indians were both citizens and wards. The two were compatible and desirable, instead of antithetical. The Assistant Solicitor also sought a strict interpretation of the Constitution and applied the power of Congress to govern the commerce of tribes as still applicable, despite citizenship.

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<sup>85</sup> *Records and Briefs of the United States Supreme Court*, “United States v. Nice: Error to the District Court of the United States for the District of South Dakota” (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1916), 593

Justice Van Devanter wrote the opinion, in which he borrowed from *U.S. v. Kagama*: “These Indian tribes are the wards of the Nation. They are communities dependent upon the United States . . . . From their very weakness and helplessness, so largely due to the course of dealing of the Federal Government with them and the treaties in which it has been promised, there arises the duty of protection, and with it the power.” Therefore, he concluded, Congress may confer citizenship upon Indians “without completely emancipating the Indians or placing them beyond the reach of congressional regulations adopted for their protection.”<sup>86</sup> This ruling reflected less the racist hierarchy of the time than the institutionalized paternalism in federal Indian law. Full citizenship did not preempt Indians’ status as wards.

All three branches of the federal government supported Indian citizenship as an ideal. They rejected the Reconstruction template for citizenship, the Fourteenth Amendment, for a gradual and deeply flawed process. Citizenship laws help a nation define itself. As capitalist nations move from the pre-industrial to the modern world, they generate a national identity, or nationalism, to unify the political system, its culture and institutions. This is political integration, an important concept for groups outside mainstream society, which are in politically vulnerable positions compared to the nation. To achieve political integration, national and territorial integration must occur. This means organizing “culturally and socially discrete groups” into a single unit under a single, national identity, and centralizing national authority over “subordinate units or regions.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *United States v. Nice*, 241 U.S. 591 (1916), 597-598.

<sup>87</sup> Wilkins, 15.

The separate, sovereign status of Indian tribes after the Civil War ran counter to the political tenor of the times. Congress and the Supreme Court defined citizenship for Americans and allowed states tremendous leeway to apply the definition to its own idea of citizenship. The concept of the sovereign Indian nation, with its own governments, customs, religious beliefs, and land base, all beyond the power of United States' authority, was unacceptable to a modern, unified, national identity. Immigrants, freedmen and freedwomen, and Indians would disappear as distinct ethnic groups under the cope of American citizenship. Reformers, missionaries, teachers, politicians, and a small, but vocal, group called the Society of American Indians interpreted this push for assimilation toward a single, unified American citizenry. Ironically, such legal and political status also gave tribes and individual Indians the constitutional means to explore their ability to vote, practice religious freedom, and redefine the ward-guardianship premise of federal Indian policy.

The Supreme Court defined the legal status of Indians from 1880 to 1916 with a series of rulings. Unclear, however, was the power of the judiciary in contrast to the plenary power of Congress over Indian affairs. Sometimes the Court acknowledged congressional "jurisdiction," other times the justices rendered opinions meant to instruct Congress to clarify or modify the federal-Indian relationship. In the end, neither body established a clear definition for the status and rights of Indians.

These decisions provided the setting for the Society of Americans Indians and their advocacy for Indian citizenship. The SAI and the federal government were engaged in a dialogue over the definition of Indian citizenship, what it entailed, where

states fit in, and where tribal sovereignty fit as well. While the federal government, Congress, and the Supreme Court passed legislation and rendered rulings, the SAI interpreted federal Indian policy for Indians and for themselves. The group of Indian intellectuals, trained in Indian boarding schools, well-versed in Christianity, believers in the reformist Progressivism of the era, produced a body of literature and an intellectual tradition for American Indians to foster the assimilation and integration of Indians into mainstream American society as individual citizens. Political scientist Judith Shklar has noted how pervasive the notion of citizenship is to politics, but at the same time, its definition is historically variable, or perhaps the correct term is *historically vulnerable*. She stated, “In America [citizenship] has in principle always been democratic, but only in principle. The equality of political rights, which is the first mark of American citizenship, has existed in contrast to its absolute denial.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 1.

**Chapter Two**  
**“O that My People Be What I Have in Mind They Should Be”:  
Progressivism and the Founding of the Society of American Indians**

“With our rise and fall the whole race will be measured and if we, the few, fail, we shall everlastingly be the laughing stock of white America and we shall merit it.

Every member of the ‘first fight’ will feel the stigma.”

-Arthur C. Parker, 1911<sup>89</sup>

The Society of American Indians formed in the midst of Progressive Era idealism. Its history emerged alongside other reform organizations such as the settlement house movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the Anti-Saloon League. The Society’s ideas and goals proved as controversial and, in many ways, revolutionary, as did those of their peers. Allen F. Davis, a historian of the settlement house reformers in Boston, Chicago, and New York, described Progressives as believers in both social justice and social control. He found that the rhetoric of Progressives “stressed truth, justice, democracy, and the faith that it was possible to build a better world.” An admixture of “moralism and religious zeal,” also characteristic of reformers, heightened the SAI leadership’s mandate for reforming the condition of Indians.<sup>90</sup> The Temporary Executive Committee that later founded the SAI released a public statement in 1911 declaring, “The time has come when the American Indian race should contribute, in a more united way, its influence and exertion with the rest of the citizens of the United States in all lines of progress

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<sup>89</sup> Arthur C. Parker (ACP), Albany, NY, to Rosa B. LaFlesche, Washington, D.C., 23 November 1911, Society of American Indian Papers, Microfilm, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, hereafter SAI-WHC.

<sup>90</sup> Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967, 1984), xx-xxii.

and reform, and for the welfare of the Indian race in particular, and humanity in general.”<sup>91</sup>

As Native Americans, however, the organization’s leadership recognized its unique situation in United States history: Indians maintained a special relationship with the federal government, one that federal officials and politicians had formulated without the consent of Native Americans. Manifest Destiny provided the ideological support for the assimilation policies that the Bureau of Indian Affairs enacted in the “best interests” of Indians. The SAI, for the first time, asserted Indians’ rights to participate in the debate over the proper federal Indian policies; it called upon the federal government to complete the process begun under the General Allotment Act of 1887 that planned to make Indians into U.S. citizens via ownership of private property and elimination of tribal identity. The SAI re-envisioned the identity of American Indians as members of humanity; their cause would be race improvement for the benefit of humanity.

The promise of full citizenship rights, responsibilities, and protections had failed to materialize by the turn of the century as evidenced in the Supreme Court rulings from 1890 to 1916. These setbacks failed to dampen the optimism and reformist zeal of the SAI as they, and their counterparts in reform organizations, called upon the federal government to become more responsive to the needs of the country’s marginalized inhabitants. The Society of American Indians emerged as the first coherent pan-Indian political organization of the twentieth century. Their struggles and the resultant intellectual debates they engaged in would characterize

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<sup>91</sup> Society of American Indian Papers, “The American Indian Association’s Statement of Purpose,” April 3-4, 1911, SAI-WHC.



American Indian political activism throughout the century. As representatives of “their race,” as the SAI characterized itself, these progressive, educated Indians broke new political ground for Indians in the United States. The Progressive Era celebrated the self-made man, the rags-to-riches stories. Indians such as Charles Eastman, Carlos Montezuma, Arthur C. Parker, and Henry Roe Cloud fit that component of the American capitalistic success.

The mainstream press, government officials, and the SAI, itself, promoted this image, and thus reinforced the idea that Indians could be civilized. Social Darwinist thinking pervaded the intellectual climate of the time. The idea that groups of people progressed from various stages of savagery to civilization was accepted as common sense, and self-evident. One representative example came from a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners (BIC), Merrill E. Gates. At a “friend of the Indian” conference in 1907 he quoted from a past lecturer who asked, “What is an Indian? What is his legal status? Can he be defined in terms satisfactory to Americans who love justice and believe in fair play? His copper color, his prominent cheek bones, his straight black hair are physical marks easily connoted for placing him among the ethnographic groups into which we divide the inhabitants of our land.”<sup>92</sup>

The BIC had been active in Indian reform efforts since 1869 when President Ulysses S. Grant and Secretary of the Interior Jacob D. Cox proposed its creation. One careful study of its origins highlighted the religious bent of the Board and found its creation “set post-Civil War Indian policy ever more firmly in the pattern of American evangelical revivalism.” A component of Grant’s Peace Policy for

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<sup>92</sup> *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples*. Reported by Lilian D. Powers, (New York: Lake Mohonk Conference, 1907), 189, hereafter, *Proceedings-LMC*.

Indians, the BIC membership was composed of elite men from Christian communities, excluding Roman Catholics. They had the authority to inspect and evaluate the Indian Office and its agencies; they scrutinized Indian appropriations; their work combined a proselytizing mission with a Christian duty toward social justice, in other words, assimilation into a “Christian nation.”<sup>93</sup>

However, influential reformers and government officials held divergent, often contradictory ideas of Indians and what was necessary for their adjustment to modern life in America. In the years leading up to the formation of the SAI, the Indians Rights Association and the Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indian wielded power and influence over federal Indian policy and public opinion. In historian Hazel Hertzberg’s terms, they were the “watchdogs of Indian rights on Capitol Hill.” These Friends of the Indian organizations sought to transform the “degraded” reservation Indian into a modern, middle-class citizen of Indian ancestry.<sup>94</sup> Francis Leupp articulated the white reformers’ vision of the modern Indian in the U.S. Leupp, a former official of the IRA, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1905 wrote, “I like the Indian for what is Indian in him. Let us not make the mistake, in the process of absorbing them, of washing out whatever is distinctively Indian. Our aboriginal brother brings . . . a great deal which is admirable, and which only needs to be developed along the right line. Our proper work is improvement, not transformation.”<sup>95</sup> Their ideas represented a shift away from the vanishing Indian of popular and political imagination. If the SAI had one thing in common with the friends of the Indian organizations it was this idea: Indians

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<sup>93</sup> Prucha, 503-509

<sup>94</sup> Hertzberg, 21.

<sup>95</sup> CIA AR, 1905, 12.

were still alive; tenaciously, they had survived as a race and claimed a stake in the future of the United States, their native country.

Richard Henry Pratt also broke with conventional views on assimilation. His hope to educate Native Americans constituted a larger commitment to Indians as human beings, deserving of the benefits the larger white society enjoyed: education, democracy, and Christianity. During the final military conquest of the Plains tribes in the 1870s, many reformers, wishing for an end to the violence and hoping for a solution to the “Indian problem” came to see similarities between the needs of Negroes, as they were called then, and those of Indians in preparing them for eventual assimilation into American society. Accordingly, space was provided for Indians at Hampton Institute, founded in 1868 by General Samuel C. Armstrong, who had been a commander of Negro troops during the Civil War and afterward served as an agent of the Freedmen’s Bureau. When the Red River War of the southern plains ended in 1875, Pratt took a group of seventy-two Indian prisoners to Ft. Marion in Florida. He was a former officer of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, a Negro regiment, and a commander of Indian scouts at Ft. Sill, in Indian Territory, and he persuaded his superiors to let him try to educate prisoners at Ft. Marion. Imprisonment ended in 1878 and, again, Pratt convinced Armstrong to let him bring Indians with him to Hampton. The next year he received federal approval for the foundation of an Indian boarding school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. It served as the national model of Indian education for over thirty years.

Once the federal Indian boarding school system was in place, Pratt looked to the first generation of Indian graduates to serve as models for Indian self-

improvement and future U.S. citizenship. He also grew more vocal in his criticism of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1904 Pratt spoke publicly about the problems inherent in the Indian Bureau; he called for its demise, even though his brainchild, Carlisle, was run under the Bureau's auspices.<sup>96</sup> He would maintain a close intellectual and professional relationship with one of the SAI founders, Carlos Montezuma. For many years the two exchanged views and supported each other's opinions regarding the BIA and its deleterious influence upon Native people. By the time the SAI was formed, its members and their associations with Progressive reformers provided a diverse, and often incoherent, set of beliefs about federal Indian policy and what constituted a representative Native perspective and identity.

This ideological friction was best represented in the speeches given at the Lake Mohonk Indian conference in 1907. Guest lecturers provided examples of white reformist thought at the dawn of the twentieth century. Participants supported the goal of Indian citizenship and looked to the federal government "to keep clean, honest and efficient that work of administration." Cooperation between Friends of the Indian and the Roosevelt administration would guard against illegal alcohol trafficking, render the Indian Bureau obsolete, and support Indian self-help initiatives.<sup>97</sup> Among the Indians in attendance were Charles Daganett (Peoria) and Charles Eastman (Santee Sioux), future founders of the SAI, and the "model" Indians who embodied the success of the civilizing process.

Charles Daganett held the highest position of any Indian in the Indian Bureau, that of Supervisor of Employment. A Carlisle graduate, he attended Dickinson

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<sup>96</sup> Hetzberg, 17.

<sup>97</sup> *Proceedings*—LMC, 5.

College but transferred to Eastman College where he also graduated. He edited a paper in Miami, Oklahoma before pursuing a career in the Indian Service. When Leupp introduced Daganett, he expressed hope of moving Indians off the reservations and into work, just as white people did. “But,” he warned, “knowing the lack of initiative in many of these poor people, I wanted to have some one give them the start.”<sup>98</sup> Daganett would pay dearly for such an alliance. His first few years in the SAI made him a target of anti-Indian Bureau sentiment and ultimately cost him a public role in the organization.

Daganett’s presentation tackled the challenges of Indian reform. “They must rub up against the world. It is bound to prove fatal to many of them; we expect that. But they must be taught one thing and I believe in this plan of teaching them, and that is self-help, self-reliance.” He countered degrading stereotypes of Indians and tried to explain a different culture’s work ethic: “Our difficulties have been not so much in securing Indians for employment. The Indians have a very natural disinclination to work hard. They are not lazy, but, like many whites, they do not work for pure love of it. It is generally prompted by necessity. In fact, about the best way to promote it is to cut off the rations.” Daganett also warned the eastern Progressive elite of a regional difference that plagued reform efforts: racism in the Southwest. “Ill feelings existing between the western people and the Indians. Eastern people cannot realize the feeling around most of the western reservations, especially those in the Southwest.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hertzberg, 23 and 42.

<sup>99</sup> *Proceedings*—LMC, 24-25.

During Dr. Charles Eastman's lecture, he professed, "I love Christian civilization." However, Indians had to discover their salvation just as whites ought to confront their nation's grave moral lapses. Eastman rejected the false dichotomy of unsullied Christian civilization and barbaric ungodly savages. Eastman reminded his friends of the spirituality once inherent in native life:

The Indian had a few principles that were strong and he followed them. He may be wrong and inconsistent, childlike in some things, but there is one thing in which he was right—that in his old days, before you brought us liquor, tomahawks, and knives, he loved the Great Mystery. What I wish to express to you tonight is that you may have take a great many things from us, you may have forced us out of the beautiful lands, but when you took our Great Mystery away from us it is your duty to give us one in its place, and it is your duty today to double your Christian work among the Indians, or turn him loose among you and let him find the Great Mystery, *your* Great Mystery himself.<sup>100</sup>

This obligation rested on all Christians and Eastman, a convert himself, dedicated his life's work to that goal.

The Conference also reflected the new debate on foreign policy. When the twentieth century opened, the United States, fresh from victory in the Spanish-American War, debuted as an imperial power. As "civilized" western countries such as Great Britain, France, and Germany colonized in Africa and Asia, the United States entered the modern era with designs in the Pacific and Latin America. The rhetoric of the "white man's burden" and the benevolent, civilizing power of American democracy and Christianity justified territorial acquisition. A domestic policy of Indian assimilation found a foreign policy equivalent for the indigenous peoples in Hawaii, the Philippines, and the Caribbean. Instead of imperial

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 177

aggression, the members saw an ever-broadening mission for the United States. “In aiding Cuba to secure its freedom,” they recalled, “the people of the United States suddenly found themselves face to face with vast responsibilities. Several million people of different races and languages, different degrees of civilization, in non-contiguous territory, were brought under the jurisdiction of this nation.” This stood as a national obligation that presidents McKinley and Roosevelt embraced. The trust relationship, created specifically for the protection of native tribes, applied to new peoples. Lake Mohonk’s report quoted McKinley: “The Philippines are ours, not to exploit, but to develop, to civilize, to educate and to train in the science of self-government. This is the path of duty which we must follow or be recreant to a great trust.” These new problems of expansion could be solved through the methods most successful with Indians: “Christian education and evangelization which contribute directly to the formation of that moral character upon which all stable society must rest.”<sup>101</sup>

A congressman from Connecticut, George Lilley, believed the civilizing process was America’s burden. The annexation of Hawaii served as his example at the Conference for a new dependent country the U.S. could not turn away. Lilley mused on the “great moral or conscience evolution of the Anglo-Saxon” and the converse of “the Indian, the Negro, the Filipino, and the Hawaiian. Their ancestors once lived as “aimless, care-free, unmoral” existence. He expanded this theme: “To the Indian was offered a full-grown and wonderful civilization, the art of agriculture, a thousand inventions to throw happiness around a life of peace. He chose the wasteful, unproductive life of an animal, and the continent which was wasted is in the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

hands of civilization.” Similarly, the “honesty of the Anglo-Saxon” awed Filipinos. Lilley deemed Filipinos deficient due to a heritage of moral laxity that had made them “weaklings.” Hawaiians were “a race of children” that held “no conception either of personal independence or the innate value of character.” Given their deficiencies, their fates, he predicted, would resemble the image of the vanishing Indian: “The Hawaiian people will fade away as the American Indian is fading away under a higher civilization, and the Anglo-Saxon people . . . will be supreme and will have the highest voice and authority in governmental affairs.” Finally, the congressman encouraged a ward-guardian construction of U.S. imperialism commensurate with Manifest Destiny. “It is the right and duty of the Anglo-Saxon,” Lilley announced, “to rule [Hawaiians] and spread over them his higher moral standards and civilization. We must not make such mistakes as we did with the Indian and foster his indolence with fat bounties. We must not thrust statehood upon him.”<sup>102</sup> Racist arrogance such as this was characteristic of a popular national sentiment. White Americans looked upon the country as a nation ordained by God to fulfill a unique destiny. To varying degrees, the leaders of the SAI struggled with partial belief in that divine providence.

Christianity provided the life theme for Charles Eastman. The trajectory of the career as an advocate of Indian reform brought him, in 1911, to the First Universal Races Congress in London. Those in attendance noted growing nationalist movements throughout the world and the necessity of peace and tolerance. He joined fellow progressive reformers such as W.E.B. du Bois, John E. Hilholland, and Mary White Ovington. His speech contained generous praise for General Pratt’s Indian

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 142-43



education system and for Pratt, as “a thinker and administrator of the first rank.” Pratt represented a more “enlightened generation” of reformers who acknowledged the humanity of Indians. Eastman counseled a gradualist approach to assimilation, or, in his words, “race amalgamation” since Indians could no longer live in isolation. In addition, racial segregation served only as a temporary measure while Native Americans awaited full citizenship. Critical of federal Indian policies, he denounced perpetuation of wardship and “partial dependence.” A supporter of the Dawes Act, Eastman concluded, “The sooner all restrictions can be removed, all specializing institutions discontinued, and all trust funds divided *per capita* the better for the manhood and full independence of the Indian citizen.”<sup>103</sup>

The Society of American Indians was officially formed in 1911 at a conference, ironically, convened on Columbus Day at Ohio State University. According to Charles Eastman, he and his brother, the Reverend John Eastman, and Reverend Sherman Coolidge (Arapahoe) had discussed the idea of forming an organization of likeminded, educated Indians fifteen years earlier. They decided against it for fear of antagonizing the Indian Bureau and because “the movement would not be understood either by our own race or the American people in general.” The “officials at Washington and in the field [were] sensitive to criticism, nor [were] they accustomed to allowing the Indian a voice in his own affairs.”<sup>104</sup> In a second attempt, Charles Eastman, Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai), Thomas L. Sloan (Omaha), Charles Daganett, Laura Cornelius, and others gathered at the behest of Fayette A.

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<sup>103</sup> Universal Races Congress, *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems*, edited by G. Spiller, reprint of 1911 ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 374-376.

<sup>104</sup> Charles A. Eastman, *The Indian Today; The Past and Future of the First American* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, 1915), 131.

McKenzie. A white sociologist and “friend of the Indian” reformer, Professor McKenzie of Ohio State University had been involved in the settlement house movement and the “Negro advancement” movement, and later served on the committee that produced the 1928 Meriam Report, the publication of which helped usher in a new phase of Indian reform in the twentieth century.<sup>105</sup>

His ideas of Indian reform were reflected in his 1908 publication on Indian-white relations in the United States. He posed the questions, “Can a culture and civilization be transferred from a higher to a lower people? Can one race acquire in a few generations what another race has with difficulty gained through many generations?” He hoped to participate in the “regeneration” of cultures, an experiment applicable around the globe.<sup>106</sup>

Attuned to the philosophy of American Indian education, McKenzie reflected similar attitudes held by the founder of Indian education, Henry Pratt, of the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. For example, McKenzie explained, “For the Indian we desire change and progress, something which is directly opposed to the forces of his tradition and custom. The tribal organization and the tribal spirit are not compatible with the white man’s life and civilization.” For the civilization process to be complete, Indians had to abandon their distinctiveness as Indians, that is, native religious, beliefs, and customs: their Indian identity. McKenzie’s philosophy of the American Indian’s status in white society was important for he worked with progressive Indians to promote citizenship for Native Americans. Citizenship was to be the apex of the civilization process. To be a U.S. citizen meant that an individual

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<sup>105</sup> Hertzberg, 36.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 32.

had attained the recognition from the dominant society that he, and later, she, embodied the civic ideals of the U.S. Constitution. He called for the elimination of distinctions between “the red and the white man in their civil status.” The unique relationship between the federal government and Indian tribes should be eradicated, thus placing Indians as individuals on the same level as all others, regardless of color. Without the “privileges” of being a distinctive race, Indians would assimilate and embrace the “obligations which rest upon his fellow citizens of all colors.”<sup>107</sup>

Hazel Hertzberg assessed McKenzie’s program for Indian assimilation, or “race transformation,” as lacking in a cultural understanding of Indians. However, McKenzie based his theories of racial adaptation upon an idea of racial survival; for Indians to avoid extinction they had to assimilate into the larger white society. He pointed to political, legal, and administrative remedies to the challenges modern Indians faced. He assumed Indians would define themselves as U.S. citizens, no longer as tribal members. The tribal affiliation constituted the primary obstacle to the progress of the race of Indians. Intellectuals and reformers alike spoke of racial progress.

McKenzie’s theory of education denounced “a belief in his [the Indian’s] essential inferiority or that would limit him to the lower ranges of life and of thought . . .” Labeling Indians as inferior intellectually was, in his mind, “a libel on human nature and the spirit of American democracy.” He proposed education for Indians so they would develop an educated class of native leaders. “Such education is practically the one way of creating . . . that racial leadership which is the chief hope

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

and mean of attaining an accelerating progress.”<sup>108</sup> The native leadership would define for Indians in the United States a racial identity instead of a tribal identity. Temporarily they called their organization the American Indian Association whose goals reflected the Progressive Era reform movement’s faith in human progress, scientific efficiency, and organizational effort. The group enlarged its membership to eighteen members, but the majority maintained connections with eastern boarding schools, were employed in professional careers, many with the Indian Bureau, and almost all were from Eastern, Prairie, and Plains tribes.<sup>109</sup>

McKenzie and the Native participants who gathered in Ohio formulated an alternative to the vanishing Indian, a cultural assumption predominant in the United States that understood Indians as a dying people, perched on extinction, relics of the frontier past. This ideology, inherent to the concept of Manifest Destiny, spelled “social death” for Native peoples.<sup>110</sup> The central event that reinforced this social death was the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee. The Seventh Cavalry’s slaughter of Big Foot’s band of Sioux proved to be the seminal event in Indian-military conflict in the United States. While reformers may have been shocked and outraged at this massacre, even Charles Eastman, present at Pine Ridge during the unrest, initially attempted to quell the “Messiah Craze” and negotiate with the “peaceful” Indians. Only years later did he learn of the substantive grievances that the Sioux held against the Indian agents at Pine Ridge. While he never endorsed the Ghost Dance, Eastman

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 31-36.

<sup>110</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 38-45; See also Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996, 1997), 135-137; Goldhagen constructed his concept of “eliminationist anti-Semitism” based on Patterson’s comparative study of slavery; a cultural phenomenon of social death, therefore, can lead to genocide.

modified his perception and therein laid one of the many criticisms he leveled against federal Indian policy and the BIA. Indian resistance appeared broken after Wounded Knee; Indians existed only in dime novels, captivity narratives, and in Wild West shows.

The SAI challenged that cognitive model through the foundation of their organization. In their “Statement of Purpose” for the Society, they asserted that Indians still lived in the United States and the organization, as the race’s representatives, would work “to emulate the sturdy characteristics of the North American Indian, especially his honesty and patriotism.”<sup>111</sup> The Society faced an almost insurmountable task. It sought to undermine the central metaphor of Manifest Destiny and the foundation of the myth of American civilization’s triumph in North America. The SAI contradicted the image of Indians as a vanishing race, defeated in the wake of U.S. expansion. In fact, Indians were very much alive and resilient and able to compete in modern American society if the U.S. granted them full citizenship. Given the chance, the argument continues, Indians would prove to be the ablest of Americans and the noblest of citizens—true to their heritage.

The American Indian Association, the preliminary name of the organization until the first annual meeting, issued a call for a national conference to be held in Columbus, Ohio in October 1911. They articulated the need for such a conference in a number of ways. First, “the highest ethical forces of America” were conducting the assimilation of Native Americans and an evaluation of the results was needed. Second, a national policy on Indian self-help was needed, which could only be achieved “with the attainment of a race consciousness and a race leadership.” The

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<sup>111</sup> “The American Indian Association, Purpose,” SAI-WHC.

successful choice of a “race leader” required the efforts of “the educated, progressive members of all the tribes.” Third, such an organization of progressive-minded Indians would provide an authoritative and collective native voice in federal Indian policy and a means of avoiding “mistaken policies.” Finally, the conference would allow the “red brother” to guide “the white man” away from “a century of dishonor,” toward redemption and social justice “for the race whose lands he has occupied.”<sup>112</sup>

The Executive committee convened again in June to draft two letters, one for Indians, and the other for “non-Indians.” The committee asked tribes to send the name of a delegate, or representative, to whom the AIA would extend an official invitation. The committee exercised final approval of delegates, with a carefully worded caveat that the Executive Committee would issue invitations “unless for very special reasons” they vetoed a nominee. The committee had begun to craft its representatives. Not all Indian voices were welcome at this conference; as representatives of their “race,” they had to consider the broader audience of white reformers and government officials they hoped to persuade and influence. Alienating those in power would have undermined their goals. This first act of censorship appeared necessary given the delicate politics of race in an era of white supremacy. To do otherwise seemed foolhardy and out of touch with the realities of working “within the system.”<sup>113</sup>

Notably, the letterhead for the “Indian letter” designated the terms of membership for the organization. Only persons of “Indian blood” could be Active and Associate Members. Determining “Indianness” by blood quantum was standard

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<sup>112</sup> Hertzberg, 37.

<sup>113</sup> Form letters, 1911, SAI-WHC.

procedure for indicating the degree of Indian ancestry, a practice that has been institutionalized in federal recognition of Indian tribes, and within many tribes. The organization's choice of Indian blood as the determinant of authenticity may appear problematic to those who maintain different standards for making such judgments. The founders of the SAI maintained a different sensibility regarding the designation of Indians as a race. Inter-marriage with whites occurred at varying degrees among tribes, and theories of blood purity helped Indians and whites at this time classify racial identity. The SAI, based on the extant records, did not discuss this issue. The organization's intention was to bring Indians together as a pan-Indian movement to assist in the assimilation of Native Americans into the broader society.<sup>114</sup> Daganett sent out a letter to solicit members and addressed it to "Fellow Americans." He pointed out that the "Indian Problem" was a "NATIONAL problem, which enlists the active interest of every citizen." He explained:

The Society of American Indians stands for the qualified Indian American as an American with all of the rights, privileges and duties implied; for the protection of the isolated groups of Indians who are unable to understand and enjoy the opportunities of citizenship nor assume its obligations; also for the preservation of Indian history, of all that is great and noble in Indian character, and for progress.<sup>115</sup>

The selected members studied in this work illuminate Native experiences, political allegiances; all left behind publications revealing their interpretations of Indian activism while they were members of the SAI. Among the handful of Indians who founded the Society of American Indians, four remain significant: Arthur Parker (Seneca), Charles Eastman, Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai), and Henry Roe Cloud

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<sup>114</sup> Hertzberg, 38.

<sup>115</sup> Form letter written by Charles Daganett, 1911, SAI-WHC.

(Winnebago). The fifth SAI member, Gertrude Bonnin (Dakota Sioux), joined the organization in 1915. By 1912 the SAI retained approximately one hundred active members and the same number of associate members.<sup>116</sup> Even as the membership ebbed and flowed over the next ten years, the intellectual leadership of the SAI set the platform for the organization, organized annual conferences, and debated the future of Indian civic life.

Arthur Parker was born in 1881 on the Cattaraugus reservation, south of Buffalo, New York. His father was Seneca (Iroquois) and his mother Scots-English. His great-uncle, Ely S. Parker, worked as a civil engineer on the Erie Canal and was later Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the Grant Administration. The elder Parker, like his great-nephew, left a controversial legacy for Native peoples. Their decisions to follow the white man's road toward education and, in Arthur Parker's case, Christianity, highlight the challenges inherent in maintaining an Indian identity within the culture of the white, dominant society. Parker worked as an archaeologist and ethnologist for the New York State Museum from 1906 to 1925. He embraced academia and made his life's work the study of the Iroquois from the perspectives of anthropology, ethnology, and archaeology. The troublesome issue of racism against "primitive" or "vanishing" Indians colored Parker's perceptions of the proper course Native Americans should take toward civilization. He, like many of his counterparts in the sciences, supported the idea of progress and Social Darwinist thinking. Race, the basic categorical distinction among human beings, revealed essential characteristics. Native Americans, in his view, were capable of adapting to white "civilization" and achieving status in the middle-class world that Parker adopted and

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<sup>116</sup> Hertzberg, 82-83.



maintained. Parker played a vital role in the life of the Society of American Indians and the intellectual backbone of the organization until his accommodationist position grew untenable to other powerful members. He served as the secretary-treasurer from 1911 to 1916 and as president from 1916-1918. In addition he founded and edited the Society's journal the *Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*, later titled *American Indian Magazine*.<sup>117</sup>

Like his peer, Charles Eastman published prolifically during his lifetime, and was, in Fayette McKenzie's estimation, "the best known Indian in the country."<sup>118</sup> He wrote thoughtfully about his life as a young Sioux, and of his conversion to Christianity. Mindful of his audience, the predominantly white intellectual community, Eastman fashioned a complex narrative of Indian life ways and the meaning of white civilization. He revealed optimism in the adoption of the dominant culture; it appeared to be the means by which native peoples had the best chance for survival. He frequently employed the terms "savage" and "Indian's wild life" to characterize the Indian existence before the influences of Christianity and Victorian culture. Critics of his attitudes must evaluate him in terms of his historical context and should remain mindful of Eastman's entire message as it evolved over time. Twisting his writings to confirm or deny a particular contemporary partisan position grossly distorts the intellectual value of his work. Eastman wrote for the intellectual, elite group of reformers and the literate, predominantly white audience, whom he and the SAI hoped to influence. His body of work sought to dispel the myth of the

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<sup>117</sup> John Siegel, "Two Cultures, One Cause: Bi-Culturalism and Native American Reform in the Career of Aruthur Caswell Parker (Gawasowaneh), 1906-1925" (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 1993), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Fayette McKenzie, Washington, D.C., to Arthur.C. Parker (ACP), Albany, NY, 31 October 1911, SAI-WHC.

degraded and vanishing Indian. Indians possessed a form of civilization with which white readers could sympathize. Just like contemporary Christians, Eastman suggested that the Indians of his youth received spiritual guidance. He interpreted his adolescent years in *Indian Boyhood*, published in 1902. Although his paternal grandmother raised him in the traditional ways of hunting, Eastman asserted, “Religion was the basis for all Indian training.”<sup>119</sup>

His father participated in the 1862 Minnesota Uprising and, believing his father was executed in the brutal aftermath, nursed an idea of vengeance against the “Long Knives,” white men. Every summer after 1862, Eastman recalled, his uncle “went on the warpath” and returned with scalps. At the same time, he heard “marvelous things of this people. In some things we despised them; in others we regarded them as *wakan* (mysterious), a race whose power bordered upon the supernatural.” Ohiyesa asked his uncle why the Wasichu received such power from the Great Mystery – “Certainly they are a heartless nation. They have made some of their people servants--yes, slaves! We have never believed in keeping slaves, but it seems that these *Washichu* do! It is our belief that they painted their servants black a long time ago, to tell them from the rest, and now the slaves have children born to them of the same color!”<sup>120</sup>

His father returned to the camp after being imprisoned in Davenport, Iowa with those convicted of participation in the Sioux Uprising. While in prison he received a white education and was converted to Christianity by missionaries. Later he received a pardon from President Lincoln. Upon release he returned to the new

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<sup>119</sup> Charles A. Eastman, *Indian Boyhood* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1902), 49.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-242.

reservation on the Missouri River, and soon became convinced that life on a government reservation meant physical and moral degradation. Therefore, he determined, with several others, to try the white man's way of gaining a livelihood. They accordingly left the agency against the persuasions of the agent, renounced all government assistance, and took land under the United States Homestead law, on the Big Sioux River. He made his home there and sought out his child. "His Christian love prompted him to do it. He secured a good guide, and found his way in time through the vast wilderness." The transition into white culture elicited this response from Eastman: "I felt as if I were dead and traveling to the Spirit Land; for now all my old ideas were to give place to new ones, and my life was to be entirely different from that of the past." When he heard a hymn containing the word Jesus his father told him that Jesus, was the Son of God who came on earth to save sinners, and that it was because of him that he had sought me. **This conversation made a deep impression upon my mind.** Late in fall we reached the citizen settlement at Flandreau, SD, where my father and some others dwelt among the whites. Here my wild life came to an end, and my school days began."<sup>121</sup>

Eastman's formal education culminated in graduation from Dartmouth College and then Boston University School of Medicine. From 1890 to 1893 he served as the reservation physician at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, during the turbulent troubles involving the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee Massacre. Eastman wrote in his application for government employment that "the government physician can be the most useful civilizer among the force of government officers placed in any Indian Reservation if he could understand the language and the habits of the people."

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 245-247

To be effective, a physician “must feel at home with them, and must put forward no claim of superiority, but rather sympathy and kindness in action and feelings.”<sup>122</sup>

Eastman articulated his role as an educated Indian in the United States: “My chief objective has been, not to entertain, but to present the American Indian in his true character before Americans.”<sup>123</sup> His own true character emerged from a traditional Sioux upbringing and a conversion to Christianity.

In his work, *The Indian Today*, Eastman expressed support for the Dawes Act primarily because it granted citizenship to Indians who accepted allotments. By becoming citizens Indians could obtain the rights of the dominant Americans, particularly the suffrage, which he hoped would give Indians a voice in decisions affecting their lives. He criticized the Burke Act of 1906 which delayed citizenship with the modification that Indians who received allotments after 1906 would have to wait the entire twenty-five-year trust period before they were eligible for U.S. citizenship. Eastman suggested that Indian intellectuals harbored “no real bitterness or pessimistic feelings” toward the federal government for the graft and corruption and repression inherent in past federal Indian policy. He observed, “It has long been apparent to us that absolute distinctions cannot be maintained under the American flag. Yet we think each race should be allowed to retain its own religion and racial codes as far as is compatible with the public good, and should enter the body politic of its own free will, and not under compulsion. This has not been the case with the native American.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Raymond Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles A. Eastman, Santee Sioux*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 41.

<sup>123</sup> Charles Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 187.

<sup>124</sup> *Indian Today*, 101-103, 105-106. 130, Eastman, *Deep Woods*, 163-64

Indians in 1911 were finally presented with the opportunity to voice their opinions about the policies that affects them as Indians and as potential U.S. citizens. In the past whites had cast Indians as heathens, savages, and “the devil’s own.”<sup>125</sup> Eastman hoped that the work of Indian Progressives would lay the foundation for the Indian self-reliance. The end of the ward status and paternalism of the federal government would produce a modern, educated Indian, whom he called the “new Indian.”

Despite participating in the SAI’s founding, Eastman did not attend the annual meetings until 1918, although he remained a member. After his experiences on various Indian reservations through his job in the BIA, Eastman expressed skepticism about the ability of the Bureau to help Indians achieve self-sufficiency. He supported the goals of the SAI, in theory. However, he never relinquished his suspicions that the Society was too tolerant of the federal Indian policy as enacted by the BIA.

The most consistently outspoken opponent of the BIA was Carlos Montezuma. He was born with the name “Wassaja” during the 1860s to Yavapai parents, whose tribe was located in central and southern Arizona. Montezuma’s biographer, Peter Iverson, noted that the tribe has also been known as the Mohave-Apache. During a clash between the Pimas and Yavapais in 1871, a number of Yavapai were killed and captured. Wassaja and his two sisters were among the captives. Later that year the Pima sold Wassaja to an Italian immigrant, Carlos Gentile, and he raised Wassaja as Carlos Montezuma, the name he received on November 17, 1871 when he was baptized. Gentile placed Montezuma in school. As Montezuma recollected, he thrived in the environment, despite frequent moves

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<sup>125</sup> *Indian Today*, 113-114.

throughout the country. Montezuma attended public schools in Galesburg and Chicago, Illinois and in Brooklyn, New York during the 1870s. Another benefactor, William H. Steadman, became his guardian when Gentile's New York business burned down. Steadman was a Baptist minister and under his tutelage, Montezuma became a practicing Baptist. Montezuma attended the University of Illinois where he earned a B.S. in chemistry. After graduation he entered the Chicago Medical College completed medical school in 1889. During his time in medical school, Montezuma initiated correspondence with Richard Henry Pratt. They maintained a life-long correspondence, and a personal and professional friendship.

Montezuma opened a private medical practice in Chicago, with deeper hopes of securing a job within the Indian Service. Pratt intervened for the young doctor and notified Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan. Montezuma expressed to Morgan his desire to work for the "elevation of a nation," and a commitment to "reform [Indians] and also to do all I can to set them a good example." Morgan appointed Montezuma as clerk and physician at the Indian school at Fort Stevenson, Dakota Territory. He accepted this position with much idealism, optimistic about his job, his Christian duty, and the possibility for, in his words, teaching "my race the values of life from savagery to civilization." He planned to proselytize among the Indians in Dakota Territory and bring to them the message that the God who "permitted the nation to which they belong to be nearly whipped out of existence" still guided them and "required of them a greater responsibility."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Peter Iverson, *Carlos Montezuma and the Changing World of American Indians* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 12, 14.

Montezuma lived and worked at Ft. Stevenson in North Dakota, the Western Shoshone Agency in Nevada, and the Colville Agency in Washington and, like Charles Eastman, grew disillusioned with federal Indian policy and the Indian Bureau in particular. He clashed with Indian agents and inveighed against the superstitions of medicine men. Inadequate staffing, medicines, and funding fueled his dissatisfaction. By 1893 he desired another transfer and wrote Pratt that he thought he needed to fulfill a “higher mission than physician, this is to prove to the white people there is the same stuff in the Indians as there is in the White people, it only requires the same environments.” His final government job was as physician at the Carlisle Indian School. But it was too late. Montezuma formed a life-long animosity toward the Bureau of Indian Affairs and sought its abolition. In a New York *Daily Tribune* article published on April 9, 1905, he openly criticized Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Francis Leupp for his position on federal Indian policy. He wrote in his review entitled, “On the Future of Our Indians,” that the Native American “is not content to remain silent. He knows what he wants and ought to have, and taken collectively, these demands of the large number of enlightened Indians . . . must bring about a change.” The change he referenced was the “complete overthrow of the system which is now more than ever intolerable.”<sup>127</sup>

Montezuma chose not to attend the first meeting in Columbus, despite the entreaties of his colleagues. He suspected the organization held sympathetic views toward the BIA as evinced in Charles Daganett’s election to secretary-treasurer. In a letter to Daganett less than a month before the first annual conference, he resigned from the association and expressed regret he had been involved in its genesis. While

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 24, 66.

he encouraged the participation of white reformers who “were thoroughly proven to be honestly our friends and had large ideas of our racial possibilities and were insistent that our people have the best opportunities for development,” he alerted Daganett to the connections these white supporters had to the Indian Bureau.<sup>128</sup> Their participation negated his. Pratt encouraged this interpretation. He wrote to Montezuma, “My dear Monty, You are dead right in your estimate of your Indian association program . . . . It is simply a skillful suppression of the vital needs of the Indian and a dilettante dancing attendance upon the Bureau’s methods and supervision.” Montezuma apparently had severe misgivings about Daganett’s leadership role in the association, too.<sup>129</sup>

Another central figure in the SAI also missed the first meeting. Henry Roe Cloud was a Winnebago Indian raised Nebraska. He had graduated from Yale in 1910. His name, Roe, he added once he was “adopted” by a couple, Mary and Walter Roe, missionaries in Oklahoma. His conversion to Christianity and his close relations with the Roes lasted throughout his life. They offered him financial, spiritual, and moral support during his years at Yale and his efforts to establish an all-Indian high school. He took the advice of Walter Roe and enrolled in Oberlin College to begin seminary training. Around the time of his graduation from Yale, Roe had counseled Cloud, “In your case it is well for you to acquire every honor and degree possible, simply as an object lesson for and concerning your race.”<sup>130</sup> He transferred to Auburn Seminary after one year at Oberlin. He was building his reputation as a model for

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<sup>128</sup> Carlos Montezuma to Charles Daganett, September 25, 1911. Carlos Montezuma Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, hereafter CM-WHC.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 64, 73-74.

<sup>130</sup> Jason M. Tetzloff, “Do Some Good Among the Indians: Henry Roe Cloud and the Twentieth Century Native American Advocacy” (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1996), 26.



Indian improvement through Christian ministry; the opportunities for speaking engagements were in the East, where he spoke at Vassar College, Mount Hermon, Williams College, and the Hampton Institute. The Roes and Cloud were also soliciting donations for the establishment of the all-Indian high school. Their connections in the East were the most promising. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1913 and, also important to his life's work, earned a master's degree in anthropology from Yale.

Roe Cloud, a product of Indian boarding schools, an elite university, and seminary training, presented himself as the embodiment of what progressive Indians could achieve in the United States. His success as an educated Indian demonstrated to the American public, still imbued with the image of the "vanishing Indian," that the life of the reservation could be overcome and left behind. Indians on reservations represented the stereotype of the vanishing Indians, the depraved, defeated, and wretched leftovers of the westward expansion. The white "friends of the Indian" sought out and encouraged such educated Indians as Roe Cloud; his subsequent work with the Society of American Indians challenged the racist notions of primitive backwardness. Roe Cloud and others like him in the SAI suggested that individual self-help, acceptance of Christianity, and alignment with the national identity of U.S. citizens offered solutions to Indian poverty and social decay.

Roe Cloud had maintained close ties with the Indians on the Winnebago Reservation in Nebraska. He worked to convert the residents to Christianity. He also used his growing national notoriety to campaign for the release of the Fort Sill Apaches, the remains of Geronimo's Cochise band who had survived imprisonment

first at St. Augustine, Florida, then in Mount Vernon, Alabama, and finally, in 1894, in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. His goal, however, was to open a school for educating Indians. He dedicated his career to providing Native students with formal schooling beyond the elementary grades and manual training programs that the boarding school system offered. Like his peers in the SAI, Roe Cloud juggled numerous responsibilities to the Winnebago, Christian organizations, and federal Indian affairs. The years that the Society flourished, Roe Cloud labored to find funding for his Indian school.

The Roe Indian Institute opened in 1915 to prepare Native Christian leaders for all tribes. Roe Cloud believed the end of the wardship status of Indians would break the cycle of government dependency that sapped Indian initiative. Educated and self-sufficient Indians would create an informed Indian citizenry capable of influencing federal Indian policy. The self-help gospel of the Roe Indian Institute stood in direct contrast to the federal government's provision of education, food, and leadership. Cloud even invoked the words of Theodore Roosevelt, which highlighted Cloud's commitment to a Christian foundation for Indian leadership, "A people educated in intellect and not in morals is a menace to our land." Two years later, Roe Cloud included Native Americans and current students in the gathering U.S. involvement in World War I, so in 1917 the Roe Indian Institute issued "The Indian: His Part in the National Emergency" to highlight the Indian's commitment to the national effort. Educated Indians who participated in overt patriotic activities proved to the larger public their fitness for assimilation and full citizenship. Cloud appealed to readers to remember the Institute as a training-ground for future Indian leaders,

those educated, Christian Indians vital to the advancement of the race. He solicited the financial support of readers and encouraged them to associate that support with “strengthen[ing] the fabric of our national life, foster[ing] a broader racial understanding, and mak[ing] up for ‘broken treaties’ and spread[ing] abroad that surest preventative of future wars—the spirit of real Christian brotherhood.”<sup>131</sup>

A latecomer to the SAI, but not to progressive Indian reform efforts, was Gertrude Bonnin, also known as Zitkala-Sa, a name she gave herself. Born at the Yankton Sioux Agency on February 22, 1876, she left for Indiana where she was educated among Quakers at White’s Indiana Manual Labor Institute in Wabash. At age eleven she returned to South Dakota, and later documented the school experience in *American Indian Stories*, published between 1900 and 1902. She hated the life, and still found education her only means of escape from the reservation. In a pensive and somber tone Bonnin captured an ambivalence toward Indian assimilation that never left her: “In this fashion many have passed idly through the Indian schools during the last decade, afterward to boast of their charity to the North American Indian. But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization.”<sup>132</sup> She later enrolled, against her mother’s advice, in Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana where she appeared to flourish until she became ill and abandoned her studies. Like many female reformers of the Progressive Era, she was similar to the first generation of female college graduates. These educated women wanted to harness their restless energy and apply

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 106, 116-117.

<sup>132</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 113.

the knowledge they had gained to “do something important.”<sup>133</sup> Also typical of many female settlement house reformers, she became a teacher. Bonnin taught at Carlisle and then studied at the New England Conservatory of Music where she honed her skills as a musician and planned to pursue a writing career.

Throughout her life she maintained ties with the Yankton Sioux and numerous other tribes throughout the country. A talented orator, her career included numerous speaking and musical engagements. She was elected to office in the SAI in 1916 when she became editor of the *American Indian Magazine*. She and her husband Raymond, also an enrolled member of the Yankton Sioux, moved to Washington, D.C. so she could manage the editor’s office of the SAI. She and her husband worked for the BIA at the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota and for five years at the Uintah and Ouray reservation. While there she served as a vocal critic of peyote use and its supporter, the Native American Church. She even testified at congressional hearings on the dangers of peyote use. She had political alliances among many well-established reform organizations such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Indian Rights Association, and the American Civil Liberties Union. She worked with John Collier as they focused on the corruption among oil developers in northeastern Oklahoma and their attempts to defraud Indians as a result of allotment.

Bonnin’s ascendancy to prominence in the SAI signaled both a larger shift in the organization’s willingness to criticize federal Indian policy and in the role of women in the male-dominated Executive Committee. She had a close alliance with Montezuma and with tribes in Utah and South Dakota. Once, she had even been

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<sup>133</sup> Davis, *Spearheads of Reform*, 37.

engaged to marry Montezuma, but they could not reconcile their career goals and personal desires to work in different areas of the country. They later mended their personal differences and worked vigorously in defense of Indian rights through the Society and on reservations throughout the United States. Both were very vocal critics of federal Indian policy, the Indian Bureau, and of paternalism. However, Montezuma was a physician trained in the tenets of Western science. He pushed for Indians to abandon out-dated practices and beliefs. Zitkala-Sa, however, embraced the “old ways” and wrote passionately about the values of traditional Indian life.<sup>134</sup>

Each member of the SAI made personal and professional choices regarding what it meant to be a modern Indian. They confronted the contradictions of Indian political activism because survival meant compromise and alliances with those who represented the federal government. Each active member’s profile defies simplistic categorization; their political activities and concessions evolved as the United States emerged as an industrialized, world power. As members of the Society of American Indians, they chose to bind their future with the nation; they were also Indians who believed in the promises of the Constitution, the U.S. legal system, and the betterment of the human condition.

Idealism aside, the SAI confronted the mundane, and often frustrating, task of administering a reform movement. The first years of the SAI were marked by dissension and efforts to boost membership. From the onset Arthur Parker attempted to present an image of the SAI removed from the influence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He and other members saw this problem as one of their most protracted. How could the organization establish credibility among a constituency that was

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 36-38.

understandably suspicious of the federal government and the Bureau? Parker wrote of his concerns to Charles Daganett a month after the first annual conference. “Do you think that there are so many elements and so many stages of advancement represented that we will have a difficult time in effecting harmony,” he asked. Parker’s attempted to create a forum for all educated Indians to speak candidly with one another regarding federal Indian policy and the needs of Indians. Educated Indians served as models for less “advanced” Native people whose life experiences seemed so far removed from the SAI leadership. Parker explained that gap: “The ideas of the educated Indian, his methods of thought, his viewpoint, his foresight and his needs are all so different from his undeveloped brother that here may be trouble.” He rejected a defeatist attitude and, during his tenure in the SAI, clung to the initial idealism he felt from the beginning. “I am not discouraged,” he wrote reassuringly, “howsoever this may sound. I am resolved to keep in the firing line and see what comes of the movement.”<sup>135</sup>

Despite his apprehensions, Parker’s reform efforts were steeped in the Progressive Era’s doctrine of self-help and moral uplift. In a letter to a new member he explained the SAI’s goal was “to inspire the race with the realization that from self help springs independence and from independence every right which the nation can give to its people.”<sup>136</sup> He believed that once Indian’s freed themselves from the label of “ward,” a pejorative term that denoted dependency upon the federal government for survival, that Indians would received full citizenship and legal protection just as all other Americans had. In a letter to Charles Daganett, Parker expressed a concern

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<sup>135</sup> ACP to Charles Daganett, November 7, 1911, SAI-WHC.

<sup>136</sup> ACP to Mrs. James Barr Ames, October 26, 1912, SAI-WHC.

he would revisit throughout his association with the SAI: how to reconcile the disparate views of Indians into a coherent plan. He knew that “educated Indians” would formulate goals different from those of their “underdeveloped brother.” What if, he asked Daganett, the founding members “agreed upon some line that our experience and education had taught us as right,” only to find new delegates and members who “repudiate our entire work?”<sup>137</sup> The SAI never found a satisfactory answer to that question.

The SAI, placed in its proper historical context, perceived the unfolding of the United States imperial power. The Congress and the Supreme Court, with the help of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, had dismantled the legal status of Indians as sovereign nations. The plenary power of Congress seemed to have total control of the Indians’ fate. In a realistic and understandable assessment of their political and legal position before the federal government, the SAI chose to assert Indians’ need for full citizenship, thus providing an avenue for Indians *as citizens* to influence federal Indian policy. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, tribal sovereignty did not appear to be a viable option for Indian tribes. The political climate of the times held that assimilation into the dominant culture offered the best option for survival. Montezuma, Parker, Eastman, Roe Cloud, and Bonnin were all examples of Indians who had adapted and survived; they served as the models for other Indians. Their ability to persuade the other Indians of the United States that assimilation was the most appropriate option for Indians was a controversial step; it has remained controversial, yet unavoidable for Indians to reconcile themselves to some form of contact with white, Euro-American values.

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<sup>137</sup> ACP to Charles Daganett, November 7, 1911, SAI-WHC.

The SAI thought its approach was the best for tribes. Plaguing them, however, was how quickly to push for change, how much to expect, how much to demand of the federal government and of a dominant culture skeptical of the abilities of “inferior” peoples. It was a disagreement the SAI was unable to resolve.

Montezuma grew more insistent in his call for the dismantling of the BIA; it was the Indian’s problem. Other, more moderate members of the organization, many of them Indian Bureau employees, countered with the approach of working “within the system” to bring about change. Parker suggested that changing the Indian into a full-fledged U.S. citizen would take time. “We are red men still, even though we have plucked the feathers from our war bonnets and are using them for pens. The battle scene has shifted and the contest becomes one of brain and wit. A race just out of the chrysalis may not yet be expected to fly as strongly as the screaming eagle.”<sup>138</sup>

Charles Daganett, the highest ranking Indian in the federal government, as Supervisor of Indian Employment in the BIA, knew his position as a spokesperson for the SAI, was fraught with contradictions.

The reaction of the Indian Bureau was certainly close in the minds of Indians at the turn of the century. The BIA served as the conduit through which Indians had contact with the Secretary of the Interior and the federal government. Its institutional make-up reflected the interests of the federal government, of course, and worked to enact its official policy: assimilation. As more Indians found employment in the Bureau, the issue of federal Indian policy, administered by Indians, became more problematic for the SAI. Membership included BIA officials and some of its staunchest critics. Critics found the BIA heavy-handed, paternalistic, and

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<sup>138</sup> ACP to Ammons, March 28, 1913, SAI-WHC.



unresponsive to complaints against the federal government or its employees. The SAI would find itself fighting to reconcile the presence of the BIA in the Society's ranks with the Bureau's formidable power over Indians and Indian affairs.

In December, Charles Daganett wrote Arthur Parker with plans to resign as secretary of the SAI because he felt his job in the BIA might be a detriment to the fledgling organization. Daganett recognized the contradiction inherent in the Indian Bureau. "It is rather a sad commentary on a Bureau, organized and maintained solely for the benefit of the Indian, when an Indian who has devoted the best part of his life to the broadest interests of the Indian is looked upon with suspicion simply because of his connection with such Bureau." He chastised critics who failed to understand the Bureau's subordination to federal Indian policy. In his opinion, the BIA often carried out policies whether or not they were in the Indians' best interests.<sup>139</sup> He resigned in January 1912. Regretfully, Parker and Coolidge acknowledged the loss of Daganett's energy and Bureau connections, but understood the liability his BIA employment posed for the SAI.

Parker perceived the need for Indians to adapt and change; the conditions of Indians in the first decade of the twentieth century required change. Parker explained, "The Indian can not live in modern America and live as his ancestors did four hundred years ago. This should be self-evident. As a race the Indian would be blotted out and with it the characteristics of the race. It would only remain in history." These statements present a pragmatic, fair assessment of the options native peoples in the United States possessed. Resistance to change meant extinction. Parker and the SAI attempted to turn this inevitability into a resurrection. The Indian

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<sup>139</sup> Charles Daganett to ACP, December 5, 1911, SAI-WHC.

must change, but Indians must find solutions for themselves within the “dominant culture,” as Parker termed it.<sup>140</sup>

The SAI lobbied Congress to legislate a defined legal status for Indians so that they might attain and exercise full citizenship rights. Gertrude Bonnin supported Parker’s vision of local SAI centers on reservations in preparation for full citizenship. The tone of moral uplift and preparedness for citizenship permeated the SAI platform. She anticipated that change would be slow, in part due to the unwillingness of “untutored kinsmen” to join their push for citizenship.<sup>141</sup> Full citizenship and a defined legal status were the solutions to the “Indian problem,” or the Indian muddle, as Parker labeled it. “The Indian to-day is in a critical, in an anomalous condition. Called a citizen he may be denied the privileges of citizenship; called a citizen he may yet be dominated by an Indian agent. The situation looks like a contradiction and it is.”<sup>142</sup>

The SAI endorsed self-help and a measure of independence for tribes. For example, Malcolm Clarke and his wife, who claimed membership of the Blackfeet, wrote to the organization and asked it to support the passage of H.R. 4327, a bill that would allow Indians to elect their agents or superintendents and to elect a business committee to oversee the tribal finances. The “real American,” Mr. Clarke reasoned, should “act independently and on the initiative” as American citizens who enjoyed “representation by and with the consent of the governed.” Parker answered in qualified agreement with the bill’s goals. He envisioned native people would “feel that they are in a certain measure responsible for their own destiny and this cannot be

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<sup>140</sup> ACP to Aug. A. Breuninger, January 15, 1912, SAI-WHC.

<sup>141</sup> Gertrude Bonnin to ACP, August 18, 1915, SAI-WHC.

<sup>142</sup> ACP to Breuninger, January 15, 1912, SAI-WHC.

done until they are made responsible by having some voice in their tribal affairs. . .

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Parker corresponded, as did almost all the active members, with people from all over the United States, Indian and non-Indian. He recognized the historical significance of the SAI, and explained it to anyone who cared to ask him. In one letter to an Indian from Oklahoma he championed the cause of social justice: “In our Society of American Indians we afford the first opportunity for the expression of racial ideas, racial opinion and the race’s plea for justice.”<sup>144</sup> However, the organization groaned under the strain of divergent, polarized views about the Indian’s needs in modern America. It faced the greatest challenge to all social movements for unity of purpose and identity: how much dissent to tolerate.

Parker and Coolidge grappled with the problem of speaking for a group that was not entirely educated on the pressing issues of Indian affairs. In fact, the SAI rejected some views of the people it purported to represent. The SAI walked a fine line between officially speaking for Indians and representing divergent, often conflicting views, of Indians. The issue of choosing a location of annual conferences most readily highlights this debate among members of the organization. After the president of the SAI, Reverend Sherman Coolidge, received some correspondence criticizing the choice of Cedar Rapids for the 1916 meeting, he forwarded the letters to Parker. The organization, once again, fended off charges of BIA control. Parker’s concern was which Indian “voices” would emerge at the conference. He responded to Coolidge’s letter: “Cedar Rapids is entirely neutral and ought to draw evenly upon the

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<sup>143</sup> Malcolm Clarke to ACP, February 12, 1915, SAI-WHC; ACP to Clarke, February 25, 1915, SAI-WHC.

<sup>144</sup> ACP to Holmes Colbert, June 6, 1912, SAI-WHC.

Ojibway and Sioux country as well as from the reservation of Wisconsin and Nebraska.” Parker questioned the wisdom of holding an SAI conference on or near a reservation. Candidly he observed, “Unfortunately, not all of our Indian people are thoroughly educated or thoroughly posted and they are frequently deceived not only by unscrupulous white people but by Indians and mixed bloods looking for business and sometimes a business interest so warps a man’s judgment into believing that his is honest when he is not.”

Parker found some Indian views “dangerous” to the goals of the SAI for racial improvement. These views carried the potential to “destroy the whole work we have so carefully erected.” Parker touched on a sensitive issue among political and social activists: unity of voice. Pan-Indian identity and opinion on Indian affairs, he recognized, was a myth and a constructed message; he spoke with an air of political realism when he determined that “because the Indian wants something it is no reason for immediately saying that it is the right thing to give, or because a man is an Indian he knows what is best for himself. The question of race does not enter into this matter of right or wrong.” In fact, Parker concluded, by “playing upon the idea of race, some shrewd individuals are trying to muddle the entire situation.”<sup>145</sup> Parker also touched on a troubling aspect of progressive reform: its tendency toward paternalism. As long as respectable Indian intellectuals represented the Indian race’s “voice,” they could dismiss and discredit other Indian views. The SAI’s platform states plainly that the organization knew best the formula for racial progress.

Regardless of the inherent conflicts within the SAI, in 1913 the Society launched a journal of views on Indian affairs. The successful publication of the

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<sup>145</sup> ACP to Sherman Coolidge, May 11, 1916, SAI-WHC.

*American Indian Magazine* by Indians and containing Indian viewpoints represented a milestone in Native American history. The SAI provided the first forum for the presentation of native viewpoints on Indian affairs. Parker edited the magazine until 1916 when Gertrude Bonnin took over. The tone of the *American Indian Magazine* exuded progressive reformer sensibilities: rational analysis of the “Indian problem,” optimistic ideals on human progress, faith in organization power and the ability of the federal government to work for the good of citizens. The SAI’s magazine set a precedent in Indian affairs because it proved that Native Americans could write and debate Indian issues in a professionally recognized public forum; the SAI followed many progressive movements of the time such as the women’s suffrage, the NAACP, and settlement house. Their goal: use the tools of the dominant culture to get general public support and sympathy.

Social reformers understood that broad public support for progressive agendas required that the activists present an air of respectability and social propriety. Critics of the SAI, to this day, find their politics accommodationist and far too supportive of assimilation. However, the critics of the SAI have failed to recognize the historical realities the SAI leadership perceived. Holding the SAI accountable for a platform that was unavailable to them fails to analyze its historical and political significance. The SAI formulated its approach based on a set of “realities.” First, the U.S. Supreme Court, by 1913 reinforced a stringent doctrine of congressional plenary power over Indian affairs. Second, the legal status of Indians remained a muddle as the General Allotment Act’s goal, individual citizenship for American Indian through the acquisition of private property and the breakdown of tribal identity, proceeded

apace. The Curtis Act curtailed the goal of U.S. citizenship for Indians, a controversial move that provoked strong criticism from progressive reformers and the SAI. Parker, Roe Cloud, Eastman, Montezuma, and Bonnin formed the first generation of native activists who solicited Indian viewpoints. They called for a defined legal status for Indians: a move from paternalism to self-determination for Indians. Full citizenship rights would allow Indians to contribute to the betterment of Indians, America, and humanity.

Parker was keenly aware of the precedent the SAI was setting. Always reflective, he discussed the responsibility of the SAI, “This Society of ours is the test of the ability of the American Indian race to fraternize with itself and a demonstration that its various divisions have a common ground for sympathetic interests and a mutual ground for consolidation.”<sup>146</sup> He hoped that the American Indian would “have a chance to made good for himself and with no other supervision than his own conscience if his manhood is sought to be preserved and developed. Supervision makes listless slaves—and this, I believe is one of the arguments against Federal paternalism.”<sup>147</sup> Parker envisioned the end of paternalism and the wardship status of Indians; as full citizens, educated and politically active, Indians would find themselves morally improved and socially accepted. Citizenship would counter the plenary power of Congress that hindered Indian self-reliance. Indians could still be Indians. They could adapt to the cultural realities of manifest destiny. Resurrected from a “social death,” Indian would not vanish; they would prevail and flourish as U.S. citizens.

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<sup>146</sup> ACP to Rosa B. LaFlesche, November 23, 1911, SAI-WHC.

<sup>147</sup> ACP to Charles Daganett, February 7, 1912, SAI-WHC.

By 1912 the SAI had set a course it would pursue with greater zeal: respectable distance from the BIA. With Daganett purged as the Secretary of the SAI, the organization hoped to gain more members from Indians who maintained a healthy and well-founded suspicion of the Bureau and the federal Indian policies it executed. The first year was replete with factionalism and attempts to establish the organization as a credible Indian voice in Indian affairs.

Historically, the SAI perceived the glaring lack of Indian participation in decisions critical to their survival as people, instead of sovereign nations. A sovereign nation was a foreign nation; in the era of immigrant influx to the United States, association with the immigrant communities further alienated the SAI members from their goal: citizenship. Indians were the first Americans, the real American, not foreigners. The rhetoric of the SAI highlighted the moral and social fitness of Indians for U.S. citizenship and the rights and privileges such status entailed. The SAI sought to deflect any nativist criticism of Indians as a separate and segregated people; they distanced themselves from the reservation system and called for racial pride and uplift as a means of gaining access to the civic community. The SAI chose civic identity in addition to tribal identity, instead of exclusively. The members hoped a merger of the two would produce a compromise, that is, a viable modern Indian identity.

### Chapter Three

#### Shaping Indian Assimilation in the Progressive Era: The SAI, 1912-1916

“It is possible to do only two things with the Indians, to exterminate them,  
or to make them citizens.”

--Robert Valentine, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1909-1913<sup>148</sup>

The SAI possessed, as part of its mission, a goal to recast the image of the Indian so that white Americans could accept, and ideally, enthusiastically support, full Indian inclusion into society. Therefore members of the SAI were acutely sensitive to Indian imagery in American popular culture. The issue permeated the organization's decision-making process, particularly when the public and the federal government were involved. For example, Parker and SAI President, Sherman Coolidge, in an exchange of letters during the last month of 1911, discussed the issue of the next annual conference. Coolidge discussed with Parker the problems that the physical layout of the conference, if organized by the city of Colorado Springs, could present. Firmly opposed to tents for conference-goers because of the implications, he wrote from Enid, Oklahoma, about the challenge. “I don't like the idea of segregating our kind of Indians in a camp because I believe they have had enough of the reservation system, and feathers and paint and tomahawk may amuse the pale face and hence the freak ‘Indian’ or ‘Injun’ must be put on exhibition, but I don't quite relish the idea of being used as an advertisement for a summer resort, or for drawing a crowd for a fair as it was at Muskogee.” He and Parker also often commented on the marketing and entertainment value of Indian stereotypes. Both bemoaned the

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<sup>148</sup> Russel Lawrence Barsh and James Youngblood Henderson, *The Road: Indian Tribes and Political Liberty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 16 in ff 42, quoted in Diane T. Putney, “Robert Grosvenor Valentine,” in Robert M. Kvasnicka and Herman T. Viola, eds., *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1825-1977* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 234.



employment of Indians in “wild west shows,” fearing that pervasive stereotype undermined efforts of educated, ambitious Native women and men who sought inclusion on white terms. Coolidge, in a humorous and ironic tone, concluded, “If we have tents the pale faces will at once call it the Indian Camp, and yet we represent something else. Heap no good!” He signed the letter, “Columbusly Yours, Sherman Coolidge, ‘The Arapaho.’”<sup>149</sup>

Parker’s response revealed his insistence that accomplished Indians stand as models of respectability. Taken seriously, Indians could compete with whites in the all professions. They merely lacked enough opportunities to do so. Parker also held misgivings about Colorado Springs as a location for the conference. “It is too near the heart of Indian Country,” he said, “and we should be swamped by local parties who had not given our needs and problems especial attention.” Emphasizing the mandate to model Indians’ fitness for American life, he worried that “local Indians not acquainted with our aims and ideals” would “greatly injure” the SAI.

Assimilation created the differences among Indians that Parker and the SAI confronted. This duality and the friction it generated characterized the Indian movement throughout its existence. In hopes of avoiding such a problem, Parker diplomatically suggested, “I would therefore ask you if Chicago does not strike you more favorably as a place likely to appeal to more progressive Indians?”<sup>150</sup> The SAI later settled upon Columbus, Ohio, a second time.

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<sup>149</sup> Coolidge to ACP, December 14, 1911, SAI Papers; Coolidge also signed his letter in this manner because Parker’s last letter to him ended with “Aboriginally Yours, The Seneca.” See ACP to Coolidge, December 5, 1911, SAI Papers.

<sup>150</sup> ACP to Coolidge, December 30, 1911, SAI Papers.

People outside the organization frequently wrote Parker to share their views. Many shared his perspective on differences among Indians. Describing himself as a Carlisle student and participant in Native business affairs in Anadarko, Oklahoma for the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apaches, Sherman Chadleson, wrote Parker in June of 1912. He expressed his enthusiastic support for the SAI, and alerted Parker that resistance lay with “our older and un-educated Indians” who fail to “understand the plans and the good things” the Society supported. With the goal of recruiting more Indians, Chadleson gushed optimistically, “[T]hey will soon decide to join this blessed road. I am an Indian too and the Society stands for my rights and my race.”<sup>151</sup>

Securing those rights depended upon appeals to a sympathetic white audience and proved integral to SAI political action; wider national appeal trumped the “local interests,” or tribal issues, during the organization’s formative years. Parker, sensitive to prevalent Indian stereotypes in American culture, understood where the power lay, and he proved capable of countering the treacherous racial stereotypes. A hallmark of his leadership was an effort to show common civic goals between educated Indians and reform-minded whites. His letter to Edna H. Clayberger was emblematic of his sensitivity to white supporters of the SAI:

It is a source of much encouragement to note the interest which you are displaying in our organization and in the welfare of the Indian race. We cannot hope to succeed without at least the confidence of every American citizen who believes in the independence and justice for every social element with in the nation. Our great task is to inspire the race with the realization that from self help springs independence and from independence every right which the nation can give to its people.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Sherman Chadleson to ACP, June 7, 1912, SAI Papers.

<sup>152</sup> ACP to Edna H. Clayberger, October 26, 1912, SAI Papers.

Later, as editor of the SAI's magazine, Parker published an article containing one personification of Indian progress, Chief Peter P. Pitchlynn (Ha-Tchoc-Tuck-Nee) of the Choctaw Nation. A central political leader in the volatile years of Choctaw history, Pitchlynn, as a biographer described him, "exemplified the bicultural elite who dominated political and economic life" among the Five Tribes during the last half of the nineteenth century. His family embraced assimilation in terms of white education and Protestant Christianity. Part of the devastating removal experience in 1831, Pitchlynn and his family resurrected their fortunes alongside the Choctaw nation in Indian Territory. Pitchlynn oversaw the establishment of a Choctaw national school system when, in 1842, he wrote a new constitution to found two academies for Choctaw children. He believed the tribal children needed a Choctaw education in their own institutions in their own nation.<sup>153</sup> No surprise, then, that Parker chose such a Native person of stature to impart advice, albeit posthumously, to journal readers. Highlighted in the SAI's journal in an article entitled, "The Advice of a Great Choctaw," Pitchlynn was quoted from a speech as part of a peace delegation convened at the end of the Civil War: "It therefore becomes us as a brave people to forget and to lay aside our prejudices and prove ourselves equal to the occasion. Let reason obtain, now that the sway of passion has passed, and let us meet in council with a proper spirit to renew our former relations with the United States Government." The article concluded with a repetition of the above-mentioned quote in italics and a parting commentary: "There, indeed, is a

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<sup>153</sup> "Peter Pitchlynn (Ha-Tachoc-Tuck-Nee), 1806-1881," by Mary Jane Warde in *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, Frederick Hoxie, ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1996), 481-482.

message to every Indian. Let it sink home and have an understanding.”<sup>154</sup> Instead of focusing on the negative features of federal Indian policy, Parker emphasized reparations in the form of full citizenship for Native Americans. This approach revealed the progressive Indian movement’s emphasis on conciliation instead of protracted conflict and the SAI’s blueprint of proper Indian-white relations.

The overriding SAI goal of definitive legal status through U.S. citizenship for American Indians proved daunting. The progressive reformers of the time found themselves, just as the SAI did, working for some form of assimilation. Modern-day critics of this goal cite the SAI’s desire for U.S. citizenship as the rejection of Indian culture and tribal sovereignty. Understood in its historical context, such criticism fails to respect the social and political climate of the times. Emerging in the pre-World War I period, the federal government called for “100% Americanism,” and Woodrow Wilson openly rejected the hyphenated American identity. Fears of union radicalism, Communist red-baiting, strikes, and unchecked immigrant “hordes,” emerged just as the SAI attempted to establish its political agenda. Assimilation or annihilation appeared to be the options. Given the choice, the SAI leadership chose to cast its lot with the ascendancy of the United States as a military, political, and economic world power. Before dismissing Eastman, Montezuma, Bonnin, Parker, and Roe Cloud as dupes or puppets for the white “friends of the Indian,” note the

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<sup>154</sup> Arthur C. Parker, “The Advice of a Great Choctaw,” *Quarterly Journal*, October – December 1914, 258-259; At a different point in time, Pitchlynn was less than forgiving of the federal government’s removal policy. Angie Debo’s history of the Choctaw includes a quote from a letter Pitchlynn wrote to U.S. Secretary of War, Lewis Cass: “I beg, sir, that for a whole nation to give up their whole country, and remove to a distant, wild, and uncultivated land, more for the benefit of the Government than the Choctaws, is a consideration which, I hope, the Government will always cherish with the liveliest sensibility. The privations of a whole nation before setting out, their turmoil and losses on the road, and settling their homes in a wild world, are all calculated to embitter the human heart.” Quoted in *Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* by Angie Debo (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934, 1961), 56.

correspondence, the context of their writings, and their activism. All of these SAI leaders perceived the passing away of traditional Indian cultures and worked to ease the transition into modern American life, built upon Protestant, white, middle-class standards of morality and success.

An address to Woodrow Wilson from Menominee attorney and SAI member William J. Kershaw was infused with the bourgeois values of the Progressive Era. His address, “The Red Man’s Appeal,” asserted that outdated laws presented the largest barrier to Indian assimilation, especially for those Native men and women with educations. To what use could an educated Indian put her education once she returned to the reservation, he asked rhetorically. “It would seem of no avail for the Government to educate and graduate hundreds of young Indians and return them to reservations without preparing conditions there in accord with their education.” But the irony was young educated Indians found few vocational opportunities. Federal Indian law needed reform. “These young Indians,” he argued, “on returning to their reservations, must live under the laws which were designed for the government of their ancestors when they were barbarians and virtual prisoners of war.” Superintendents and agents exercised arbitrary power over Indians, who, although capable, could not access United States courts for settlement of property rights and inheritances. Kershaw requested the Court of Claims be open to tribal claims.

He also asserted that Indian women, in particular, be taken into consideration. In the language of the “cult of true womanhood”—gender-based roles for women dictated by piety, purity, and submissiveness toward men—they could provide the foundation to nurture budding Native citizens. “[W]e must not forget the young

Indian women. Estimates of Indian character or the Indian situation seldom take into account the influence of young Indian women, who are good mothers, good housewives, frugal and saving, and exceptionally industrious. Indian women could develop a domestic or household manufactory exceeding in magnitude and diversity anything of the kind ever known to our history.” Kershaw stressed that the current Indian Bureau, under Commissioner Cato Sells made the SAI “proud” because Sells had “done splendid work.” “He has taken the Government machinery, with all the ingrown abuses of forty years of ill advised legislation,” and produced results (which Kershaw fails to enumerate).<sup>155</sup>

The reality of citizenship in practice, rather than in theory, proved sobering. Ironically, Indians, although indigenous, were “foreign,” to most white Americans. They were the “other,” and separate, distinctive from the white, male citizens of the U.S. Political scientist Rogers Smith argued that the Reconstruction’s legacy of expanded citizenship appeared, in the clear light of the Gilded Age politicians, to have been a grievous mistake. Any further expansion of the citizenry needed a more considered approach, unlike the sweeping constitutional amendments that granted former male slaves citizenship and the right to vote. Instead, Indian citizenship via allotment in severalty offered a gradual incorporation, which the Burke Act of 1906 slowed even more. Smith explained, “Greater civic inclusion was promised and sometimes pursued, but it had come on terms highly protective of the world that Protestant white men had made, or not at all.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> William J. Kershaw, “The Red Man’s Appeal, Being an Address to the President of the United States,” *Quarterly Journal*, October – December 1914, 275-276; Kershaw originally gave the address on December 10, 1914.

<sup>156</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 346.

The SAI entered that world in 1912 when it established its base office in Washington, D.C. and loaded its agenda with numerous projects. Full of reformist zeal and supremely confident in their ability to argue their cause to the American public, Parker, as the main spokesperson for the organization, supported memorializing important Indian leaders and establishing a national Indian Day to honor their accomplishments. The SAI officially supported inclusion in the broader U.S. civic body; they embraced “progress” for the race, i.e., for Indians, through the best that the United States had to offer: its legal system, its educational institutions, and Christianity.

Parker’s correspondence with a member of the Blackfeet, Malcolm Clarke, who, along with his wife, joined the organization in February of 1915, provided an explanation of how Native people could become full citizens. Parker said they needed to increase their presence in tribal affairs, for example, in the selection of superintendents. Clarke supported the passage of a congressional bill to elect agents or superintendents, in addition to a “business committee” that provided Indians a voice in the use of tribal funds. Clarke criticized the Indian Office for withholding support for the legislation, calling it “not altogether enthusiastic.” The “real Americans,” Native people, found themselves denied a basic democratic right: “representation by and with the consent of the governed.” He hoped the SAI had the initiative to mobilize reservation support. Parker responded with a guarded endorsement of the bill. “I believe,” he wrote, “that the bill is absolutely correct, for until the Indians are made to feel that they have some responsibility and some voice in the disposition of their own affairs, they will continue to be dispirited and continue

to grow more and more incompetent.” Then, he interjected a caveat: in its current form it contained “certain dangers” that “our best people” could work on and redraft.<sup>157</sup> Such was Parker’s approach, one that endorsed Indian participation in tribal affairs as long as it served as a primer for future full civic activism. However, he abhorred the reservation system and avoided support of any initiative, even the Indian vote on reservations, if it prolonged the existence of the system itself.

Officially the SAI presented a united Indian front; however, beneath the surface the Executive Board and the most active members struggled with the demands of two, often contradictory, cultural traditions. Assimilation into the civic body required compromise. Christian morality meshed well with the goals of the SAI, but legal precepts of suffrage for citizens clashed with the grinding reality that many so-called citizens exercised little influence in domestic policy issues. Parker stressed that Indians were well suited for inclusion. He played upon stereotypes of nobility, honor, bravery, dignity of the “Noble Savage,” intending all along to replace the word “savage” with “Citizen.” A clear legal definition of the Citizen Indian required dismantling the past prejudices against Indians as a “race,” who were either vanishing or merely so degraded as to be unfit for civilization’s bounty. Parker, as President of the SAI, shaped the public image of the organization, and worked to articulate a model of progressive adaptation to new circumstances. He stressed that Indians persisted as a race. Instead of extinction or permanent backwardness, Native Americans could anticipate a future in the United States. He wrote:

As the coming race, not the vanishing one, we however feel that our men and women who have risen through the old and have come into an adjusted themselves to the new culture, are Indians still, in blood, in loyalty, and in

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<sup>157</sup> Malcolm Clarke to ACP, 12 February 1915, SAI Papers; ACP to Clarke, 25 February 1915.



ability to make the country wonder even yet what the red skins are going to do next.<sup>158</sup>

The member who fully embraced religion-based assimilation, Henry Roe Cloud, spoke at a Cheyenne-Arapaho camp meeting in 1909 and expressed his concern for the survival of Native people in terms of a “road to life.” The most ideologically Christian, or sectarian, of the leaders in the SAI, Roe Cloud meshed his activism, particularly education reform, with religion as a blueprint for improving Indians’ lives. His address presented traditional Native “roads” to healing: “Indian medicine,” the “Holy Dance,” the medicine lodge, and mescal use. Each one he rejected as a failure. They led to death without eternal life; they carried the “great burden of sin” on their shoulders; and they led to the destruction of Indian lives. He explained, “My tribe walked these roads and they are becoming less and less . . . the families are gone. All these roads make me think of Jesus. They seem to be groping in the darkness.” The only road to God, Roe Cloud concluded, was Jesus Christ.<sup>159</sup> The race would be reborn with Christ’s salvation as the catalyst.

Roe Cloud’s position in the Indian reform movement aligned him closely with the Lake Mohonk group. Scholar of Indian education, David Wallace Adams, described the Lake Mohonk reformers as “almost universally guided by the tenets of evangelical Protestantism, never doubting for a moment that their effort to uplift Indians was a fulfillment of the Christian obligation to extend the blessings of Christianity to all peoples of the world.”<sup>160</sup> Roe Cloud’s goals were more modest; he

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<sup>158</sup> ACP to Hon. Elias M. Ammons, March 28, 1913, WHC SAI Papers.

<sup>159</sup> Henry Roe Cloud, “Address by Henry Cloud at the Cheyenne Arapahoe Camp-meeting,” Colony, OK, 1909, Roe Family Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University (hereafter RFP).

<sup>160</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding*

planned a collaboration with the white couple who adopted him to found a Christian school for Indians. He rejected a work model that assigned monotonous tasks to Native students, with the added benefit of cutting costs for the institution. He recalled his time in boarding school in which he cranked a washing machine for two years. “It did not take me long to learn how to run the machine and the rest of the two years I nursed a growing hatred for it. Such work is not educative.”<sup>161</sup>

Gertrude Bonnin recalled a similar smoldering emotion toward work at boarding school. In 1884, Bonnin left the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota for a boarding school in Indiana, White’s Manual Labor Institute. As punishment, she was given the task of mashing turnips. Rules appeared arbitrary and meaningless to Bonnin and she mashed the turnips so hard she crushed the glass bottom of the jar. “With fire in my heart, I took the wooden tool that the paleface woman held out to me. [G]rasping the handle with both hands, I bent in hot rage over the turnips. I worked my vengeance upon them. As I sat eating my dinner, and saw that no turnips were served, I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me.” After three years she returned to the reservation. The reunion with her mother proved difficult and Bonnin found herself unable to heal the rift between her mother and herself, a breach emblematic of the estrangement she felt from Native life. Bonnin recollected, “During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond the touch or voice of human aid. My mother had never gone inside a schoolhouse, and so she was not capable of comforting her daughter who could read and write. Even nature seemed to have no place for me. This deplorable situation was the effect

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*School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 152. Roe Cloud made these comments at a Lake Mohonk Conference in 1914.

of my brief course in the East, and the unsatisfactory ‘teenth’ in a girl’s years.” Even when her mother offered Bonnin the family Indian Bible to read aloud, Bonnin rejected the overture and placed it, unopened, on the floor. “My enraged spirit felt more like burning the book, which afforded me no help, and was a perfect delusion to my mother.”<sup>162</sup> She left the reservation within a year and a half, moving from one Nebraska Indian school and back to White’s, and finally enrolled in Earlham College. Her entire white education came at the expense of her mother’s approval.

Shaping assimilation, leavening it with Indian voices, meant coexistence with the federal bureaucracy. Creating a productive, respectful relationship between Native people and the federal government, specifically the Bureau of Indian Affairs, proved the greatest challenge to the SAI’s fragile pan-Indian vision. The federal bureaucracy that administered Indians was the Indian Office, also known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Prucha found the Indian Office of the Progressive Era unparalleled in its efforts. From 1897 to 1929, five men held the office of Commissioner of Indian Affairs. These were critical times in shaping a modern federal Indian policy, one predicated on assimilation in preparation for citizenship. Four Commissioners stand out: Francis E. Leupp, who served four and a half years under presidents Roosevelt and Taft; Robert G. Valentine, whose tenure lasted the remainder of the Taft presidency; Cato Sells, whose service extended throughout Woodrow Wilson’s two terms as president and the early months of Warren G. Harding’s term; and Charles H. Burke, who rounded out the Progressive bent of Indian reform until the end of Calvin Coolidge’s administration in 1929. Prucha treated these bureaucrats with kindness: “These men took seriously their charge as

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<sup>162</sup> Zitkala-Sa, “American Indian Stories,” 94-101.

guardians of the Indians, and although they were subject to considerable just criticism, they were free of fraud and corruption, misguided as their policies might seem to later generations.”<sup>163</sup> In a more critical stance, Hertzberg found the Indian Bureau “a classic example of a corrupt bureaucracy” in which agents were politically appointed for their party loyalty instead of their competence and broad knowledge of Native people. “Venality and self-interest” characterized the BIA and few examples mitigated the damage done to Indians.<sup>164</sup>

Some SAI members balked at working with the BIA, while others adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Charles Eastman and Carlos Montezuma, for example, maintained a respectful, sometimes too prominent, distance from the SAI during its formative years. While willing to serve informally as advisors, to travel and encourage whites and Indians to embrace Native Americans as equal participants in the U.S. democratic vision, the two men held opinions based upon personal and professional experience. Their contact with the BIA, Indian agents, and politicians left them skeptical of the Bureau’s ability to assist in the “uplift” of Indians. The highest-ranking Native employee in the Bureau, Charles Daganett, remained a constant irritation to members hostile to “government control” of the SAI. Daganett played a key role in the recruitment of members, which further alienated Eastman and Montezuma. Parker, ever the conciliator, plied them with promises of equal voice, venues for honest criticism, and stroked their egos with the plea that their national prominence would boost the respectability of the SAI and sway whites to accept

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<sup>163</sup> Prucha, 763.

<sup>164</sup> Hertzberg, 5.

Indians as citizens. One month after the first SAI conference Parker wrote to Eastman, “I want to feel that your heart is still with us in an active way.”<sup>165</sup>

Citizenship for individual Indians would be the culmination of the Indian reform movement. The SAI staunchly supported the Progressive agenda for education, self-help, and citizenship. Wardship remained incompatible with the individualistic cant and social Darwinism of American political rhetoric of the time. The theory of an evolutionary model for social development gained currency in the 1880s and shaped a range of policies such as Indian reform, immigration programs, and imperial or “colonial” policy in the Pacific.<sup>166</sup> The charismatic president, Theodore Roosevelt, articulated the national vision of racial evolution, based on a model of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. Like an open door to all lesser-developed races, American as a “land of opportunity” merely required the effort of those who wanted to walk through the entrance. Roosevelt explained his position in a speech to students at Tuskegee Institute: “The race cannot expect to get everything at once. It must learn to wait and abide its time; to prove itself worthy by showing its possession of perseverance, of thrift, of self-control.”<sup>167</sup>

This applied to African Americans, Indians, and immigrants. Indian Studies scholar, Russel Barsh, found the settlement movement in urban areas like New York City, whose targets were immigrants, highly influential in Indian policy. It was the degrading environment, slums, tenement housing, disease, and ignorance that held

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<sup>165</sup> Letter from ACP to Charles Eastman, November 3, 1911, quoted in Raymond Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles A. Eastman, Santee Sioux* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 157. 157; According to Eastman’s biographer, his experiences with white agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation and the Crow Creek Reservation tempered his naïveté and abiding faith in the good will of the government, *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>166</sup> Barsh, 2.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

immigrants back from assimilation. Instead of innate inferiority, immigrants suffered from a lack of programs that would “prepare them for the competitive, democratic American lifestyle.”<sup>168</sup> Men deeply involved in Indian reform efforts such as Robert Valentine, Arthur Ludington, and John Collier, found common activist goals in the Society of American Indians.

A gradualist approach to citizenship permeated the BIA and found its most coherent expression in the Burke Act of 1906. The evolution of a race, just like the evolution of a citizen, took time. The General Allotment Act of 1887 had been too optimistic. Indians needed proper education, training for industrial labor or farming, close contact with white people, and a dedication to Christian brotherhood before they could earn the designation “citizen of the United States.” Valentine believed the BIA provided the means through which Indians would become self-sufficient citizens. Progressives saw government, once purged of corruption and incompetence, as the champion of democratic values. The Indian who worked in the Indian Office learned citizenship as if it were on-the-job training. In 1910 Valentine wrote an article entitled “Making Good Indians” in which he explained his perspective on the BIA, “The whole Indian Service is one great citizenship school for Indians, and all the lands and forests and rivers, all the funds, tribal and individual, are but text-books and laboratories in this school wherein teach over five thousand men and women, the employees of the Indian Service.”<sup>169</sup>

A supporter of the Society of American Indians from its inception, Valentine returned from the first meeting of the SAI to speak at Sherman Indian Institute. He

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<sup>168</sup> Barsh, 4.

<sup>169</sup> Barsh, 16, ff 42, quoted Valentine’s article “Making Good Indians,” *Sunset* 24 (6), 602.

spoke in glowing terms of the good the Indian Bureau could do to treat Indians with respect. Whereas the Bureau conspicuously ignored the opinions of Indians when implementing federal policy for them, Valentine called for a more respectful approach, one founded on Indians' participation, an exercise in self-government in the best sense of democracy: "The day has come when the Indian Bureau at Washington makes a mistake if it seeks to take a single forward step in connection with your affairs without consulting you Indians yourself about it." The outcome of the imperial war with Spain in 1898 offered a lesson in preparation for citizenship. He suggested that the promotion of democracy in Native schools would benefit from an expert recruited from the U.S. administration in Cuba, a former Spanish colonial possession now independence yet under the Monroe Doctrine-inspired watchful eye and tutelage of the United States.

A year after the SAI's founding, rumbles from within Congress warned interested parties that the Indian Office might be legislatively axed by 1922. No consensus on a viable timetable existed, however. Partly in an act of self-preservation, the Indian Bureau cautioned that assimilation for citizenship, if it proceeded too quickly, could overwhelm Indians. In spite of this warning, Valentine hired a former settlement worker to conduct a policy analysis of Native people's progress toward full citizenship. He commissioned Arthur Luddington, a political scientist and former personal assistant to Woodrow Wilson at Princeton University, to systematically study the issue. Luddington designed a questionnaire for the 105 Indian agency superintendents on topics related to liquor laws, citizenship, and Indian-white relations. The date for allotment completion was 1925; that left a mere

thirteen years to complete what was only halfway finished. Luddington also recommended that all Indians attain citizenship by 1950.<sup>170</sup>

Valentine also approached allotment with zeal. He planned a systematic issuance of fee patents that would further the assimilation of Indians and reduce conflict between white settlers and Indians. Since too many Indians failed to request a fee patent for land, Valentine proposed competency commissions visit agencies and grant fee patents to approved allottees. The Omnibus Act of 1910 included his plans and that summer, the commissions began touring agencies around the United States. Indians were assigned a category, competent or incompetent, based upon education level, work ethic, and health. Fayette McKenzie and the Indian Rights Association supported Valentine's work.<sup>171</sup> Both would later work with the SAI and support the creation of a dialogue between Progressive Indians and federal policymakers.

Dialogue differed from agreement on policy, however. Anxious to prove the SAI was not merely an extension of federal Indian policy, Parker wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to broach the issue of racism among superintendents in government schools and on reservations. Based on his letter to Cato Sells, Parker referenced previous government correspondence that contained an offensive appellation: "squaw." Parker hoped to educate Sells on the meaning the word carried "on the lips of white men." A term of "reproach," squaw besmirched the "dignity of the Indian woman," whom whites considered "worthless, ignorant, and of no account." The Commissioner should hold superintendents to higher standards of discourse, press them to help Indians "advance in civilization," in short, treat Indians

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<sup>170</sup> Barsh, 7; "Office of Indian Affairs Circular No. 612: The Status of the Indians' Personal Rights and Liberties," March 14, 1912, reprinted in Hoxie, *The Final Promise*, Appendix 3, 255.

<sup>171</sup> Hoxie, 176-77.



with respect and courtesy. Parker, more direct than typical in his correspondence, closed, “Indians are men and women just as the males and females of other races and we believe that any special designation should be considered bad form.”<sup>172</sup>

In matters of race, the SAI also remained attuned to comparisons between Native people and African Americans, who began a progressive movement of their own by founding the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People two years before the SAI. Carlos Montezuma reprinted in his own journal, *Wassaja*, a 1913 address by Richard H. Pratt in Philadelphia entitled “Negroes and Indians.” With fresh memories from his years in the Union Army, Pratt rewrote history in order to proclaim the war worthwhile. “We are a reunited country,” he stated, “and the South expresses satisfaction that there was no division.” Even slavery proved beneficial to both blacks and whites. While slaves remained impoverished, their “service” to the nation’s coffers proved “a great advantage to both races. No other scheme would have transported millions of aboriginal people from the opposite side of the earth and the torrid zone into our country, . . . and through contact with a higher race have given them a new language and advanced them to incorporation as fellow-citizens.” However, Pratt condemned lynching and the violations of due process that black men experienced. Black men needed the protection and the responsibilities that citizenship provided. So, too, did Indians, who needed “uplift” because they had been treated even worse. He offered a “formula for transforming our Indians into citizens”: remove prejudice and give equal ability and equal rights; prejudice vanishes through proper association and industrial usefulness; equal ability comes

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<sup>172</sup> ACP to The Honorable Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 16, 1914, SAI Papers.

when the same training is given during association; and, equal ability can always take care of equal rights.”<sup>173</sup>

Parker agreed with Pratt that comparisons between Negroes and Indians proved the latter suffered greater hardship. In a letter to the president of Carthage College in Illinois, Parker asserted, “The negro was enslaved yet his environment was in the midst of civilization which he was able to learn. He was permitted to acquire a knowledge of the virtue of sustained industry and the value of surplus. The negro was robbed of nothing, when we consider what he received in return.” Conversely, Indians lost their country and tribal rights, and once segregated on reservations, lost access to knowledge of civilization and competition. Parker recommended Helen Hunt Jackson’s polemic against federal mistreatment of Indians.<sup>174</sup>

The racial politics of Dr. Charles Eastman were more opaque. In his book on Progressive Era Indian issues, primarily citizenship, he recalled the declaration at the Universal Races Conference in 1911 that “there is no inherently superior race, therefore no inferior race.” Each race possessed the same innate abilities. The “racial environment” could interfere with development, but “change the environment and the race is transformed.” Evidence of his assertion lay in the lack of discrimination educated Indians encountered, for example, when President Theodore Roosevelt received him in the White House. Eastman recalled what he interpreted as high praise when the president said “he would give anything to have a drop of Sioux or Cheyenne

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<sup>173</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, “Negroes and Indians,” originally dated January 14, 1913, reprinted in *Wassaja*, date unknown, Bonnin Papers, 2,4, and 8.

<sup>174</sup> ACP to President H.D. Hoover, March 1, 1913, SAI Papers; Francis Paul Prucha assessed the book as follows: “It was a polemic, not balanced history, and everywhere evidenced the haste with which it had been put together.” However, he does acknowledge that Jackson “touched sympathetic chords among the reformers and much of the public.” See Prucha, 627.

blood in his veins.” From this, and numerous other encounters Eastman had during his peak years of lecturing, he concluded that “intelligent and educated Indians” experienced no racism, or in other words, “his color is not counted against him.”

The comparison between the strength of “Indian blood” and “negro blood” proved even more illustrative of white society’s openness to educated Indians. He cited Booker T. Washington’s “habit of saying jocosely that negro blood is the strongest in the world, for one drop of it makes a ‘nigger’ of a white man.” Eastman responded, “I would argue that the Indian blood is even stronger, for a half-blood negro and Indian may pass for an Indian, and so be admitted to first-class hotels and even to high society. All that an Indian needs to be lionized if he so desires, is to get an education and hold up his head as a member of the oldest American aristocracy.” Indian men’s intermarriage into white, elite families—as Eastman experienced—demonstrated that the “best in two races and civilizations” compensated ambitious Indians “for what we have lost.”<sup>175</sup>

A member of the SAI Advisory Board, Marie L. Baldwin, lodged a complaint about the presence of African American employees in the Indian Bureau. She had numerous reasons. First, Indians and Negroes lacked knowledge of one another. Second, she found treating Negroes as equals anathema; “the negro” needed to be “kept in his place” even though African Americans held positions of authority over whites and Indians. Such working conditions were, to Baldwin, intolerable because the federal government’s employment practices sent a message of equality she rejected. “Under such conditions, I know what the negro gets to be. After a while the

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<sup>175</sup> Eastman, *The Indian To-Day*, 118-120.

Indian begins to feel that Uncle Sam must consider the negro equal to the Indian and white, else the negro would not be placed in a position of equality.”

Third, she feared miscegenation, perhaps from the two groups working together. She approved of preferential hiring of Indians. She bolstered this position with an example from Reconstruction. Florida Indians forced to remove to Indian Territory had been forced to take their slaves with them to Indian Territory. There, “the negro was set free. There are enough Indians with negro blood in their veins now.” She seethed, “Then, too, the negro is immoral—dangerous! Think of this and grind your teeth! A negro physician is employed at one Indian reservation and at a number of places are negro bosses over boys and girls.” Baldwin acknowledged that General Pratt and others rejected her position, but she remained adamant, and willing “to make a protest even if I must do it alone.”<sup>176</sup>

Besides debates on racial uplift, discussion of full citizenship rights necessitated an evaluation of the federal Indian education system. General Richard H. Pratt’s imprint upon Indian education remained intact during the life of the SAI. He had presided over the construction of a national Indian education system, starting with Carlisle, but the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, sensitive to Pratt’s stalwart supporters, fired him in mid-June 1904. Only the month before, Pratt had addressed the New York Ministers’ Conference where he called for the “complete destruction of the Indian Bureau.” The office, instrumental in retarding civilization and citizenship, isolated Indians on bleak reservations. In order to fully assimilation, and therefore save themselves, he declared, “THEY MUST GET INTO THE SWIM OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP. They must feel the touch day after day until they

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<sup>176</sup> Marie L. B. Baldwin to ACP, November 18, 1913, SAI Papers.

become saturated with the spirit of it, and thus become equal to it.”<sup>177</sup> And the worst betrayal of individual Indian progress was, in Pratt’s estimation, an educated Indian’s decision to return to the reservation.

Whereas Pratt called it, “going back to the blanket,” Parker saw the rejection of white civilization differently. In a plaintive letter to Oliver Lamere (Winnebago), Parker explained what he hoped this leader of the peyote religion in Nebraska would model to all Americans, “I wanted you to show that the Indian cannot always remain in the ‘old ways’ and expect to live in either health or mind and that in order to get along, or as we say, to compete with the white man, he must learn the same ways that the white man learns in business, in mind and in all the activities of life. The Indian who learns these things is just as good an Indian who lives forever in his tent without progressing.”<sup>178</sup>

Parker supported the provision of education beyond the rudiments and vocational training; without full access to a solid education, Indians would enter the civic body unprepared for its demands. In a letter to a distraught mother, he counseled both her and her son, who was homesick and vulnerable to consumption. Ms. Hale wanted her son to return from Genoa Indian School and attend day school near their home in Mayetta, Kansas. Parker responded with encouragement, “When Louis returns next year he ought to be able to judge what is best for him. He has a whole life before him and must learn a great deal if he is to get along as well as the smartest white people that live around you. A good many white people go to school for 20 years and when they get through they are able to do a great many things and

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<sup>177</sup> Adams, 323, quoted from *Red Man and Helper*, May 13 1904, vol. 1, 4.

<sup>178</sup> ACP to Oliver Lamere, September 24, 1913, SAI Papers.

make a good deal of money. Our Indian boys and girls must get the same idea in their heads, if they are to be successful.”<sup>179</sup>

Parker did share his deep misgivings about the quality of Indian education with Roe Cloud. Showy pronouncements about the success of Indian schools rang hollow to Parker. Appearances were misleading, he confided, and the truth remained that an emphasis on manual education trumped high academic standards. “I have a feeling,” he confided to Roe Cloud, “that the low grade of these schools and the excessive importance placed upon manual labor, results from a concealed opinion of the inherent incapacity of the Indian and his inferiority intellectually.” Another dilemma faced Indians who left the boarding schools for white public schools and universities: persistent prejudice.<sup>180</sup>

Privately, Roe Cloud loathed Pratt and his education policies. In a letter to his adoptive mother, he described Pratt as “a venomous creature,” “selfishly egotistical,” and “absolutely without the Christ vision.” Unlike Carlos Montezuma, Roe Cloud believed Pratt merely *posed* as the “greatest friend” of the Indians. He had rendered a disservice to Carlisle students by limiting their education to the eighth grade, but more importantly, by instilling prejudices against missionaries. Even four of “his best Carlisle products,” two actively involved in the SAI, had marriages that ended in the immorality of divorce, Roe Cloud railed. He also pointed to Carlisle’s declining reputation in the years following Pratt’s dismissal. Historian David Wallace Adams described the deterioration of conditions at the flagship Indian school in 1913 to the point that over 250 students signed a petition requesting an official federal

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<sup>179</sup> ACP to Mrs. Joe Hale (Meough-Kah) of Mayetta, Kansas, November 24, 1915, SAI Papers.

<sup>180</sup> ACP to Henry Roe Cloud, January 12, 1914, SAI Papers.

investigation. Secretary of the Interior, Franklin Lane, responded within a few months and found gross mismanagement under superintendent Moses Friedman. Cato Sells, then Commissioner of Indian Affairs, fired Friedman and others left for different employment.<sup>181</sup>

Charles Daganett, still employed at the Indian Bureau, used his access to monitor the content of public school texts as they addressed Native people. He alerted Parker to the need for reform of public school history textbooks. In his view, they misrepresented the history of Native Americans. He cited one example from a text that described the Indian as a barbarian or savage and a concluding remark, “Such the Indian was three hundred years ago and such he is today.” Daganett called this version of history ridiculous and untrue. He hoped the upcoming annual conference might discuss the issue and ask the Vice-President of Education to rectify these mistakes.<sup>182</sup>

The Executive members found themselves buried under an avalanche of requests and demands. Parker, operating out of his office in the capital, depended upon a skeletal staff to manage the correspondence. Despite early warning signs of over-extension, in 1913 the SAI launched a publication called the *Quarterly Journal*. Conscientiously inclusive of diverse views, the executive council wanted a respectable, professional journal that would gain the SAI credibility. Yet Parker, as its first editor, stressed that the publication would avoid one Indian voice. Instead, he

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<sup>181</sup> Henry Roe Cloud to Mary Roe, February 9, 1915, RFP; Adams, 323-325; Adams found three specific areas upon which the investigation at Carlisle focused: Friedman’s competency, the athletic program, and corporal punishment. But Roe Cloud leveled an additionally troubling charge in his letter to his mother: “Girls were bearing children on being found with child at Carlisle before last summer’s upheaval.”

<sup>182</sup> Charles Daganett to ACP, June 30, 1914, SAI Papers.

called for a multiplicity so it could act as a forum for dignified debate, for “serious study and for preservation.” The SAI rejected responsibility for or endorsement of opinions published in the journal. He cautioned readers, “The Society may even be opposed to the ideas expressed, but it does not fear to present them for study and debate. The Society is only responsible for the enactments of its Annual Conferences and for the actions of its Executive Council. The opinions of a member, of a writer, of an officer, of the editor, are individual opinions that do not in any sense bind the Society to follow or uphold.”<sup>183</sup> In an attempt to be fair-minded, Parker’s rhetoric, once put into practice, left the SAI open to never-ending conflict. He wanted unified efforts for full citizenship, and yet divergence of opinion on the correct route to that end. This was much to ask from the first generation of Indian intellectuals and activists, as well as white supporters and the federal government.

The annual conferences functioned in tandem with the journal. Often, speeches from the conferences, from Lake Mohonk, and private addresses from members reappeared in print. In writing and through public gatherings, Parker hoped to convince white Americans that Indians, far from vanishing, were “a coming race.” They had retained Indian identities, “in blood, in loyalty, and in ability to make the country wonder even yet what the red skins are going to do next.” He expressed this position in a letter to the governor of Colorado, Elias M. Ammons, with future plans to convene an SAI annual conference in the state. Signs of assimilation abound as Indians entered politics, law, medicine, the clergy, science, and news reporting, yet, he insisted, “We are red men still, even though we have plucked the feathers from our war bonnets and are using them for pens. The battle scene has shifted and the contest

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<sup>183</sup> Arthur C. Parker, *Quarterly Journal*, October – December 1914, 250-251.



becomes one of brain and wit. We have the capacity and the ability when opportunity is afforded. It has not helped to prod and pamper the race. We are here to do and achieve, not merely to mourn the years gone by. Can Colorado boost a conference of men with such ideas?"<sup>184</sup> The answer was yes. That October the SAI held its conference in Denver, but under a dark cloud, a harbinger of fissures within the organization.

Parker proposed its theme, "What the Indian Can Do for Himself." A self-help theme predicated on Indians generating solutions to the myriad problems of assimilation would allow Indians to demonstrate their ability to assess their condition in a spirit of reform. Perhaps in an effort to discredit the critics who accused the SAI of being under the influence of the Indian Bureau, Parker expressed his vision to Montezuma, "We have been talking long enough about what the Government and what somebody else can do for us . . . ."

Despite his best efforts to attract and retain broad-based Indian attendance, Parker's decision to hold the conference in Denver alienated two key supporters of the organization. Pratt broke ties with the SAI because he believed its presence in Denver indicated support of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show scheduled to perform in 1915. Colorado planned a "pageant" or "last grand council" as a tribute to the American West and the romantic ideas associated with it. Pratt abhorred the Wild West shows as a disgraceful exploitation of Indians. Sensitive to Pratt's powerful connections, Parker wrote Montezuma two months before the conference and pled his case. Parker found Pratt to doctrinaire and reactionary. Parker attempted to counter Pratt's curt letter of renunciation: "I sent lengthy protestations to the Governor of the

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<sup>184</sup> ACP to Hon. Elias M. Ammons, March 28, 1913, SAI Papers.

state and mayor of the city and president of the chamber of [commerce] telling them that the time had come when the dignity of the Indian should be upheld and that he no longer be forced to become a cigar store sign to attract customers for somebody else.”<sup>185</sup> In a blunt response to Parker, Carlos Montezuma heartily agreed with Pratt. Montezuma suspected the SAI was being “hoodwinked” with promises that their presence in the “pageant” served to educate the public and uplift the Indians. He derisively dismissed the offer from Colorado as an “Indian show, simply a breeder of immorality and degeneracy to the Indians who partake.”<sup>186</sup> Unpersuaded, he boycotted the conference.

One active SAI member sensed the discord and wrote a more comprehensive assessment to the Secretary-Treasurer. J. N. B. Hewitt, a Tuscarora anthropologist and linguist who worked in the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology, found the Executive Council and the Advisory Board “paralyzed by a depressing lack of harmony and disinterestedness.” Since the end of the first conference, outright hostility and bitterness barred any effective activities the Council wanted to undertake. Hewitt worried the internecine fighting reflected poorly on the image of self-sufficient, accomplished Indians and their capacity to work together. The SAI Executive Council envisioned itself the model for Indians who needed guidance through the assimilation process. Despite the high quality of SAI publications, in Hewitt’s view, they possessed “little practical value and use to the unlettered Indian who most needs the protection and guidance at this time in adjusting himself to the condition of modern civilization.”

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<sup>185</sup> ACP to Montezuma, August 14, 1913, SAI Papers.

<sup>186</sup> Carlos Montezuma to ACP, August 19, 1913, SAI Papers.

Hewitt went even further to charge that Sherman Coolidge's presidency—a “microbe of inertia”—had produced negligible results; his leadership, or lack thereof, allowed the current disunity to flourish unabated. He pointed to Coolidge's letter to President Taft issued at the second annual conference as an example, claiming Coolidge had reduced it to “a masterpiece of aimless effort and bumptious flapdoodle.” Hewitt found it lacking in any “specific evils and wrongs for which its advocates definite remedies.” Even worse, the entire SAI agenda appeared vague and marred by “milk and water appeals to the canons of abstract justice.” Lack of focus, petty bickering, and ineffectual leadership, both in the presidency and the Executive Council, rendered the SAI incapable of constructive work.<sup>187</sup>

Parker responded with an initial confession that he, too, had doubts about the SAI. He also supported Hewitt's indictment of the Executive Council, both for its back-stabbing conduct toward one another and for various charges of personal and professional misdeeds. Parker himself helped settle wills, allotments, patent fees, complaints against Indian agents and superintendents. The larger goal of full citizenship receded as the more pressing issues for Indians absorbed the SAI's time and energy. Exasperated, Parker declared, “The membership, at large, is absolutely ignorant of the immense amount of work which comes from seeking to adjust these differences between Indians and superintendents.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> J.E.B. Hewitt to ACP, August 25, 1913, SAI Papers.

<sup>188</sup> ACP to John N. B. Hewitt, August 30, 1913, SAI Papers; Parker also did not remind Hewitt that the year before, he had received a personal letter from President Taft. The response, reprinted in the *Quarterly Journal* in 1914, addressed the issue of citizenship for Indians as individuals, instead of as members of a race. Taft conceded that Indians were “entitled to a voice” in federal Indian policy. He also noted that Indian assimilation as “individuals into the body politic” would accelerate over time. Therefore, citizen Indians should embrace “obligations and burdens” instead of merely the benefits of citizenship. See William Howard Taft to ACP, 1912, reprinted in the *Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1914, vol. II, no. 3, 196, SAI Papers.

The internal discussion of challenges that threatened to rend the organization appeared in print two years later, this time from one of the most well known Native Americans in the United States. SAI member Charles Eastman kept a respectable distance from the organization. His 1915 book, *The Indian Today*, offered a critique of SAI goals. Generally, Indians had not been “trained” to work in harmony. Therefore, when progressive Indians struggled over organizational principles and projects, the way was unclear. He wondered if the SAI should focus on fraud cases, creation of “racial pride and ambition,” Indian youth, congressional lobbying, or “intensive work among our people, looking especially toward their moral and social welfare.” Eastman favored the latter, and this may be why he maintained a respectable distance from the SAI because of its emphasis on “governmental affairs.”<sup>189</sup> Influential members were also his intellectual peers, such as Carlos Montezuma and Gertrude Bonnin. He was a writer, an orator, but not a politician. He was, however, hopeful the journal would provide the foundation for a pan-Indian movement.<sup>190</sup>

Ideologically, Eastman counted himself a member of the progressive Indian movement, with its emphasis on full citizenship for Native Americans. His 1915 publication provided a meditation on Indian citizenship, assimilation, and leadership. The aim of his book, he wrote, was “to set forth the present status and outlook of the North American Indian,” who was in one sense a “vanishing race,” yet in the midst of transition. The race was also “a thoroughly progressive one, increasing in numbers

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<sup>189</sup> Eastman, *The Indian To-Day*, 132-133.

<sup>190</sup> Wilson, 160-164.

and vitality, and awakening to the demands of a new life.”<sup>191</sup> The gradualist approach to citizenship, once the Burke Act of 1906 modified the allotment process, and consequently a general path to citizenship, needed a clear, legal process delineated by Congress. Eastman endorsed Dr. McKenzie’s proposal, which entailed four phases of diminishing “paternal control”: first, tribal ward; second, allotted ward; third, citizen ward; and fourth, full citizen.<sup>192</sup>

The “new Indian” that Eastman envisioned, as he perceived himself to be, were of “the thinking and advanced class of Indians” who possessed no bitterness or pessimism. They recognized that Indians had to adapt in order to survive. In the U.S. “absolute distinctions,” that is, a separate Indian political identity, was unsustainable “under the American flag.” However, religion and “racial codes,” which he failed to explicate, could be retained if compatible with “public good.” Finally, entrance into citizenship should be voluntary instead of compulsory.<sup>193</sup>

Roe Cloud wondered about the future of Indian leadership too. In a November article entitled “The North American Indian of Today,” he classified contemporary Indians into three categories. The first group, mostly old Indians, “live in the old days,” and direct their spiritual life toward the maintenance of “the old spirit worship.” The second, constituting thousands of educated Indians, were dissatisfied with the traditionalist approach. The third group, “the out-and-out Christian Indians,” worked with missions and other Christian students. Of these, Roe Cloud asked, “What group will lead them out of this bewildering transition period and place them as strong men and women among the races of men?” He rejected the

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<sup>191</sup> Eastman, *The Indian To-Day*, 3.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 106.

traditionalists: “We cannot stay the tide of civilization in order to give the Indian religion its native atmosphere. To go back to the old days is unthinkable.” Education alone was also insufficient. Disease, bad legislation, and corruption contained, at their core, a moral crisis. Regeneration of the Indian race and fulfillment of a “glorious future” were possible only through “the exercise of a strenuous morality inspired by faith in God.” Roe Cloud credited Christianity for the progress Indians had made. In place of the Great Spirit, Indians had been given Christ.<sup>194</sup>

Echoing the theme of citizenship, the *Journal* carried a reprint of Roe Cloud’s October address at the Lake Mohonk Conference. His speech, “Education of the American Indian,” defined Indian citizenship as “sharing the responsibilities, as well as the opportunities, of this great Republic.” His statements contained references to numerous progressive reform issues such as troubled relations between labor and capital, railroad strikes, immigration and city congestion, political power in the hands of “bosses,” overseas war, and alcoholism. But the greatest problem the country faced was race prejudice. He posed the question, “Is America truly to be the ‘melting pot’ of the nations?” Only fair opportunities for all citizens could translate into the actualization of this national image. For Indians, Roe Cloud reiterated that the Indians’ legal status blocked their opportunities. Wardship and citizenship stood in direct contradiction.<sup>195</sup>

Parker attempted to explain the necessity of citizenship to Chief Joe Moses, a Native leader among the Yakima on their reservation. Chief Moses must have

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<sup>194</sup> Henry Roe Cloud, “The North American Indian of To-Day,” November 1913, 491-493, published article, RFP.

<sup>195</sup> Henry Roe Cloud, “Education of the American Indian,” reprint of Lake Mohonk address in *Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1914, vol. II, no. 3, 203-205.

expressed concern over allotment and water rights because Parker tried to assure him, “We are still interested in your case,” but nothing could stop federal plans to divide the reservations, sell surplus land, and gradually make Indians citizens. Expressions of Indians’ power must come via citizenship. He explained, “The Indian has nothing to say in the matter according to the Government in Washington and the Indian will never have anything to say about his own affairs until he becomes a citizen and tax payer and a voter.” “Old times have passed away,” Parker counseled more gently, and “new things must come for you as well as for all races of people.” Indians must join or expect to live in the margins of American civic life. “It is too bad perhaps, to let the old things go, but just as you and I must wear different clothes in winter than in the hot summer time, so must the old Indians change their ways and habits when a different civilization comes to rule the world.”<sup>196</sup> Parker, both pragmatic and sympathetic, had reconciled himself to the ascendancy of white power in the United States. He recognized the growing world prominence of the U.S. and attributed his personal success to reconciliation with that reality. Parker preserved an Indian identity through his professional work in ethnology and political activism, but increasingly the demands, financial, physical, and emotional, began to wear on him by 1914.

Less than one month before the fourth annual conference in Madison, Wisconsin, two key members of the SAI resigned. Charles Daganett, the highest-ranking Indian employee in the Indian Bureau, and Rosa LaFlesche, departed. Daganett cited the discrimination against Indians in government service as his reason. The SAI, afflicted by sectarian disputes, partisan politics, and hostility toward Indian

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<sup>196</sup> ACP to Chief Jo Moses, December 21, 1914, SAI Papers.

Bureau employees betrayed the “broad, constructive lines” of the Indian reform movement.<sup>197</sup> In a hasty letter to Fayette McKenzie, Arthur Parker apprised him of the latest disasters, including large organizational debt. Parker, unable to attend the conference, hoped McKenzie would attend. His presence, Parker hoped, might steer the program away from a “purposeless program” of talk without action or results. That same day, Parker also wrote Sherman Coolidge. Exhausted, overworked, and underpaid, he planned to resign, too. “As for myself,” he closed, “I feel that my time has come to retire. It is not best for me to continue. My interest is intense and my loyalty to our ideals will not waver.”<sup>198</sup>

At the end of the year, the SAI appeared to stabilize. Parker agreed to stay on as Secretary-Treasurer and editor of the *Quarterly Journal*. He signed a memorial to President Woodrow Wilson, whose contents were agreed upon at the fourth annual conference. The *Quarterly Journal* contained a diversity of perspectives on Native issues. Both the memorial and the journal called for the immediate remedy to the Indian’s anomalous legal status. The memorial contained two requests. First, the signatories asked that the President and Congress convene a three-member commission to recommend a code of Indian law, thus making it possible for Native people to have a definitive civic status in court and in the nation. Second, the SAI wanted the Court of Claims to receive jurisdiction over all Indian claims against the government. The final resolution regarding the civic status of Indians and the settlement of their property disputes with the federal government meant the end of barriers to “race development.” The SAI implored Wilson to pressure Congress for

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<sup>197</sup> Charles Daganett to ACP, September 26, 1914, SAI Papers.

<sup>198</sup> ACP to Sherman Coolidge, September 26, 1914, SAI Papers.



reform. Remedies in citizenship and property were “essential to release us from enforced wardship, dependence and consequent degeneracy . . . . We ask for nothing which is incompatible with the duties, responsibilities and rights of American citizenship.”<sup>199</sup>

Montezuma had been absent from the fourth annual conference, just as he had been the previous year. Parker still recognized the doctor’s prominence in the Indian reform movement. In the last issue of the 1914 SAI journal, Montezuma laid out his complaints in his characteristically uncompromising prose. Still aligned with Pratt, Montezuma rejected the idea of separate Indians schools. He loathed the Indian Bureau and the oppressiveness its policies engendered. “Dominating government for our people has reached its climax. It seems that an Indian cannot speak to or for his people without being suspicioned.” The Indian Bureau represented everything wrong with federal Indian policy; it must be destroyed instead of supported as “commercialism,” or capitalist interests in collusion with the Bureau, depleted natural resources on reservations. Montezuma called upon Indians to act in their own self-interests. “My Indian friends, it seems that we have no voice in our affairs. It seems that all we can do is to sit there like dummies and see our property fade away and wonder what next.” The forests, water for irrigation, and minerals dwindled. Montezuma urgently called for the SAI to act: “If our Society is going to amount to anything do you not think we out in some way stand up for our people? As the Society of American Indians, it is our duty to protect and aid in some way, to stop these wholesale smuggling away of our people’s property. Can you imagine any other race allowing this without their consent?”

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<sup>199</sup> “Memorial to the President of the United States,” December 10, 1914, SAI Papers.

Montezuma invoked the Progressive Era spirit of reform and faith in the public's desire for just and moral government policies backed by action. The SAI's efforts should catalyze public censure, perhaps similar to that which Helen Hunt Jackson's writing evoked. "If we are progressive for our peoples' interests, we must be the first one to voice it; we must first start the wave of public sentiment throughout the breadth and length of the country; we must stir up righteous indignation and we must make the first move to abolish the Indian Bureau from the face of the earth; not until then shall we be perfectly free. [W]e must fight out our own salvation."<sup>200</sup>

The doctor believed in radical self-help and cessation of dependency upon the federal government. Indians had to change and push for federal Indian law to accommodate that change. "To a great extent it is our fault because we have taken no interest, no thought and no consideration to change and to look around to be really free. We Indians must let loose from these things that cause us to be separate from the laws and rules that other races enjoy. It is a delusion to think that we are free when we are reservation Indians and governed by the Indian Bureau." The reservation, symbolic of Indians' separateness and inferiority to whites, blocked advancement of the race. "Being caged up and not permitted to develop our faculties has made us a dependent race. We are looked upon as hopeless to save and as hopeless to do anything for ourselves." Instead of resignation to oblivion, Montezuma calls for Indians to "get out of it and hustle," just as other races had done worldwide.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Carlos Montezuma, "What Indians Must Do," *Quarterly Journal*, October – December 1914, 294-297.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

Parker found Montezuma's position dogmatic and premature. Still on friendly terms, he wrote to the doctor in April 1915, committed to maintaining a substantive connection between the organization and the most vehement critic of the Indian Bureau beside Pratt. Each SAI annual conference had an umbrella topic, and for the upcoming one Montezuma suggested "Freedom of the Indian." Tentatively, Parker approved, "[T]he Indian can only become free from his present unhappy environment through adequate education and through a training that will give those that are now uneducated the mental and business equipment to compete." He also slipped in a small reference to the Indian Bureau, "We can close the books of the Nation and abolish the Indian Bureau when the government has fulfilled its obligation in the way of treaties, trust funds and other contracts." Parker, and many other SAI members, wanted allotment settled, as well as other legal Indian matters, through the Court of Claims. His contact in the Bureau, Assistant Commissioner Merritt supported this platform. Congressional opposition, not the Bureau, posed the obstacle to reform.<sup>202</sup>

Three days later, Parker composed a three-page letter to Commissioner Sells on the matter. He asked Sells to push Congress for a definitive legal status for Native Americans. Were "non-competent Indians" eligible to become "potential citizens," or destined to remain "permanent wards," he asked. To Parker, the two conditions were incompatible. Indian assimilation through congressional action would bring Indians "into complete citizenship and absorption into the body politic" so that "a definite goal would be ahead and the ideas of the past blotted out forever." Indians then currently "living as wards and in the tribal state" would have opportunities as voters and taxpayers, and their lives in an "ancient condition" would prove less appealing.

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<sup>202</sup> ACP to Carlos Montezuma, April 7, 1915, SAI Papers.

He submitted a similar request for clarity and congressional action to Secretary of Interior, Franklin Lane.<sup>203</sup> The SAI created a medium for Indian voices, but a corresponding response backed by action failed to materialize. J. N. B. Hewitt's criticism proved accurate.

The year 1916 was a turning point for the organization. Gertrude Bonnin, whose self-given Native name was Zitkala-Sa, joined the organization, along with her husband, as members. At the annual conference she was elected Secretary while her organization nemesis, Mary Baldwin, served as Treasurer. Their acrimonious rivalry over duties and finances absorbed Parker's energies to the point of exasperation. He held the office of President for the first time and began to publish his editorials in his Native name. The journal, renamed as *The American Indian Magazine*, shared the national Native press with a rival publication, *Wassaja*, owned and edited by Carlos Montezuma. Tired of the timidity with which the SAI addressed Indian Bureau mismanagement of Indian affairs, the doctor tailored his message to one issue, unlike the SAI's approach, which allowed as many educated Indians as possible into the debate. Montezuma wrote polemics while the *Magazine* strove for restraint and moderate reform.

The most active members of the executive committee also spoke openly against the use of peyote. This issue would further factionalize the organization as less militant members tolerated and even participated in its use, particularly in Oklahoma when the Native American Church was formally organized in 1918. Within the span of two years, 1916-1918, the only adhesive binding the SAI together

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<sup>203</sup> ACP to Honorable Cato Sells, April 10, 1915, SAI Papers; ACP to Hon. Franklin K. Lane, April 14, 1915, SAI Papers.

was overwhelming support for Indian enlistment in the military to fight in World War I. It would surely provide an avenue, they and many other prominent Progressives believed, to full citizenship, especially suffrage rights. U.S. entrance into the Great War altered the Indian reform movement, as well as the larger Progressive reforms and, significant to the SAI, placed pressure on Congress to redraw the boundaries of citizenship.

**Chapter Four**  
**“Making Democracy Safe for the Indian”:**  
**World War I and the Demise of the SAI, 1916-1923**

“I am an Indian; and while I have learned much from civilization, for which I am grateful, I have never lost my Indian sense of right and justice. I am for development and progress along social and spiritual lines, rather than those of commerce, nationalism, or material efficiency.

Nevertheless, as long as I live, I am an American.”

--Charles Eastman, in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 1917<sup>204</sup>

Throughout 1916 the Society of American Indians confronted challenges which were the direct result of federal assimilation policies. Indians found themselves trapped in a nebulous civic status that demanded reform. The SAI believed Indians were most vulnerable at the political and legal levels. Politically speaking, Indians needed the right to vote and act as full citizens who would both demonstrate an active allegiance to the nation and a far-reaching commitment to Native self-help initiatives. In legal terms, federal Indian law continued to be confusing, rife with problems related mostly to land titles and treaty rights. The Indian Bureau, responsible for administering Indian affairs, was often the subject of heated debate from within the Society. From its inception the SAI wrangled with how close it should be aligned with the Indian Bureau without risking its credibility in the eyes of Indians who feared political cronyism and corruption.

The organization’s efforts to remain nonpartisan, or in their words, “above politics,” was naïve, a reflection of political inexperience and of Progressive idealism. The SAI leadership also maintained a vision of Native citizenship steeped in Progressive Era rhetoric and sentiment that defined the boundaries of SAI influence.

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<sup>204</sup> Charles A. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, 144-145.

In other words, the influence of the Progressive movement underwent a transformation when the U.S. entered World War I, a modification in which prominent white progressives endorsed the war effort after bitter in-fighting and public recriminations. The SAI experienced a concomitant struggle over support for the war effort, peyote use in religious rituals, the outreach of the SAI, and the existence of the Indian Bureau.

A definitive legal status for Indians remained the most important organizational goal, and took on greater significance during America's participation in World War I. In 1916, before the United States entered the war, Arthur C. Parker detected a political opening to make the case for Indian citizenship. The tone of the *American Indian Magazine*, with Parker as editor, changed to include more militaristic rhetoric. Playing on the stereotype of Indians as warriors, one of his articles from the January-March edition carried the title "Wanneh: The American Indian as a Warrior." The article began with a call for Americans to recognize their own hypocrisy when they criticized Europeans for violations of treaty and individual rights. Parker wrote, "What is American to stand impotent and horrified, to talk of 'scraps of paper' and the 'rights of a weaker people'? What an assumption of virtue for America to condemn Europeans for violations of treaties and for invasion!" As he had done in a past issue, Parker invoked Chief Peter Pitchlynn as an example of successful Native assimilation. He recounted a statement from Pitchlynn which proclaimed, "Let all men then know the value of the red man as a citizen, as a soldier, as an American." In Parker's view, Indians would always exhibit the masculine traits

of a soldier who fought for both the survival of the race and of the “land God gave them.”<sup>205</sup>

Parker also used World War I to highlight the Indian’s readiness to fight as an American soldier. He stressed Indian preparedness for war with the example of boarding schools. Their use of military drills, strict regimentation of the day, and discipline created “the best drilled and best prepared boys in the United States.” In addition, Parker said, “Every man of them is an embryo officer who may some day be called upon. The Indians are loyal Americans and they are prepared.” Parker then touched upon the stereotype of Indian as “savage.” In comparison to Europeans, the Indian’s ancestor was “at times very mildly a savage.” He concluded that the degree of carnage through use of new “death dealing machines” revealed the contemporary European as “the real savage.”<sup>206</sup> Parker’s position on Indian men fighting in World War I indicated his deeper belief in their readiness for full citizenship. “A potential citizen ought to manifest a spirit of loyalty and eagerness since he is to become a citizen, or he should absolutely refuse that citizenship. If the potential Indian Citizen won’t fight for the flag neither will he when his citizenship matures into actuality,” he concluded.<sup>207</sup> The magazine also included an excerpt from Secretary of the Interior Lane to the Parker. Lane noted the SAI’s support for his agenda to preserve in Indians their self-respect at the same time he increased their self-confidence. Sounding an optimistic note, Lane found Indians more responsive to federal efforts to

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<sup>205</sup> Gawasa Wanneh (Seneca), “ ‘Wanneh’ The American Indian as Warrior,” *American Indian Magazine*, January-March 1916, 27.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>207</sup> ACP to Philip Gordon, April 26, 1917, SAI Papers.



change them from “a class of dependents” during a period of transition. Indians needed a set Indian policy as the foundation for their own progress.<sup>208</sup>

Parker situated Lane’s statements in the pages before he wrote his own critique of federal Indian policy entitled “Parker: The Indian and the Government.” He structured the two articles as if they were a dialogue on an issue, which reflected his desire for structured and informed debated. Aware of congressional plenary power over Indian affairs, Parker called upon Congress to provide a “careful and wise” definition of Native Americans’ legal status. The confusion made it nearly impossible for Native Americans to understand their own political position. Also, the workings of the Indian Bureau continued without transparency. Native Americans found themselves at the mercy of a bureaucracy they were unable to understand. The Bureau in particular failed to acknowledge it was accountable to the people it claimed to serve. Parker linked this lack of accountability to the problem of Native citizenship. He proclaimed in capital letters: “The Indian Department ought never to forget that the making of citizens who are intelligent men and women and who shall be responsive to all the necessities and demands of the age, is its chief function.” Indians needed full knowledge of federal Indian policy so they could act in their best interests. Parker saw this as a basic right Indians possessed so the Bureau could achieve the results it said it desired: “equity, education, and good citizenship.” Parker attached a footnote stating he believed Commissioner of Indian Affairs Sells was working toward these goals.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Franklin Lane, “Secretary Lane to the Editor,” *American Indian Magazine*, Jan-March 1916, 37.

<sup>209</sup> Arthur C. Parker, “Parker: The Indian and the Government,” *American Indian Magazine*, January-March 1916, 41.

Parker's colleague, Carlos Montezuma, also expressed confidence in the ability of Native Americans to adapt to modern life. In a transcript of a speech before the Illinois Woman's Press Association, he discussed "The Indian of Tomorrow." He covered the arc of human civilization and cautioned that Indians should forget the horrible past, their near annihilation. Using the language of evolutionary theory, he believed Indians were in a process of transformation from a "lower and insignificant plane of existence to a higher and more potent sphere of life." Indian communities lacked the "social organization of civilized life." He catalogued the list for marks of civilization missing: schools, churches, courts, prisons, hospitals, asylums, saloons, teachers, judges, lawyers, doctors, books, reading, writing, and education. Consequently, the Indian, "though he was an adult in appearance, he was mentally a child." Montezuma challenged individual Indians to compete with other men for the privileges of civilization. "There is no reason why he should be housed and nursed." He spoke of racial uplift: "Indians must become their own emancipators. There is none to carry the burden for them."<sup>210</sup> The *American Indian Magazine* carried an optimistic tone and indicated the SAI and federal officials who shaped Indian policy were in agreement on assimilation.

Indian self-help had its limits though. An example of Parker's position appeared in his March letter regarding a proposed bill in Congress for Indians to elect their own superintendents. Reservation Indians, in his view, were incapable of "knowing the character and ability of" candidates and he feared the influence of "local interests" in the selection process. Better to allow the federal government to

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<sup>210</sup> Carlos Montezuma, "The Indian of Tomorrow," undated, 3-6, in Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Harold B. Lee Library. Department of Special Collections and Manuscripts. Brigham Young University. Provo, UT (hereafter Bonnin Collection).

appoint the superintendents than leave those positions vulnerable to Indians' inexperience with reservation management and local corruption, particularly if collusion between "commercial interests" and politicians occurred.<sup>211</sup> One local Native man held similar concerns about no federal oversight of Indian policies. Nahwats (through his interpreter, Howard Whitewolf) wrote Henry Roe Cloud that same month about the vulnerability of Indians. Nahwats placed himself among "older Indians" who could not look after their own affairs nor "compete with the ways of civilization." He rejected the bill also mentioned in Parker's letter and implored Roe Cloud and the SAI to look after Indian interests. Yet Nahwats said he did not want dependency, but assistance similar to that a war veteran might receive such as a home and advice on business matters.<sup>212</sup>

The Society's executive officers differed more frequently about the locus of its reform efforts. Would they focus on national public opinion at an intellectual level, as Parker preferred; at the congressional level, similar to an interest group making statements on Indian policy; or at the local level in Indian communities and on reservations? Parker's preference reflected his own strengths as a writer, a consensus-builder, and an educated professional. At the end of March Fayette McKenzie received a despondent letter from Thomas Sloan, who, as Vice President on Legislation for the SAI, recognized the disparate approaches existed. Feeling alienated from Parker and Sherman Coolidge, Sloan complained his position was an empty post. He also believed the leadership in the SAI lacked proper guidance from its members. Contact with Congress appeared critical to safeguarding the welfare of

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<sup>211</sup> ACP to Hon. Moses E. Clapp, March 13, 1916, SAI Papers.

<sup>212</sup> Natwats (dictated to Howard Whitewolf) to Henry Roe Cloud, March 27, 1916, SAI Papers.

Indians and Sloan expressed a desire for more active communication with various congressional committees on Native issues. He told Coolidge that his “greatest delight” would be the abolition of the Indian Bureau, but the political realities indicated to him that the discontent on reservations needed addressing. The Indian Bureau’s obsolescence was a long-term goal that the SAI support, but short-term remedies also needed tending.<sup>213</sup> Two months later Sloan still hungered for more activism from the SAI. Whereas Parker’s approach remained eschewed confrontation, Sloan pushed Parker for more action, less talk: “We cannot be an Indian Society and be neutral, we must be either for the Indian or the Indian Bureau. It is past the time for generalities. It is time for action.” Sloan called for a vision for the SAI, which he believed was missing from the organization.<sup>214</sup>

Parker resisted Sloan’s arguments. He wrote Sherman Coolidge five days after receipt of Sloan’s letter, and again rejected the idea that reservation Indians were entirely capable of managing their own reservations. Plans for the annual conference were underway and Parker opposed holding it on or near a reservation. “Unfortunately,” he wrote, “not all of our Indian people are thoroughly educated or thoroughly posted and they are frequently deceived not only by unscrupulous white people but by Indians and mixed bloods looking for business and sometimes a business interest so warps a man’s judgment into believing that he is honest when he is not.”<sup>215</sup> Paternalism permeated federal Indian policy, and its presence in Parker’s philosophy of Indian uplift revealed his own gradualist bent.

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<sup>213</sup> Thomas L. Sloan to Henry Roe Cloud, March 13, 1916, RFP.

<sup>214</sup> Thomas L. Sloan to ACP, May 6, 1916, SAI Papers.

<sup>215</sup> ACP to Rev. Sherman Coolidge, May 11, 1916, SAI Papers.

Yet Parker shared Sloan's concerns about the condition of the organization, even if they disagreed on strategy. A month before President Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany, Parker revealed his disappointment at the condition of the SAI. Describing himself as discouraged and "at low pressure," he reached out to his confidant and fellow reformer, Sherman Coolidge, and expressed his dismay. Parker concluded that funding no longer existed to support the magazine, in many ways his beloved vehicle for intellectual discourse on Native activism. In addition, he described the organization as an "unfinished experiment," entertaining the possibility that it was near the end. The Society, he reflected, had been "too optimistic and trustful of dangerous elements," which he did not name.<sup>216</sup> He elaborated somewhat on his concerns in a letter to Gertrude Bonnin a few days later. His health was poor and his "brain power" sapped as he sat buried under office work. He alluded to dissention among the organization, and wrote, "We must be broader than politics, above suspicion of the treachery of our Indian brothers and sisters in the service of the government and Christian without being the least sectarian."<sup>217</sup>

Internal disputes and burnout aside, financial crisis remained the most pressing matter within the organization. The SAI's resources continued to dwindle under the management of Marie Baldwin, whom Bonnin loathed and Parker feared was working to actively undermine the Society. Bonnin was convinced Marie Baldwin was in league with the Bureau. She complained to Parker, "I do not intend, if I know it, to trust SAI work to Indian Bureau spies and watch dogs, no matter how small and insignificant they are. I am awake to the fact that the Indian Bureau

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<sup>216</sup> ACP to Rev. and Mrs. Sherman Coolidge, March 7, 1917, SAI Papers.

<sup>217</sup> ACP to Gertrude Bonnin, March 12, 1917, SAI Papers.

begrudges us any recognition or salary or even inheritances. They would like to make us beggars and hinder us from active work in the SAI.”<sup>218</sup> “All my various organizations seem to flourish but he S.A.I. whom of all I love most.” Two factions, one pro-Bureau and the other anti-Bureau, symbolized the “millstones” crushing the Society, he concluded.<sup>219</sup> Carlos Montezuma proved the most vitriolic of the anti-Bureau millstones.

Montezuma stepped up his attacks on the Indian Bureau in his own publication, *Wassaja*. The doctor had grown impatient with the SAI’s moderate stance on Indian reform, and the monthly newsletter reflected his dissatisfaction. The aptly titled “Arrow Points” column usually contained brief criticisms of people or legislation outside of Montezuma’s ideological position. The leading paragraph stated, “Ex-President Coolidge of the Society of American Indians says that he can be loyal to the Indian race and at the same time serve the Indian Bureau. WASSAJA wonders if he serves God and the Devil the same way.” Montezuma was uninterested in investigative journalism or disciplined intellectual debate. Instead he hinted at Indian Bureau conspiracies, graft and corruption. Another item from “Arrow Points” exemplifies his polemical style: “Rottenness and immorality in our government schools! The facts? Hidden in the dusty files of the Indian Bureau.”<sup>220</sup> There the column of diatribes ended. The year 1916 ended with unresolved fractures in the organization. U.S. entrance into World War I temporarily unified the most active members.

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<sup>218</sup> Gertrude Bonnin to ACP, June 2, 1917, SAI Papers.

<sup>219</sup> ACP to Gertrude Bonnin, March 27, 1917, SAI Papers.

<sup>220</sup> *Wassaja*, October 1916, vol. 1, no. 7, 1-2.

In the early months of 1917 the Wilson administration prepared for war. One of its top priorities was to reshape public opinion in favor of U.S. participation and, most controversial, a draft. Based upon the research of historian Cecelia Elizabeth O’Leary, one of the defining features of increased patriotism in the public discourse was “Anglo-conformity.” The debate revolved around the seeming incompatibility of a “melting pot” with a single American identity. One’s patriotism became linked with unquestioning support for the Great War. The Committee for Public Information, formed to feed pro-war propaganda to the American public, successfully intimidated and suppressed dissenters be they leftists or the liberal members of the Progressive movement. O’Leary defined the emergent “official patriotic culture” of the war years as a period in which national power was on the ascendancy, the language of nationalism emphasized masculinity, a martial spirit, and “the imposition of racialized and anti-radical criteria defined by Anglo superiority and political intolerance.”<sup>221</sup> Racial issues arose throughout the war effort. Native progressives were keenly aware of racial stereotypes of Indian “warriors” and used them to bolster their argument for Indian fitness for military service.

Wilson implemented a domestic policy of war mobilization that directly affected Native Americans. Its rhetoric emphasized service to the nation, which appealed to the SAI’s agenda. The President addressed Congress on April 2<sup>nd</sup> to persuade the representatives to “formally accept the status of belligerent.” That course required a “mobilization of all the material resources of the country.” These resources included manpower, and the President declared that additional men in the

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<sup>221</sup> Cecelia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 237, 242-43.

armed services for the war effort required “universal liability to service.” Historian David M. Kennedy noted that Wilson directly addressed the issue of loyalty during the war effort, especially of those men and women of German descent or sympathy. Disloyalty “will be dealt with with a firm hand of repression,” he cautioned. Congress erupted in applause.<sup>222</sup> Congress declared war on April 6, 1917. The draft was controversial for numerous reasons and caught many Americans by surprise. Wilson had run for re-election on the slogan “He Kept Us Out of War,” then seemingly reversed course. The country’s tradition of volunteering for military service, as opposed to conscription, and then, deploying them overseas, aroused concern and protest throughout the country.

Lessons from the Civil War shaped the thinking of the Wilson administration members who were in charge of the draft. Secretary of War Baker and Judge Advocate General Enoch Herbert Crowder had studied the war and knew the disastrous consequences of the Union Army draft. Military officers had overseen the conscription, thus creating a sense of naked federal power poised against civilians. In addition, draft riots broke out. Baker, with these historical facts in mind, placed civilians in local administrative control of the draft. Crowder explained that this policy “put the administration of the draft into the hands of friends and neighbors of the men to be affected, “a testimony to the “true democratic doctrine of local self-government.” This policy, according to Kennedy, proved a “brilliant public relations

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<sup>222</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 12-13.



stroke, deepening the illusion of willing individual service and community control.”

The Wilson administration engaged in an “appealing fiction.”<sup>223</sup>

Kennedy’s analysis of Wilson’s war rhetoric found the use of the word “service” significant because it played upon the desire of Americans to see themselves as “an exceptionally altruistic nation.” Leading Progressives of the day like Herbert Croly blended the ideal of individual freedom with collective responsibility for the nation. In 1909 Croly’s work *The Promise of American Life* envisioned “service” to be the end of selfish individualism and the advent of “cooperative nationalism.”<sup>224</sup> Executive leaders within the Society embraced a similar view. The SAI could link its platform with an emergent national identity during wartime and endorse the war effort as a sign of Native American patriotism.

Arthur Parker wrote directly to Secretary Baker in July to apprise him of the SAI’s position on drafting Native men. Parker opened with an assurance: “It is the desire of this organization, the Society of American Indians, to cooperate with the Government in every possible way in the matter of assisting in military activities.”<sup>225</sup>

Henry Roe Cloud also threw his newly founded Indian school, the Roe Indian Institute, behind the war effort. The school’s mission, to train native Christian leaders from all tribes, meshed well with the moral mission President Wilson articulated for the U.S. entrance into the war. Roe Cloud published a school pamphlet entitled “The

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 150-152.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 152-154; in a letter from Baker to Wilson dated May 1, 1917, Baker wrote, “I am exceedingly anxious to have the registration and selection by draft conducted under such circumstances as to create a strong patriotic feeling and relieve as far as possible the prejudice which remains to some extent in the popular mind against the draft by reason of Civil War memories. With this end in view, I am using a vast number of agencies throughout the country to make the day of registration a festival and patriotic occasion.” (see ff 15, pg. 150); for the lingering effects of the Civil War on popular memory and leading American figures, see pp. 178-179 in Kennedy.

<sup>225</sup> ACP to Hon. Newton D. Baker, July 1917, SAI Papers.

Indian: His Part in the National Emergency” to outlines the many ways Indian could be of service to the country. They could fill non-combat jobs at home and generally create a “spirit of real Christian brotherhood” to prevent future wars.<sup>226</sup>

Congress passed the Selective Service Act on May 18, 1917, and Wilson appointed Crowder to the position of provost marshal general. His new role was to develop Selective Service policies and oversee the registration and mobilization of men into military service. The first draft began on June 5<sup>th</sup>, which required all men between ages twenty-one and thirty-one to report to their local boards. Crowder and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells discussed the special circumstances the draft presented for Native Americans because, at that point, more than one-third of the total Native population lacked U.S. citizenship; only Native men with citizenship, however, were eligible for the draft.<sup>227</sup> To confound the issue, many Indians lived in remote locations and others spoke English poorly, if at all. Crowder gave the BIA the task of registering Indian men, reasoning that reservation officials could handle the unique challenges of communicating and enacting federal policy.

The whole enterprise confused both Native peoples and the local draft boards. Historian David Britten’s research on Native Americans and World War I revealed the problem was one of citizenship. Local boards struggled to determine, case by case, whether Indians who registered were U.S. citizens. Over the next year, Sells instructed local boards to determine whether those Indians with citizenship claimed it under the Dawes Act or Burke Act, or if he voluntarily lived apart from his in a

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<sup>226</sup> Jason Michael Tetzloff, “To Do Some Good Among the Indians: Henry Roe Cloud and Twentieth Century Native American Advocacy” (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 1996), 104-106.

<sup>227</sup> Thomas A. Britten, *Native Americans in World War I: At Home and at War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 51.

“civilized” manner, or if he received citizenship because his parents were. Noncitizen Indians could claim exemption from the draft, but some requested a waiver for enlistment. However, legislation did not exist to allow such waivers until May 1918. If there were any doubt about the citizenship status of a registrant, Sells further instructed local boards to classify the individual as a noncitizen. Crowder added that designated noncitizen Indians were to be placed in the Class V category of exemptions, the one for men with special vocations, alien enemies, and resident aliens. The draft process also contained a quota system for the induction of black and white registrants. Racial classifications further muddled the process, in light of Crowder’s order that Native Americans were to be classified as white.<sup>228</sup>

Local administration of draft boards proved vulnerable to partisanship and prejudice given the immense discretionary power of board members. For example, the draft functioned on a quota system which required registration be proportional, based upon total population. The problem, however, was the presence of two and half million “non-declared” alien men, that is, immigrant men with preliminary citizenship documents who were exempted from the draft. Britten found that 11, 803 Native men registered for the draft before September 1918. Of that number, 6,509 entered the service while 228 (less than 2 percent) claimed deferment. After September 1918 5,500 Native men registered, but the number inducted remains unknown. The number of Native enlistments is also unclear with estimates ranging from 8,000 to 15,000.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 51-58.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 58-60.

Some Native men refused to comply with conscription. Draft resistance erupted among the Eastern Cherokee on the Qualla Boundary reservation in North Carolina, on the Goshute reservation on the Nevada-Utah border, with the tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy in New York, and among the Creek in Oklahoma. These exceptions proved the rule; most Native men participated willingly in the draft.<sup>230</sup> Incidents of draft resistance emerged in two cases reported by the *New York Times*. First in June 1917 some members of the Navajo and Utes held “war dances” and threatened arson in Ignacio, Colorado, during war registration. The next year approximately two hundred Creeks were reported to have fired shots when their sons were drafted. The Indian Office believed the unrest was the result of pro-German subversion within the tribes, and superintendents received instructions to discreetly warn Indians the dangers of treason.<sup>231</sup>

A further problem was race-based: the segregation of troops. African American progressives also viewed the war as an opportunity to press for the end of Jim Crow laws and ubiquitous racial segregation in the United States. Military service offered men an opportunity for patriotic duty and sacrifice, and ideally, would prove Black men’s fitness for full citizenship. They could demonstrate their commitment to becoming Americans, a process Native people and immigrants experienced as assimilation.

Advocates of “Americanization” pressured the Army to shift policy. In response, it created “development battalions” to socialize recruits instruction, usually from a YMCA volunteer, in the English language and United States history and

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 67-71.

<sup>231</sup> Russel Lawrence Barsh, “American Indians in the Great War,” *Ethnohistory* 38: 3 (Summer 1991), 281.

government. Concurrently, the Army formed ethnically segregated troops for Slavs and Italians. Race-based segregation of troops continued and enlistment suspended once four Regular Army and eight National Guard units achieved full strength in April. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, racial violence in Houston, Texas involving black Regulars of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion spurred debate within the War Department about the training and stationing of blacks in American camps. Black troops were scattered throughout the country. One exception, an exclusively black camp for training officers, appeared in at Fort Des Moines, due to the insistence of the NAACP officials Joel Spingarn and W. E. B. du Bois. None of the fourteen officer-training camps opened after the declaration of war admitted blacks, so a segregated program appeared better than none at all. The program graduated one class of 639 officers, all below field rank, and once assigned to the 92<sup>nd</sup> division, retained all-white superior officers. Reflective of discrimination in employment back in the States, African American soldiers received fewer combat assignments and larger menial tasks such as stevedores and cooks.<sup>232</sup>

On April 30<sup>th</sup> Representative Julius Kahn (CA), member of House Committee on Military Affairs, introduced a bill that called for ten or more regiments of Indian to be called the "North American Indian Cavalry." Upon enlistment these men would receive citizenship without compromising their tribal status, land or annuities. Close ally of the SAI and Oklahoma representative Charles Carter and Senator Boies Penrose (PA) also introduced like-minded legislation. Supporters of these bills included Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane and General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force, and the Board of Indian

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<sup>232</sup> Kennedy, 156-162.

Commissioners. But Secretary Baker and U.S. Army Chief of Staff Peyton C. March were against the policy for reasons that included the condition of African American troops. Intelligence from within the Army indicated growing unrest among black soldiers, Baker warned the President, so another racial segregation policy could have acted as an accelerant to racial violence.<sup>233</sup>

Firmly against segregated troops, Commissioner Sells believed that Indian soldiers would benefit from the environment of discipline and respect that characterized white military units. Such experiences helped Native men prepare for citizenship. In a letter to the superintendent of Pine Ridge Reservation, he explained, “I want the Indian to go into this conflict as the equal and comrade of every man who assails autocracy and ancient might.” He hoped Indians would return “with a new light in his face and a clearer conception of the Democracy in which he may participate and prosper.” Fighting “shoulder to shoulder” with white men would expose them to the obligations, discipline, and respect that whites experienced. Further, Sells hoped Indians would experience no discrimination in the military and find themselves progressing further away from “tribal relations and towards civilization.” Indian soldiers, then, as “hyphenless Americans,” found an opportunity through military service, to prove themselves “worthy of his noble ancestry.”<sup>234</sup>

Gertrude Bonnin opposed segregated troops for Native Americans because she wanted them in close proximity to “recognized citizens” and distinct from Negro soldiers who were segregated. “It hardly seems right,” she wrote Arthur Parker, “that these Negroes be sent in a separate regiment, any more than it would be for the

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<sup>233</sup> Britten, 38-43

<sup>234</sup> Cato Sells to Henry M. Tidwell, February 4, 1918, SAI Papers.

Indian; still they offer the inducement of making them Officers.” She concluded that the black population had increased to the point that they could sustain casualties the Indian troops could not. She even entertained the possibility that deployment of separate Indian regiments to the front lines of war would be interpreted as “an intended annihilation of the Red Man.” Then she confided, “Secretly, I wonder if it is not a cute idea to reduce the Negro population. This sounds like treason; so you better not quote me, unless you want me hung.”<sup>235</sup> In an ironic twist, the SAI found itself supporting the Bureau of Indian Affairs on Native men’s participation in the war. Both agreed that segregated troops were inappropriate because such an approach would hinder assimilation and block Native men from learning an Anglo work ethic.<sup>236</sup> The war would prove Native Americans were advancing in the process of civilization.

One Society member expressed dissatisfaction with both the Wilson administration and the SAI. Ever the gadfly, Carlos Montezuma found hypocrisy in the Wilson’s public rationale for U.S. participation in World War I, especially when Native men were drafted. In *Wassaja* Montezuma fired his first volley, “We hear on all sides that America must maintain her true spirit of democracy, we must see that all men are treated on an equal footing, equality and human rights must be upheld.” However, Indians found little freedom under the administration of the Indian Bureau. Instead he drew a parallel with Germany: “Indian Bureauism is the Kaiserism of America toward the Indians. It enslaves and dominates the Indians without giving

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<sup>235</sup> Gertrude Bonnin to ACP, June 20, 1917, SAI Papers.

<sup>236</sup> Britten, 38.

them their rights.” How could such a “liberty-loving country” deny justice to Native Americans at home?<sup>237</sup>

When the Society cancelled its annual meeting, ostensibly because of the declaration of war, Montezuma expressed his displeasure in a *Wassaja* article entitled, “Scalping the S.A.I. Again.” He blamed the cancellation on the Bureau who, he speculated, “might have” whispered charges of treason for possible criticisms of the government and the Bureau if the conference were held. He feared “very shallow motives” lay behind the cancellation, and the SAI’s move indicated that “a true Indian” with “the Indians’ welfare at heart” would have held the conference.<sup>238</sup> In the same issue Montezuma spoke against drafting Native men without first giving them citizenship. Wardship prevented Indian from attaining full citizenship, so drafting Native men was “another wrong perpetrated upon the Indian without FIRST bestowing his just title—THE FIRST AMERICAN CITIZEN.” “It is a sad picture that hunts America’s conscience, and now worse than ever we are forced into the army, as though we were citizens or at least aliens. The wards are called upon to protect their Protector! It is damnable to be an Indian!”<sup>239</sup>

The conference cancellation and the organization’s disarray left Parker craving intellectual discourse on federal Indian policy; he found it at another conference held in January 1918. He and Matthew Sniffen, secretary of the Indian Rights Association (IRA), held a joint conference in Philadelphia to keep Indian issues visible. Parker presented a paper on Indian citizenship, “Making Democracy

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<sup>237</sup> Carlos Montezuma, “Indians Are Fighting for Their Freedom, Liberty and Rights,” *Wassaja* June 1917, vol. 2, no. 3, 2.

<sup>238</sup> Carlos Montezuma, “Scalping the S.A.I. Again,” *Wassaja* October 1917, vol. 2, no. 7, 1.

<sup>239</sup> Carlos Montezuma, “Drafting Indians and Justice,” *Wassaja*, October 1917, vol. 2, no. 7, 3.



Safe for the Indians,” in which he reiterated the need for reform of the Indian Bureau and preparation for Native veterans return home. He questioned whether their “blood bought privileges” of “liberty, fraternity and equality of opportunity” would be present in American democracy.<sup>240</sup> Temporarily Parker distanced himself from the SAI and its newest controversy, peyote use among Native Americans.

By 1917 nineteen states had adopted prohibition laws; the Anti-Saloon League was ascending in power and pressuring the Congress to amend the Constitution with federal prohibition. Bowing to such pressure, the War Department ban the sale of liquor near training camps and forbade men in uniform from purchasing liquor. In 1919 the Eighteenth Amendment passed.<sup>241</sup> Alcoholism and peyote use ran contrary to BIA prohibition policies. In 1918 Sells endorsed congressional legislation against the sale of illegal liquor on Indian reservations. He withheld the disbursement of annuity payments to the Osage when charges of alcohol abuse among the people surfaced.<sup>242</sup>

The Society’s official platform was anti-peyote despite some high-ranking members who endorsed its use in religious ceremonies. Parker engaged in a debate via correspondence with a supporter of peyote use, Henry Roman Nose. Parker, staunchly against peyote, argued, “You can be very sure that if peyote was good for the white man he would have found it out long ago and be using it now. If you want to do the best kind of service to your people, tell them it is wrong to drink whiskey, it is wrong to eat peyote and it is wrong to want to be ignorant.”<sup>243</sup> Henry Roe Cloud

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<sup>240</sup> Siegel, 126-128.

<sup>241</sup> Kennedy, 184.

<sup>242</sup> Britten, 154-55.

<sup>243</sup> ACP to Henry Roman Nose, June 16, 1915, SAI Papers.

also shared Parker's view. A letter from his mother contained her request that he send an official telegram to an upcoming Mohonk Conference expressing the official position of the Institute toward peyote, an "exceedingly harmful drug." In compliance with her request Roe Cloud sent the message and quoted its contents to her, which read in part, "We, the young Indian men of this generation have seen Peyote undermining the health and moral of our race. The whole country has resorted to the strong arm of the law for protection against baneful drugs."<sup>244</sup>

Gertrude Bonnin fought actively against peyote use and, while in Utah, traveled among the Utes to convince peyote users to desist. She described to Parker in a November letter, her small group's efforts to meet with "peyote men." According to Bonnin, "It was a brave talk, frank and earnest, telling them that the Sioux of Pine Ridge had taken a vote against peyote and were doing all they could to stamp it out. A man she referred to as Standing Bear, Sr. also spoke to the men gathered while Bonnin interpreted his Sioux to English. The speaker warned against the "evils and demoralization" that would accompany peyote use. Next, the Utes in attendance requested the speakers meet with their "chief peyote man," John McCook, whom Bonnin discovered used peyote to minimize the pain from his rheumatism. Noting his reluctance to accept the visitors' interpretation of peyote use, he responded: "When Washington told us to stop gambling, I told my people to stop it. When Washington told us that whiskey was bad, I told my people no to use it. . . . As long as we can get this medicine, I think we will continue the use of it."<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Henry Roe Cloud to Mrs. Walter C. Roe, October 1916, Yale.

<sup>245</sup> Gertrude Bonnin to ACP, November 11, 1916, SAI Papers.

In 1918 Congress held hearings on peyote use. Prominent Native leaders, in contrast to the SAI, spoke in support of peyote as a legitimate part of Native religious ceremonies. Francis La Flesche and Fred Lookout testified. La Flesche, an Omaha working for the Smithsonian Institution as an anthropologist, witnessed the growing support of the peyote rite and knew many practitioners in Oklahoma. Claiming he did not participate in peyote use, La Flesche testified that he had “numerous opportunities” to observe peyote use among the Osage, Omaha, and Ponca. Already informed of the alleged immorality and promiscuity that accompanied peyote meetings, he recounted his observations in the manner of a trained anthropologist, aware of preconceived notions, sensitive to the cultural meaning the participants gave to the ceremony and peyote “medicine,” and mindful of moral judgments. When he asked the man sitting next to him what he expected to see, the answer was, “We expect to see the face of Jesus and the face of our dead relatives. We are worshiping God and Jesus, the same God that eh white people worship.” Based upon his frequent visits to Native homes, La Flesche found little evidence of alcohol consumption and no evidence that peyote use in the meetings made Indians lazy or reluctant to work.<sup>246</sup>

Lookout, an Oklahoma Osage leader whose career would begin in 1908 as a member of the Osage Tribal Council and extend for forty years, supported the Native American Church. An active participant in the use of peyote for religious worship of God, Lookout asserted that the Osage had improved as a result of peyote integration into tribal Christian services. “Since the use of peyote amongst the Osage Indians,” he testified, “my young people, or my young men, have developed quite a good

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<sup>246</sup> Frederick Hoxie, ed., “Statement of Mr. Francis La Flesche, Bureau of American Ethnology, an Omaha Indian,” in *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), 82-84.

reputation. They are living a better life and making money, settling down in their own homesteads and raising their own cattle and horses and everything. By using this peyote they have lived a whole lot better life.” Benjamin Tillman, a congressional Democrat from South Carolina, challenged Chief Lookout on the biblical authority upon which he based the use of peyote: “Then explain to this committee where you get any authority from the Bible for the use of this bean in worship?” Unable to cite a specific biblical reference, Lookout replied, “I do not understand about the Bible. If the Bible gives any authority for the use of this peyote, I am not familiar with it.” Unconvinced, Tillman pressed the issue with the question, “Then where do you get your authority to use it?” Lookout replied that “all [his] people used peyote; members of his tribe persuaded him to try it.”<sup>247</sup>

Watching a fragile consensus erode over peyote and in-fighting, Parker had reached the breaking point with Bonnin and Baldwin’s feud by early 1918. In a letter to Sherman Coolidge, he once again revealed the depth of his dissatisfaction. “I have already told you of the trouble between Mrs. Baldwin and Mrs. Bonnin. Both have been petty and spiteful. I hate to admit it, but it is so. As good as they both are they are killing our work. Personally I believe that only a reorganization will bring a cure.” He hoped both might resign. As he prepared to meet Bonnin and Charles Eastman in Washington, he felt “gloomy over the prospects,” a reference to the direction the SAI may take.<sup>248</sup> Upon his return from the meeting, he reported to Coolidge that “Dr. Eastman appeared quite out of harmony with what we had done

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<sup>247</sup> Frederick Hoxie, ed., “Statement of Fred Lookout, Chief of the Osage Tribe of Indians, Pawhuska, Okla.,” in *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), 85-86.

<sup>248</sup> ACP to Rev. and Mrs. Sherman Coolidge, February 6, 1918, SAI Papers.

previously” in the SAI. “He intimated that we aimed too high.” Instead of Bonnin’s resignation she was reassigned as Secretary, a grave misstep in Parker’s opinion. He asserted, “No woman will ever make a good Secretary, bad as I was in some ways. Women officers will scrap.”<sup>249</sup>

Parker also felt ineffective. By June he confided that he was considering resigning. Lack of a strong leader to take his place held him back. He described the SAI as “a defective organization” and himself as “the poorest sort of president.” Any planning for the annual conference proceeded without him, but he did not intend to attend anyway due to lack of income. Apparently he had revealed his desire to step down to Gertrude Bonnin because he mentioned that an “ideal man” to replace him was Charles Eastman.<sup>250</sup>

As Parker’s influence waned, Bonnin’s increased. She used the war to push for Indian citizenship. In the July-September issue of the *American Indian Magazine*, Bonnin, now editor, wrote a commentary on the 1918 annual conference in Pierre, South Dakota. Held during “trying war times,” the conference indicated that progressive Indians were scrutinizing the federal government’s conduct. Bonnin’s prose soared, “The spirit of a great united American brotherhood fighting in a common cause, the defense of world democracy, pervaded the whole affair. American Indians are watching democracy, baptized in fire and blood overseas.”<sup>251</sup> The greatest contention among those in attendance occurred over the Indian Bureau system. It defendant was an Indian Bureau official, Wilma R. Rhodes, who “repeatedly took to the floor” in the Bureau’s defense. Bonnin described the reaction

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<sup>249</sup> ACP to Sherman Coolidge, February 20, 1918, SAI Papers.

<sup>250</sup> ACP to Rev. Thomas C. Moffett, June 28, 1918, SAI Papers.

<sup>251</sup> Zitkala-Sa, “Editorial Comment,” 181.

of conference members, fully skeptical of “the fat fly of paternalism in this particular brand of ointment.”<sup>252</sup> She even tried unsuccessfully to present a case for American Indian citizenship at the Paris Peace Conference. Even though her agenda was “a domestic matter,” she wrote Carlos Montezuma with optimism. “The psychological moment is here,” Bonnin assured him, “and will continue for weeks. . . .” The “heroic sacrifice in the war for democracy” laid the groundwork for “securing full citizenship for the American Indian.”<sup>253</sup>

Progressives, according to David Kennedy, hoped the war would actualize their ideals. Bonnin’s optimism mirrored that of other Progressives. One example was John Dewey, who made the transition toward support of the war effort. The mouthpiece of pro-war progressive faction, *The New Republic*, published Dewey’s essays that praised Wilson and proclaimed the potential ameliorative effects of the war. Wilson demonstrated his rhetorical skill in couching the war effort in terms Progressives could embrace: a war to end all wars and a war to spread democracy. Progressives’ ears were filled with “Dewey’s siren song” especially the editors of the *New Republic*, Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, and Walter Weyl—who were “guided by the lodestar of Wilson’s idealism.”<sup>254</sup> In November 1918 Lippmann, writing for the journal, endorsed the war as an opportunity to “stand committed as never before to the realization of democracy in America.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>253</sup> Gertrude Bonnin to Carlos Montezuma, December 6, 1918, Bonnin Collection..

<sup>254</sup> Kennedy, 50-51.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 247; see ff. 35 in Kennedy as quoted in “The Post-War Mind,” in Joseph Ratner, ed., *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy in John Dewey*, 2 vols., New York: Henry Holt, 1929, II, 599.

W. E. B. Du Bois had also supported U.S. entrance into World War I. His biographer, David Levering Lewis, connected Du Bois' July 1918 pro-war essay, "Close Ranks," with a military commission he received in exchange for patriotic endorsements from the NAACP's journal, *The Crisis*. The publication contained sentiments similar to those of the *American Indian Magazine*. He explained his position to the readers: "Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy." His plans to accept a captaincy in Military Intelligence Branch of the Army rocked the NAACP and incensed most of the African American press. The appointment never materialized, while the War Department got what it wanted: public support from one of the highest-profile African Americans in the country.<sup>256</sup>

Less than two months before the Armistice, the leadership of the SAI transferred to Charles Eastman. Both he and Gertrude Bonnin hoped to revitalize the organization with a campaign for Indian citizenship and a more unified attack on the Indian Bureau. Hoping to ride a tide of good feelings toward Native soldiers back from Europe, Eastman embarked upon a lecture tour in the spring of 1919. The summer edition of the *American Indian Magazine* contained Bonnin's account of Eastman's circuit of speaking engagements. "The Indian race is asking release from the clutches of bureaucracy!" she announced. In a revision of colonial history, she also tried to find parallels between whites and the current condition of Native Americans: "The American people still remember how their early ancestors fled

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<sup>256</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 555-556, 560.

from the autocracy of Europe to the open arms of the Red Man a few centuries ago. This memory together with the proud record of the Indian in the world war just closed must move all those whose hearts are not stone.” Once again the Bureau stood in the way of progress as Eastman reached out to reservation Indians. According to Bonnin the Bureau prohibited Eastman access to the reservations. Outraged, Bonnin expressed disdain for “the riffraff of the white people from the four corners of the earth” who could enter reservations and create homesteads, and for daily contact Indians could have with “the very scum of other races.” Meanwhile, “educated, refined, and patriotic” Indians were barred from teaching democratic values to Indian audiences in desperate need of such instruction. Instead of the democracy Native soldiers fought for, race discrimination emanating from the Indian Bureau remained in place on reservations.<sup>257</sup>

Eastman’s opening address at the 1919 annual conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, expressed a desire to revitalize the SAI and refurbish its treasury, which was empty. “We have become part of civilization,” he told his audience. “We are not going to live in teepees all our lives. We are not going to continue our hunting. The white man’s hunting is business. We must conform to this life, this new life, and we have.” In a direct attack on the Bureau he said, “Indians have power in their hands to get citizenship. We must stand on our treaty rights. We must stand on our constitutional rights and force the Bureau to cease its shameless bluffing, put it right out. So long as we let it rule, we are playing an ignorant Indian.”<sup>258</sup> Bonnin, as Secretary-Treasurer, presented an address, too. She appealed to those in attendance,

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<sup>257</sup> Zitkala-Sa, “An Indian Citizenship Campaign,” 209-210.

<sup>258</sup> Charles A. Eastman, “Opening Address by Dr. Charles A. Eastman,” *American Indian Magazine*, Fall 1919, 148, 150.



“We have come from our homes to this national teepee and we are talking with one another in a different language, but we are all proud of our Indian blood, we are glad we are Indians. We want to teach our children to be proud of their Indian blood.”<sup>259</sup>

Both had reason to believe their major goal was within reach. Indications from the federal government were positive, especially for Native veterans who wanted U.S. citizenship.

Material from the Office of Indian Affairs suggested that the Great War had helped civilize Native soldiers; it had altered the “character” of the servicemen in a number of ways, a few of which were:

He has lost much of his timidity.  
He has greater self-confidence.  
He is more courteous and more polite.  
He has been made to feel that he is as capable of fulfilling his obligations to his country as any other race of people.  
He understands more fully his patriotic duty to his country.  
He realizes more than ever that there is a place for him in the community; that his is a unit of the great Commonwealth.  
His contact with the outside world and his associations with disciplined men has meant for him much mental discipline. As a result of such discipline he returns to school a better and more desirable student, and to his home a better citizen.<sup>260</sup>

Several veterans supported the prevailing interpretation that the war had transformed Native men and held them assimilate into American society. They expressed pride in military service and in their new sense of duty. Henry M. Owl of the Eastern Cherokee found tribalism much less appealing than incorporation into national citizenship. Basically, their outlook on life had been expanded by overseas travel and exposure to military training and discipline.<sup>261</sup> A bill originating in the House of

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<sup>259</sup> Gertrude Bonnin, “Address by Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin,” *American Indian Magazine*, Fall 1919, 154.

<sup>260</sup> Office of Indian Affairs, “The American Indian in the World War,” Bulletin 15 (1922), 2-3.

<sup>261</sup> Britten, 173-176.

Representatives granted any Native veteran with an honorable discharge the opportunity, if he desired, to become a full United States citizen. His status as citizen did not “impair” individual or tribal property rights.<sup>262</sup>

Beginning in 1920, in the wake of success, the SAI began to lose key founding members and their support. Henry Roe Cloud resigned from the Society in October 1920 in a letter to Thomas Bishop, the Secretary-Treasurer. Roe Cloud stated that, although he had been with the SAI since its founding, it had strayed from its original mission. “I have understood all along that the Society was not founded for partisan purposes, nor to be used for the personal advantage of anyone, but rather that it should be devoted to general principles and to the highest honor of the race.” He had received a circular letter from the SAI, which he believed was “propaganda” that compromised his name and dragged the Society into politics.<sup>263</sup>

In 1921 Montezuma wrote from Washington after meeting with the Indian Committee of the House and Senate. As for the Committee members, he dismissed them because none had “any knowledge of the Indian people.” They were dupes of the Indian Bureau. So deeply entrenched in suspicion of the Bureau, Montezuma confirmed “only an earthquake could move them.” And, even more insulting, “These Senators and Congressmen and the Indian Bureau take the Indians as lower in the human scale than the Negro people.” The Indian remained wards while their enemies encircled them. “When the Indian can dodge the cooks, keep the white rascals from robbing them and when they can support themselves, then and only then, will it be safe to abolish the Indian Bureau. That will be many years to come. We will not live

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<sup>262</sup> [H.R. 5007] 41 Stat., 350, November 6, 1919.

<sup>263</sup> Henry Roe Cloud to Thomas C. Bishop, October 11, 1920, SAI Papers.

to see that day.” Overall, he lamented how prejudice toward Indians disturbed him. “It is so appalling,” he lamented.<sup>264</sup>

In 1922 issue of *Wassaja* Montezuma criticized the disarray the annual SAI conference was in. He reviewed the sad condition of its affairs. Membership had fallen off and the financial crisis persisted. Thomas Sloan had be re-elected President for a fifth time, which raised Montezuma’s ire. The SAI lacked direction after four previous years under Sloan’s leadership, and the organization had missed the opportunity to find elect new officials who could save the founding organization that had lost its prestige.<sup>265</sup> In less than four months Montezuma was dead.

Arthur Parker rejected the SAI’s direction, too. In a bitter 1921 letter to Charles Daganett he proclaimed, “So far as the conference is concerned, I had no desire to go. I have been spending some time in the medical college lately looking over cadavers. I can stand only so much odor of carrion and no more.” Thinking of the current condition of the SAI repulsed Parker to the point he excoriated the current leadership: “That bunch of bolshevists could never have started the Society today; now they are living on the reputation we made for it.”<sup>266</sup>

The following year, Arthur Parker, in a more moderate, reflective mood, summarized the work of the Society of American Indians. In a letter to the editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*, he complained about an article the newspaper published entitled “The American Indian Question.” Parker found it “neither accurate nor impartial.” Parker denied any connection between the SAI and the Indian

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<sup>264</sup> Carlos Montezuma to Dovey Dovie, Washington, D.C., June 28, 1921, Carlos Montezuma Papers, Western History Collection, Norman Oklahoma. Microfilm.

<sup>265</sup> Carlos Montezuma, “Conference of S.A. I at Kansas City, Mo.,” *Wassaja* October 1922, vol. 8, no. 2, 3.

<sup>266</sup> Hertzberg, 194.

Bureau. As for Sloan's leadership, he said, "The Society is now in the hands of Thomas Sloan, a bitter enemy of the Bureau, yet an aspirant for the office of Commissioner." If this is the partisanship that Roe Cloud complained of, is uncertain. Parker also concluded that the SAI possessed little of its standing and influence because "a mistaken policy of bitter criticism and destructive action has all but destroyed it." The Society, he said, had encouraged Indians to work for their freedom "through thought and labor, even under adverse circumstances, and that the world gives full rights to groups of men who prove their ability to produce valuable things."<sup>267</sup>

Gertrude Bonnin remained active even after the demise of the SAI. She continued to lecture and publish throughout the 1920s. In an essay on the findings of the Committee of One Hundred entitled "The Indian Problem," she addressed the issue of Indian citizenship, a topic that generated "much loose talk." The greatest obstacle to Indian citizenship, Bonnin concluded, were Indians who were indifferent to their own political condition. She explained, "The cold fact is that Indians, as a whole, are not much concerned about citizenship." People she labeled "Congress Indians" invariably opposed legislation for reasons she fails to provide.<sup>268</sup> That same year, a pamphlet containing information of the graft and corruption Oklahoma Indians were experiencing was printed. Bonnin, working as a research agent for the Indian Welfare Committee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, had helped investigate conditions in the state. She, Matthew Sniffen, still with the Indian Rights Association, and Charles Faben, an attorney for the American Indian Defense

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<sup>267</sup> ACP to the Editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*, April 15, 1923, SAI Papers.

<sup>268</sup> Gertrude Bonnin, "The Indian Problem," 1923, Bonnin Collection.

Association, privately investigated the probate courts. Their conclusions were published in *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians*.<sup>269</sup>

Overall, World War I provided Native men the opportunity to prove themselves on the battlefield, sacrifice themselves for the nation, and meet the standards martial patriotism in hopes of earning full citizenship. The SAI actively encouraged Indian men to enlist and those who stayed home to support the war effort as best they could. They recast stereotypes of native people such as warrior and noble and brave to bolster their argument that Native men were masculine and powerful enough to fight for the ideals of the nation; this signaled their allegiance and identity as Americans. However, the SAI platform modified under the leadership of Charles Eastman and Gertrude Bonnin ensured old factions would fester and new ones erupt. The war as a means to citizenship provided one unifying goal, one that appeared attainable.

In addition the federal government had cracked down on dissent. Criticism of federal Indian policy had to be recast as a call for inclusion in the war effort. Indian men were able to prove their fitness for civic inclusion, especially since they wanted integrated troops, not segregated ones as African Americans had. This demand further ingratiated the SAI to legislators at a time when the New South rose to national political power in the 1912 elections. O'Leary found this political shift a harbinger that "racism and preparedness for war would once again be compatible allies," as they had been in the Spanish-American War and the Civil War.<sup>270</sup> The World War I era ushered in race riots, gross civil rights violations, and nativism. By

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<sup>269</sup> Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 327-330.

<sup>270</sup> O'Leary, 193.

1924 the country made definitive its racial and ethnic preferences for immigration and citizenship. The Native reform movement's support for assimilation through full Indian citizenship found its inverse in the rise of the Native American Church, which used peyote in religious services. Both Native responses to assimilation reveal the complexity of Indian identity and the contentious racial politics of the age.

## **Conclusion: The Future of Indian Citizenship**

Indian cultures have continually adapted to new circumstances from their first encounters with Europeans. In the early twentieth century, they were faced with pressures to assimilate and thus disappear into American society. The leaders of the SAI confronted the dilemma of giving Indian communities full access to the perceived advantages of life in American society while retaining some sense of Indian identity. The task of the SAI then was to re-educate whites in positions of power to the reality instead of perpetuating the fallacy. The SAI hoped to better the circumstances of Indians who were poorly educated, lived in precarious economic conditions, and alienated from mainstream civic life. Their tools were citizenship, allotment, and patriotism, i.e. service in war to show how Indians were worthy of full rights and privileges of citizenship.

The leaders of the SAI pursued a long-term goal for Indian people: for them to live as Native American citizens--a status they believed should be grounded in consent and one that was also incompatible with the ward-guardian paradigm in federal Indian policy. They tried many strategies, some much more successful than others. They challenged the federal government's definition of Indians as wards with the goal of proving that Indians were eager for civic engagement, participatory democracy, and equal treatment before the law. While under Parker's leadership, the SAI encouraged informed debate in the SAI magazine, at conferences, and in correspondence with other Indians. These venues of expression of Indian popular

will challenged the power of the Indian Bureau's control over the implementation of federal Indian policy.

Chronic financial problems, recurrent fears of Indian Bureau sabotage, and infighting weakened the SAI until the United States entered World War I. Like many of their progressive-minded contemporaries, particularly African Americans and women suffragists, Parker, Eastman, and Bonnin rallied behind the war effort and encouraged Native men to enlist in the military, or at least to demonstrate a visible and vocal patriotism. If Native Americans were either willing to make "the ultimate sacrifice" or support that sacrifice at home, this would indicate where their loyalties lay: with the citizens and with the nation. However, the United States functioned as a democracy with various "degrees" of citizenship, one for privileged white males and another for people of color, immigrants, and women. Support of the war and participation in it moved Congress to grant Native veterans citizenship and women the right to vote.

Citizenship and political equality, however, are not the same, although the nation's self-image indicated otherwise. The experience of African Americans provided a useful example. The SAI leadership perceived Indians as different, and in a sense superior to, blacks. Their strategy lay in legal definition rather than in racial identity. In 1924 Congress granted citizenship to all Native Americans who had yet to receive it.

Prominent members of the SAI espoused full inclusion of Indians into American society, but they possessed a more circumscribed approach to that goal. The lofty rhetoric of the Society reflected the Progressive Era's idealism and, at



times, an air of superiority. Leaders in reform efforts, such as the SAI, were imbued with a sense of mission and a desire to guide those in need of proper models of moral uplift. Sometimes this translated into an elitist stance, despite how well-intentioned the motives. What is clear from their writings is they saw themselves as both Indians and Americans, a redefinition of Native identity which could be included in the democratic ideals of the United States.

The history of the SAI and the ideal of American citizenship and full rights and participation in American democracy point out important themes for study of changing American Indian identity. Voting rights, land and tribal court cases, educational opportunities, health care, employment opportunities, and spiritual matters still need attention. For the first time in the twentieth century, a group of Native American intellectuals spoke up to demand a voice in federal Indian policy. The SAI leadership wanted respect for Indians as citizens. This would ensure that Indians would have a means of giving their consent or registering their dissatisfaction with the policies that affected their lives. The next wave of reform during the New Deal emerged on the foundation the Society of American Indians laid.

That effort to reform Indian identity to suit a modern American context still exists. In the fall of 2005, the Eastern Band of Cherokee made a controversial decision to completely revise one of its most popular and profitable tourist attractions, the performance of the drama “Unto These Hills.” For decades this fictionalized account of the Cherokee removal had been a cornerstone of the revenue generating ventures of the tribe, and one of the few means of drawing non-Indians to the reservation, besides gaming. The tribe’s plan is to eliminate the stereotypical version

of the vanishing and vanquished Indian and replace it with a historically accurate representation of Cherokee culture during the removal period. At the same time, the tribe recognizes the need to remain financially stable, but to also avoid perpetuating stereotypical images of Indians. They are faced with the dilemma that confronted the SAI and continues to confront all modern Indians: how to change and yet retain a viable Native identity for themselves.

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