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# A Dissonant Education: Marching Bands and Indigenous Musical Traditions at Sherman Institute, 1901–1940

*Vincent Veerbeek*

On July 18, 1901, American government officials and local dignitaries gathered for a cornerstone ceremony commemorating the start of construction of Sherman Institute, a new off-reservation boarding school for children from Indigenous communities across California and Arizona. Located in Riverside, California, Sherman would replace the nearby Perris Indian School that the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) had established ten years earlier. With Perris students present during the ceremony to provide musical entertainment, the festivities near the school site on Magnolia Avenue began at three o'clock with Robert Hall's "Albanian March" rendered by the twenty girls who made up the school's Mandolin and Guitar Club.<sup>1</sup> After the club played several songs, the twenty-eight boys of the marching band took the stage to perform a selection of marches and waltzes. A mixed chorus of sixteen students subsequently sang "Oh, Columbia, We Hail Thee" by Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti.<sup>2</sup> Speeches concerning the significance of education for the spread of civilization and "the redemption of a race" alternated with more vocal and instrumental performances by young Native Americans for the remainder of the program,<sup>3</sup> which ended with the assembled crowd singing "America" and the marching band performing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Sherman Institute's cornerstone ceremony illustrates the ideologies that motivated the American government to establish twenty-five off-reservation boarding schools between 1879 and 1902. The sight of fifty neatly-groomed students in white dresses

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and blue uniforms performing beloved musical standards emphasized the idea that with the right education, young Native Americans could become model citizens of the United States. That complete assimilation into the American nation-state was possible was a central belief of the predominantly white, late-nineteenth-century movement calling for a reformed Indian policy.<sup>4</sup> Creating social programs for Native Americans that would help them become less dependent on government support was one of its main ambitions and central to that mission was the education of Indigenous children.<sup>5</sup> These ideas soon became guiding principles of the federal government's approach to Native American affairs. Beginning in the 1870s, the federal government under the auspices of the OIA created schools like Perris and Sherman to remove Indigenous children from their communities and cultures. This way, officials hoped to eradicate those cultures and imprint Native youth with the norms of mainstream white society instead.<sup>6</sup> Following the example set by military officer Richard Pratt's Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, administrators ran these schools like military institutions and taught a labor-based curriculum.<sup>7</sup> In practice, however, boarding schools failed to achieve complete assimilation, and their legacy is far more complex than nineteenth-century reformers could have imagined.

For the past three decades, scholars have studied boarding school history in local, national, and international contexts. Their work has resulted in a rich body of literature on the system as a whole,<sup>8</sup> as well as numerous studies of individual institutions,<sup>9</sup> including several on Sherman Institute.<sup>10</sup> In general, historians have found that even though the schools had a destructive impact on Indigenous individuals and communities, many pupils managed to subvert assimilation efforts and were able to "turn the power."<sup>11</sup> This idea, which exists in various Indigenous cultures, was introduced to scholarly debate to conceptualize how students navigated boarding school life by Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc.<sup>12</sup> Rather than merely resist the government's efforts, students used what they learned in government schools to survive and support the continued existence of their communities and cultures, thus reversing the pressures of assimilation. In general, to look at boarding schools through this lens is to see how Native Americans created spaces within hostile environments where they could thrive, even in those instances where historical sources are silent on their resilience.

The ambivalences of the boarding school system are central to the history of their recreational programs with music, in particular, serving as a source of both subjugation and liberation.<sup>13</sup> Scholars seeking to address such ambiguities in the historical conditions of the boarding school system have turned to article 2 of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, which specifically names two conditions that pertain to the schools, "serious bodily or mental harm" and the forcible transfer of children.<sup>14</sup> Although "cultural genocide" is not included in the convention, scholars have used it to redefine and expand the concept. Historian Kevin Whalen, for instance, argues that in analyzing boarding schools, this framework can help to find a "balance between individual agency and the coercive realities of the institutions in which individuals worked."<sup>15</sup> More broadly, Lawrence Davidson writes that cultural genocide entails the "purposeful destructive targeting of out-group cultures so as to destroy or weaken

them in the process of conquest or domination,” typically with the intention of establishing cultural and political dominance.<sup>16</sup>

Given that the US government used music “to erase Indian culture and history from students’ memories,”<sup>17</sup> and that schools worked toward “colonial control” under the guise of assimilation,<sup>18</sup> a cultural genocide framework is especially pertinent when studying music. Students used music to “turn the power,” but they did so in a context where teachers invalidated their very understanding of what music is and continuously undermined their cultures. Although most studies acknowledge music’s place in boarding school history, only a few deal exclusively with music. Most notably, Melissa Parkhurst uses administrative sources and alumni interviews to examine the history of music at Chemawa Indian School in Oregon.<sup>19</sup> In addition, John Troutman’s study of Indian music and federal policy during the early twentieth century discusses boarding schools.<sup>20</sup> However, “each school engendered different sorts of musical experiences” and due to local circumstances, general trends are not always indicative of school-specific developments.<sup>21</sup>

To date, most of the scholarly research specifically about Sherman Institute’s music program are found in William Medina’s dissertation on the school’s publicity campaigns and Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert’s work on Hopi students.<sup>22</sup> Other recent publications on Sherman Institute likewise offer brief comments on music.<sup>23</sup> In general, it is clear that music was virtually omnipresent. As enrollment grew from 500 students in 1910 to 1,200 by 1928, the school’s music culture expanded, too. All students came into contact with music during their school lives, although only a fifth of all students were in formal music clubs any given year and even fewer had opportunities to sing the songs of their own communities.

To better understand the ways that different historical actors at Sherman Institute used music to their advantage, this article analyzes the school newspaper, the *Sherman Bulletin*, correspondence between school and government officials, and annual superintendent reports to trace how the school’s music culture evolved between 1901 and 1940 through the histories of the marching band and other Indigenous music groups. Following a contextual outline of the attitudes of progressive reformers concerning music, the second and third sections of this article present the history of these two components of Sherman’s music program and their place in Sherman’s educational program and relation to its mission.

It is important to address two limitations of the study’s methods. First, this study relies primarily on institutional sources, but it attempts to reconstruct the student perspective and include their voices whenever possible. Second, in that I juxtapose the marching band and the various Indian dance groups at Sherman, this article replicates a dichotomy between “Western” and “Indigenous” musical traditions.<sup>24</sup> I do so in the understanding that these categories were distinct in the minds of boarding school administrators, although clearly they are not always mutually exclusive. As a historical reality, this distinction provides insight into the ideas that informed the thought and behavior of historical actors. In general, I strive to use language that does justice to the vibrancy and diversity of the Indigenous cultures represented in Sherman’s history.

## SETTING THE TONE

In several key aspects, the first concert played on the future school grounds reflects the boarding school approach to music. Every one of the songs the Perris students performed that afternoon were from Euro-American tradition: waltzes, marches, and popular tunes.<sup>25</sup> More than simply representing mainstream American culture, progressive reformers considered these musical styles to be not merely the culture that they wanted young Native Americans to embrace as their own, but prime examples of civilization.<sup>26</sup> Performed in grand fashion during the cornerstone ceremony, similar music also permeated everyday life at the school in more subtle ways, especially through singing.<sup>27</sup>

One reason why music was so important to assimilation is that many believed it could transform students' emotions.<sup>28</sup> In a telling example of the connections between music and ideas of civilization, a 1915 article from the *Sherman Bulletin* is titled, "Music soothes the savage breast." It describes how a new piano in one of the boys' dormitories would aid the work of the school disciplinarian because he could now make "negligent students, who may be savagely inclined" listen to pieces like Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" in order to calm them down.<sup>29</sup> In the short term, music could improve student behavior; in the long term, they might abandon the cultures that supposedly gave rise to such behavior altogether. If the culture of the United States was the pinnacle of civilization, music was seen to be both its embodiment and the primary instrument for spreading its core values.

In 1899, Supervisor of Indian Schools Estelle Reel wrote to boarding school superintendents, "These children and youth are the wards of the Nation, and should be early imbued with a love of our institutions and our flag, which is theirs also," adding that singing patriotic songs was the best strategy.<sup>30</sup> By cutting students off from the musical traditions of their communities and exposing them to these songs instead, school officials encouraged children to see themselves as part of the United States rather than the Indigenous nations in which they had grown up. Thus, another aspect of the schools' music program, the use of music to inculcate patriotism, was also on full display in July 1901.

A songbook printed at Sherman Institute in 1948 gives an impression of the music sung during the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Included are multiple songs that explicitly celebrate America, "Columbia," or the United States flag. Characteristic of the blend of Protestantism and republicanism that defined American nationalism during this period, these songs incorporate religious themes into symbols of national pride.<sup>32</sup> "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," a Civil War-era song that "celebrates the divinely guaranteed power of the Union," is a telling example.<sup>33</sup> With lyrics that link the death of Jesus Christ to the American love of freedom, it illustrates how music united different strands of American identity and helped students to identify with them. Patriotic music was also part of public education, but played a fundamentally different role. Marching bands did not become popular until the 1920s in public schools and they were not a functioning part in a quasi-military institution.<sup>34</sup> At Sherman Institute, on the contrary, drill exercises were a regular part of the school

day from 1902 until 1932, and the student body was organized into battalions and military companies.<sup>35</sup> As such, patriotic music had fundamentally different undertones for Native students, who engaged with these songs in an environment that was foreign to them, and did so as part of a larger disciplinary system geared toward compulsory assimilation.

Few government officials denied the potential benefits of Western music for school spirit and student progress, yet they did debate the extent to which Indigenous youth could and should have opportunities to develop their musical talents. Although the cornerstone ceremony included both vocal and instrumental music, prioritizing singing became especially prevalent around the turn of the century, when, as Frederick Hoxie argues, reformers began to abandon the idea of complete assimilation.<sup>36</sup> Federal officials replaced the part-vocational and part-academic program in favor of a new curriculum emphasizing practical training.<sup>37</sup> Reel explicitly stated in a 1901 curriculum guideline that, “it is not the desire of the Department to give advanced instruction in music, but it is intended to be taught more as a recreation.”<sup>38</sup> Disappearing with the hopes of full equality was any need for a comprehensive musical education; for the purposes of assimilation, vocal training would suffice. Moreover, it made financial sense for the federal government to prioritize vocal training for young students they deemed incapable of significant musical achievement, because singing did not require sheet music or instruments. More often than not, grand rhetoric about civilization and national pride obscured more practical concerns. Crucially, singing was probably a smaller adjustment for many students given the prevalence of vocal music in many Indigenous communities. Although this again illustrates that complete assimilation was losing significance, Reel and her contemporaries did believe that singing could contribute to acculturation by helping students learn English and improve their pronunciation.<sup>39</sup>

Even when codified into government policy, the impact that the views of officials had on day-to-day operations in individual schools was rarely straightforward. For instance, Sherman Institute offered a wide-ranging music program even though it opened a year after Reel’s new guidelines emphasized vocational training. The music curriculum included vocal training as well as a range of electives in instruments including violin, harmonica, and even piano. Neither did federal policy prevent expansion of Sherman Institute’s extracurricular music culture. In addition to the band and mandolin club first established at the precursor school in Perris, articles from the *Sherman Bulletin* give an impression of the various choirs, glee clubs, and instrumental groups that were added during the next three decades. Performances by the school’s musical organizations drew large crowds to the school campus, and students also traveled to venues across Southern California. As Medina argues, Sherman’s first superintendents, Harwood Hall and Frank Conser, were so keen on musical training partly because concerts were a source of revenue and renown.<sup>40</sup> These concerts provided an opportunity to showcase the success of Sherman’s education program, and school officials hoped to acquire funding so they could expand their operations.<sup>41</sup> Although Hall and Conser sometimes ignored federal policy, they did so to further the cause of assimilation, illustrating that disagreements among reformers over music were often a matter of strategy rather than ideology.

Local and federal administrators may have generally agreed on what styles of music to encourage, but opinions varied as to what Indigenous practices schools should allow. K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty argue that policymakers followed the logic of a safety zone, designating “which Native beliefs and practices might be judged safe, innocuous, and tolerable” and which supposedly threatened the American way of life.<sup>42</sup> In 1907, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Leupp issued a circular categorically dismissing all forms of Indigenous expression, designating as “safe” only children’s songs.<sup>43</sup> As a result, tolerance toward Indigenous cultures was the exception rather than the rule at off-reservation schools into the 1930s.

Even the 1928 Meriam Report, which presented a strong indictment of federal Indian policy, remained in line with the ideas of Leupp’s generation.<sup>44</sup> The authors commented on the inherent “objectionable features” of Native American musical styles, and encouraged modification to remove those “undesirable accompaniments.”<sup>45</sup> In fact, it was not until John Collier became commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933 that the federal government slowly began to recognize the inherent value of Indigenous cultures.<sup>46</sup> Those changes did not end assimilation or cultural genocide, but the growing tolerance for Indigenous cultural practices did give students access to a broader range of influences from which to develop their identities.<sup>47</sup> Crucially, because local officials and students continued to navigate the “safety zone” as they saw fit, the framework of federal policy can sketch only the contours of Sherman’s music culture.

## THE BAND MARCHES ON

To examine and explain the workings of cultural genocide, the marching band at Sherman Institute is a helpful case study. Following Carlisle Indian School’s example, most off-reservation schools established a brass band of some capacity, depending upon the budget available for purchasing instruments and hiring a band instructor. Marching bands, as an institution designed to restrict student thought and behavior, and considered a “symbol of civilization, intelligence, culture, and refinement,” illustrate both how school officials approached music and how students used those same strategies to turn the power.<sup>48</sup> At Sherman Institute, the band grew from twenty-five to thirty-six members between 1902 and 1907.<sup>49</sup> Over the following decades, its membership was typically between forty and fifty students. Membership grew slightly as the school’s overall enrollment increased, but the number of musicians depended primarily on the number of talented students available.

The band director tended to look for talent among the student body. Although some Sherman students had previous musical experience and some even came there to pursue a music career, the school only occasionally went out of its way to recruit musicians. As Medina explains, school officials sought talented students mostly to ensure the band’s appeal to outside audiences.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the early decades, the band’s repertoire fell consistently within the parameters of a canon of Euro-American music. Regular concerts in the 1910s and 1920s consisted of marches, overtures, and waltzes, usually ending with “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Crucially, only a segment

of the student body had to master these songs to spread the sounds of civilization across the school.

More than simply performing state-sanctioned music, the band also played a pivotal role in the school's rituals of military discipline—a significant difference from music education at public schools. Intended to instill order and obedience while simultaneously working to “break up persisting tribal associations,” the military system seemed to represent a clear path toward civilization.<sup>51</sup> An overview of company leaders from March of 1921 shows that the band was its own company within the regimented student body, which makes sense given that in drills they typically led the charge. Students marched out to the school's central flagpole every morning and every evening, and stood in formation as the American flag was raised during reveille and lowered during retreat, while the band played the “Star Spangled Banner.”<sup>52</sup> The 1929 yearbook significantly describes this practice as a “daily ceremony of National Devotion.”<sup>53</sup> Sundays were especially busy for the band, starting with a special drill routine “similar to a military inspection” and roll call.<sup>54</sup> After religious meetings and some free time, the student body reconvened at four in the afternoon for an hour-long public band concert, followed by the evening flag ceremony.<sup>55</sup> With these rituals, school officials used the band to remind students of their responsibilities to the United States and erase distinctions between students.

Besides teaching discipline to students, school administrators also sought to influence the way band members interacted with their peers. Similar to the school's other companies, the marching band was organized hierarchically. Students held ranks like captain, drum major, and chief musician, and they could obtain leadership positions through experience and effort. These titles came with specific roles during drill exercises, but also entailed a certain status and responsibility. When bandleader David Campbell was absent in 1924, for instance, Chief Musician Garcia Bautista, a third-year Tohono O'odham student, led the band and orchestra for about a week.<sup>56</sup> In many ways, ranks were not only a reflection of the school's military culture, but also familiarized students with a culture where individual achievement determined social standing.

In addition to carefully selecting the music that students played, school administrators thus also structured interactions between students to teach them how to approach life in a society where competition was as important as cooperation. By the late 1920s, however, it became increasingly clear that the nature of the military system and its distance from everyday life meant that its relevance to assimilation was tenuous at best. Indeed, the Meriam Report listed marching and dress parades as two contributing factors to the institutionalization of school life with “disastrous effects upon mental health and the development of wholesome personality.”<sup>57</sup> In short, the aspirations of Sherman Institute and other boarding schools to encourage character development by means of rigid social structures, like those of the marching band, often yielded contradictory outcomes.

In addition to the marching band's contributions to cultural genocide, it played a key role in convincing audiences of the school's success in assimilating students. Disciplined students were a prime selling point for the schools, and the Sherman band's Sunday appearances drew large crowds of local visitors, as well as tourists

from farther away. In 1912, for instance, as many as 1,500 people attended a single concert.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the band received glowing reviews from both the *Sherman Bulletin* and local newspapers like the *Riverside Enterprise* and the *Arlington Times*. Their coverage and commentary evidences the band's public profile, but also reveals what is missing. Audiences saw the final product, not the almost constant training that the band's disciplined performances required.<sup>59</sup> These predominantly white, middle-class audiences saw neither the individuality of students, nor their motivations for being in the band. They could not tell from these concerts that some students not only had prior musical experience, but came to Sherman specifically to develop their musical skill.<sup>60</sup> White audiences also could not see the many cultural practices that school officials compelled students to give up to play in the band. Most importantly, they saw what Hall and Conser wanted them to see: a marching band akin to boarding school bands elsewhere, not what made the band unique. These were not simply musicians with individual stories, but young Native Americans who represented dozens of different Indigenous nations, united by shared experience.

To better understand the dual nature of the marching band in the experiences of these students, a sense of the ways that students used off-campus trips to exert agency and develop modern identities is necessary. Troutman refers to these outings as "a bit of a vacation," and it is not hard to see why.<sup>61</sup> After all, band travel provided a break from the toil and routine of everyday life at Sherman. Several musical groups performed at fairs and parades across Southern California, including the mandolin club and certain choirs. What set the band apart, however, was the frequency of their travels, and the distances they covered. During the Perris years for example, students traveled over 400 miles to Sacramento to play at the California state fair.<sup>62</sup> In 1905, Sherman students went on one of the furthest trips in school history, as band members and chaperones traveled to Portland, Oregon by train for the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition.<sup>63</sup> They performed at the fair, as well as several additional venues, and visited the off-reservation school in Salem on the way.<sup>64</sup> Over the years, other world fairs followed—in San Diego in 1915 and 1936, and San Francisco in 1915 and again in 1939.

Significantly, these trips were not merely a respite from school life; students used band travel to expand their horizons and get to know the country that school officials continuously instructed them to admire. In this sense, band travel allowed students to develop modern identities that incorporated influences from both Indigenous cultures and American society at large. Indeed, what makes these trips particularly noteworthy is that the experiences of boarding school students are not typically associated with mobility. As Kevin Whalen argues, student life beyond the confines of Sherman Institute's school grounds remains underexplored.<sup>65</sup> To date, off-campus labor and visits to nearby Riverside or Arlington have been identified as kinds of student mobility, yet trips related to music and athletics also must be added. For example, during a 1912 Mexican Independence Day celebration in nearby Crestmore, the band not only participated in a parade, but they also enjoyed a barbecue with "Spanish dishes," heard speeches in Spanish, and watched a bullfight.<sup>66</sup> At the end of

the afternoon, “some of the boys wished to remain to spend the evening dancing,” and apparently received permission to stay longer.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the opportunities for students to broaden their horizons, for young musicians band travel could be uniquely inspiring. A former student and band member, Robert Levi (Cahuilla), reminisced about a weeklong trip to San Francisco for the 1939 World Fair in a 2001 interview.<sup>68</sup> What he looked back on with particular fondness was seeing musicians like Benny Goodman perform and improvise on stage, inspiring him and his peers to try similar improvisations. Whether it was musical inspiration, an adventurous weekend or a little pocket money, it is clear that despite everything the band represented, its members had unique opportunities to enrich their boarding school experience. In the process, students were able to transcend the school’s narrow understandings of Indigenous and American identity.

Notably, the band underwent major changes in the three decades between the 1905 trip to Portland and the visit to San Francisco in 1939. It occasionally faced hard times such as several changes in leadership during the 1910s, a brief drop in membership around 1920, and an occasional lack of funds for new instruments.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, unlike bands at other schools, Sherman’s marching band never disappeared.<sup>70</sup> Although the early years appear to have been its heyday, the Sherman Band remained popular with local audiences well into the 1950s. Nonetheless, as the years went by it did see important changes. In addition to the end of the military system in 1932, female students could join the band starting in the fall of 1938, with membership reaching a historic peak of fifty-five the subsequent year, even as enrollment remained roughly the same.<sup>71</sup>

That same year, the band adopted a constitution, representing a broader trend toward student representation.<sup>72</sup> In that changes to the band parallel the general developments of the Collier years, the band functioned as a social barometer.<sup>73</sup> What makes this particularly significant is that the band’s repertoire remained strikingly conservative and by 1944 still consisted of “marches, overtures, Indian Characteristics and novelties.”<sup>74</sup> Other music groups presumably filled the gaps left by this outdated repertoire, as by the middle of the 1930s the campus was home to two swing orchestras. Even so, local and federal officials would continue to conceptualize music in narrow ways based on their visions of American society in subsequent years.

## EXPRESSING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

In line with the federal approach to Native American music, any expressions of indigenism were strictly absent from the 1901 cornerstone ceremony. Although the OIA was building Sherman Institute on Cahuilla land, neither the Bird Songs that were central to their musical tradition were heard that day, nor music from any of the other tribes represented across the student body. Sherman’s superintendents nevertheless made exceptions in subsequent years, driven by a desire to appear tolerant and raise money for the school.<sup>75</sup> School administrators at Chemawa Indian School sanctioned public expressions of Indigenous identity as part of “ad hoc events mounted for special visitors,” and Sherman’s policy was generally similar.<sup>76</sup> Bird Songs were

performed at least once in 1905, for example, but only following a request made by a progressive reformer and advocate for Indian rights, Charles Lummis.<sup>77</sup> Like some of his contemporaries, Lummis believed that Native American cultures were disappearing and wanted to record them before it was too late.<sup>78</sup>

Although this small-scale recording session at Sherman received little attention, other requests from prominent figures did lead to large events. In June of 1909 for instance, when journalist Henry Finck visited, “pupils of seven different tribes arranged a program of native songs” that was performed in the school auditorium on his behalf.<sup>79</sup> While these were most likely not the only two instances when the school gave students both the permission and the platform to display their music, such occasions were rare. Crucially, the school provided no paths for students to learn about their own cultures; rather, such practices were actively discouraged, except on occasions when school officials stood to gain from it. As a result, only a small number of students ever performed their tribes’ songs in public. The first generation of Hopi pupils appears to have been given more leeway than their peers, reinforcing the impression that Sherman’s approach to Indian music was fairly haphazard. Paradoxically, as early as 1906 this student group had opportunities both on and off campus to practice their culture openly, whereas other students were forced to meet in secret.

To explain the presence of these Hopi Singers, Sakiestewa Gilbert points to the significance of an elder who attended Sherman with the first generation of Hopi students and acted as a cultural broker.<sup>80</sup> In addition to mentoring and educating the young Hopi, Tawaquaptewa ensured that all their public performances used authentic costumes and instruments.<sup>81</sup> Although they had some degree of creative control, the specter of assimilation loomed large over the Hopi Singers’ performances. During their first documented appearance at the school, Tawaquaptewa carried a school banner while singing in the Hopi language.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, as Sakiestewa Gilbert describes, a commencement operetta titled “Uncle Sam’s Convention of his Indian Wards” incorporated the Eagle Dance and Hopi music into its display of “Americanness.”<sup>83</sup> Both of these performance programs exemplify the school’s efforts to impose dominant cultural frames on expressions of Hopi identity such as these. Because the Hopi could now pass on their practices, however—something boarding schools were explicitly designed to prevent—those impositions were a small sacrifice.<sup>84</sup> Although young Hopi performing an Eagle Dance in the regalia of their community did not conform to popular stereotypes, part of their appeal came from a sense of exoticism. At the same time, the Hopi Singers challenged the preconceptions of white audiences through what were essentially authentic performances.<sup>85</sup>

Sherman administrators approached some forms of Indigenous music with unusual leniency, but these stories were exceptions. If a dozen or so students did find a stage for ancestral cultural performances, hundreds of others at Sherman had no such opportunity. Nevertheless, in precious moments outside of staff supervision, those pupils created other opportunities to express themselves. Probably more often than we will ever know, Sherman students undertook what David Adams aptly describes as “clandestine acts of cultural preservation.”<sup>86</sup> In private, some boarding school students sang quietly to themselves in their dormitories; others would leave

campus to transgress the school's cultural restrictions.<sup>87</sup> Trafzer and Loupe describe how Robert Levi would "meet other Cahuilla students in the orange groves adjacent to the school, where they told stories [and] sang traditional Bird Songs."<sup>88</sup> More than acts of quiet defiance, students used these clandestine spaces of cultural expression to reconnect, heal, and mitigate the effects of cultural genocide. Moreover, even if the general view of US officials was that Western and Native American music were mutually exclusive, assimilation into the dominant American culture was not straightforward. Each type of music may have had its own significance for students, but some did not feel a need to choose. After all, they did not necessarily feel less Indigenous when they learned to speak and sing in English or play the saxophone. Revered band member Robert Levi enjoyed playing the baritone horn and the saxophone, but never gave up his Cahuilla culture.

Despite their deviations from the federal safety zone, Sherman officials still determined which cultural expressions were "acceptable" and tailored student performances to meet public demand. Efforts to appeal to public taste were particularly problematic in the early twentieth century, considering that "Indianness became a commodity in the emerging consumer culture" as Wild West shows and Indianist music created popular demand for what was perceived to be actual Indigenous cultural expression.<sup>89</sup> Such songs even entered the repertoire of the band at Sherman Institute. In March of 1912, a band concert in the nearby town of Corona included "A Sioux Indian Love Song," which was continued in their repertoire, as was "A Sioux Indian War Dance."<sup>90</sup> Having little to no connection to actual Lakota culture or history, these songs indicate how many white Americans envisioned assimilation and the context in which students were allowed to perform their tribal music: Indigenous cultures and musical traditions could continue to exist, but only as a lesser subgenre of mainstream American culture.<sup>91</sup> Ideas about Native Americans circulating in popular culture clearly affected life at Sherman, whether it was in terms of the band's repertoire or the staging of Indigenous dances.

Some students may have preferred to practice their cultures on their own because appearing in public came with inevitable constraints. Even though Sherman Institute had an exceptionally long history of providing a stage to Indigenous music, students did not always go along in the school's efforts to incorporate elements of Indigenous cultures into the education program. Their reluctance became especially pronounced following the reforms of the 1930s. In February of 1934, Sherman Superintendent Donald Biery described the progress that the school had made in their recent efforts "to encourage the development and preservation of such customs and cultures."<sup>92</sup> At Sherman, these efforts included classes in Native American history, a number of short-lived dance groups, and an extracurricular arts and crafts program inspired by the popularity of Indian craftwork.<sup>93</sup>

These reforms created new contexts for Native students and staff to revive and continue certain cultural practices, but students did not always embrace them wholeheartedly.<sup>94</sup> For example, it seems that few Sherman students formed dance groups. From an original ten Hopi dancers performing for outside entertainment in the early 1930s, by 1941 only two students remained willing to appear.<sup>95</sup> One reason for this

decline was that overall enrollment was restricted to the California tribes, whose students, according to Biery, “simply do not do any more dancing or singing.”<sup>96</sup> A generic Indian club did continue, in which students learned from white and Indigenous teachers about Native American cultures in very general terms, but there is no mention of tribally specific groups for the subsequent decade. By refusing to perform their music for white audiences on the school’s terms, and instead doing so in their own time, Sherman students “turned the power.” Although no firsthand accounts have surfaced that can help illustrate how students felt as they made these decisions, the context of boarding school life does provide important clues.

One reason why students in the 1930s may have chosen not to engage in certain cultural practices within the constraints of the boarding school program is because, unlike the first generation of Hopi students, they lacked the guidance and support of an elder such as Tawaquaptewa. Even without explicit historical evidence, the actions of students are indicative of a tension between their cultural sensitivities and the school’s ambitions. They may have been hesitant to perform certain songs and dances specific to their communities because of their cultural and perhaps even spiritual significance. Although the music that students performed at Sherman was typically social rather than ceremonial, especially in the context of Indian clubs, they may have felt unable to do these songs justice. Facing a similar dilemma as the first generations of Hopi and Cahuilla students, the young men and women attending Sherman in the 1930s followed their own musical path.

## CONCLUSION

On that July afternoon in 1901, Cahuilla student Sylvas Lubo was one of the students playing in the marching band. Lubo was the first student to enroll at Perris Indian School when it opened in 1892, and, according to his obituary in the 1935 yearbook, a band member at both Perris and Sherman.<sup>97</sup> Symbolizing the central role that their music and that of subsequent generations of students played in school life, enshrined in the school’s cornerstone during the ceremony was Lubo’s name and those of the other student musicians. Once envisioned by white reformers as an easy path to civilization, music instead opened a maze of many paths, but few led straight to assimilation. This was true whether students took vocal lessons and joined glee club, sang the songs of their ancestors in private or in public, or took up instruments and joined the marching band, the mandolin club, or any of the school’s other music groups. Sherman administrators attempted to impose their ideas about music, civilization, and citizenship on students, and they continued even as federal officials’ understanding of these concepts changed and reforms were implemented.

Needless to say, this article does not address several important themes related to the history of boarding school music, or only in passing. Like most aspects of life at Sherman Institute, the music program was heavily gendered and imprinted students with specific ideas about masculinity and femininity. Also warranting further study is another connection between music and ideas of civilization: religion. Not only did Christian themes feature prominently in regular music, but each of the school’s church

organizations also had choirs and musical programs. The place of music in the school curriculum, in addition to the various extracurricular organizations, is another area of potential interest.

Performances of band music and songs from Indigenous musical traditions may represent two ends of a spectrum, but students demonstrated resilience in the face of cultural destruction in their engagement with both types of music. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s and a resurgence of assimilation in the 1950s, students listened to music, played music, and used new and familiar tools to create identities for themselves and their communities. Furthermore, many did not leave their violins and clarinets by the door once they left Sherman. They took what they had learned with them to reservations and urban communities, and many made music into a successful career.<sup>98</sup> Finally, despite the fact that this essay focuses on music at a single boarding school, the stories presented here illustrate the wider significance of these histories. In them, we find moments where federal and local policy did not work in tandem and sometimes outright contradicted each other. We find moments where students turned the power using a range of strategies and musical styles that transcended the colonial categories US officials imposed upon them. Studying these moments in greater detail and analyzing them in the context of cultural genocide will provide greater clarity about the off-reservation boarding school past.

## NOTES

1. "Cornerstone Concert 1901," Series 13, Box 87, Folder 17, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Sherman Indian High School, Riverside, CA.
2. Ibid.
3. Speech of Senator George C. Perkins, July 18, 1901, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 13, Box 87, Folder 21, cf. Clifford E. Trafzer and Leleua Loupe, "From Perris Indian School to Sherman Institute," in *The Indian School on Magnolia Avenue: Voices and Images from Sherman Institute*, ed. Clifford E. Trafzer, Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, and Lorene Sisquoc (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2011), 19.
4. Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869–1933* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 20–25; Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 34–37.
5. Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 30–31.
6. Trafzer and Loupe, "From Perris Indian School to Sherman Institute," 25–27.
7. For a more detailed discussion on Carlisle, see *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, ed. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2016); Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club*; and David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 36–55.
8. These include Adams, *Education for Extinction*; Margaret Archuleta, Brenda Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences, 1879–2000* (Phoenix: Heard Museum, 2000); Michael Coleman, *American Indian Children at School, 1850–1930* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993); and Margaret Connell-Szasz, *Education and the*

*American Indian: The Road to Self Determination Since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

9. Some notable works include Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Fear-Segal and Rose, *Carlisle Indian Industrial School*; K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); and Robert A. Trennert, *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891–1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

10. See, for instance, Jean A. Keller, *Empty Beds: Indian Student Health at Sherman Institute, 1902–1922* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002); Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas: Hopi Students at Sherman Institute, 1902–1929* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); and Kevin Whalen, *Native Students at Work: American Indian Labor and Sherman Institute’s Outing Program, 1900–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

11. Trafzer and Loupe, “From Perris Indian School to Sherman Institute,” 27, cf. Kevin Whalen, “Finding the Balance: Student Voices and Cultural Loss at Sherman Institute,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 58, no. 1 (2014): 128, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213495026>.

12. *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences*, ed. Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 1.

13. In addition to music, work has also been done on art education and sports. See Marinella Lentis, *Colonized through Art: American Indian Schools and Art Education, 1889–1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), and John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000).

14. *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, New York, December 9, 1948, *United Nations Treaty Series* 78, no. 1021, 280.

15. Whalen, “Finding the Balance,” 140.

16. Lawrence Davidson, *Cultural Genocide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 1, cf. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Studies* 8, no. 14 (2006): 398, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

17. Melissa D. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart: Music at Chemawa Indian School* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2014), 13.

18. Margaret D. Jacobs, “Indian Boarding Schools in Comparative Perspective: The Removal of Indigenous Children in the United States and Australia, 1880–1940,” in *Boarding School Blues*, ed. Trafzer, et al., 225.

19. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*.

20. John W. Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879–1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

21. *Ibid.*, 147.

22. William Oscar Medina, “Selling Indians at Sherman Institute, 1902–1922,” PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 2007; Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, “The Hopi Followers: Chief Tawaquaptewa and Hopi Student Advancement at Sherman Institute, 1906–1909,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 44, no. 2 (2005): 1–23; Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas*.

23. See Diane Meyers Bahr, *The Students of Sherman Indian School: Education and Native Identity since 1892* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); Trafzer, et al., *The Indian School on Magnolia Avenue; Shadows of Sherman Institute: A Photographic History of the Indian School on Magnolia Avenue*, ed. Clifford E. Trafzer, Jeffrey Smith, and Lorene Sisquoc (Pechanga: Great Oak Press, 2017).

24. Cf. Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 21; Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 204. Instead of using the word “traditional,” I intend to be precise about the origins of musical influences.

25. "Cornerstone Concert 1901," Sherman Indian Museum collection.
26. For a discussion of their ideas on civilization, see Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 74.
27. See, e.g., Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 54–56.
28. *Ibid.*, 12.
29. "Music Soothes the Savage Breast," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 24, 1915. All editions of the *Sherman Bulletin* are part of the Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 17.
30. Letter from Estelle Reel to Agents and Bonded Superintendents, February 1, 1899, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 12.
31. *Favorite Songs*, 1948, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 13, Box 87, Folder 27. This is one of the only surviving songbooks, and although published after the Second World War, most songs date back to the nineteenth century and are referenced in sources from earlier decades.
32. Coleman, *American Indian Children at School*, 54.
33. Benjamin Soskis and John Stauffer, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic: A Biography of the Song That Marches On* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.
34. See, e.g., Phillip M. Hash, "The National High School Orchestra, 1926–1938," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 57, no. 1 (2009): 51–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429409333376>. See also Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 35.
35. Bahr, *The Students of Sherman Indian School*, 25–26.
36. Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
37. *Ibid.*, 190.
38. Estelle Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States: Industrial and Literary* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1901), 161.
39. *Ibid.*, 160–61. See also Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 54.
40. Medina, "Selling Indians at Sherman Institute," 119.
41. Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 111.
42. K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty, "To Remain an Indian": *Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 5.
43. *Ibid.*, 54.
44. For a discussion of the Meriam Report, see for instance Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 331–33; Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 405–8.
45. Lewis Meriam et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), 45.
46. See, e.g., Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 256.
47. For a discussion of Collier's reforms and their impact on Indian education, see, e.g., Whalen, *Native Students at Work*, 130–31.
48. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 36.
49. "General News," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 13, 1907.
50. Medina, "Selling Indians at Sherman Institute," 119.
51. "Regimental Staff, Sherman Institute," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 4, 1921.
52. "General News," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 13, 1907.
53. *Purple and Gold*, Sherman Yearbook, 1929, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 16, Box 179, 48.
54. "Sunday at Sherman," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 13, 1907; "Sunday at Sherman," *Sherman Bulletin*, May 5, 1909.
55. "Sunday at Sherman," *Sherman Bulletin*, May 5, 1909.

56. "Junior Items," *Sherman Bulletin*, December 5, 1924.
57. Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 393.
58. "A Big Audience Delighted," *Sherman Bulletin*, January 17, 1912.
59. The school newspaper frequently commented on the band's demanding schedule, e.g., "General News," *Sherman Bulletin*, November 6, 1907. See also: Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas*, 82.
60. Clifford E. Trafzer, Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, and Lorene Sisquoc, "Introduction," *The Indian School on Magnolia Avenue*, 11, cf. Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 23.
61. Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 138.
62. *Purple and Gold*, Sherman Yearbook, 1935, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 16, Box 180, 18.
63. Letter from Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs C. F. Larrabee to Superintendent Harwood Hall, May 20, 1905, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 12, cf. Medina, "Selling Indians at Sherman Institute," 125.
64. "General News," *Sherman Bulletin*, May 1, 1907.
65. Kevin Whalen, "Beyond School Walls: Indigenous Mobility at Sherman Institute," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 49 (2018): 279, <https://doi.org/10.1093/whq/why035>.
66. "A Pleasant Trip," *Sherman Bulletin*, September 25, 1912.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Sherman Indian High School*, documentary produced by Lorene Sisquoc, Riverside, 2001, YouTube, September 3, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrloiMLIT1Q>.
69. The problem of funding appears to have become particularly dire by the 1930s, when Superintendent Biery wrote to the superintendents of Haskell, Phoenix, Chilocco, Carson, and Flاندreau, asking if they had instruments to spare. For example, several such letters are in NARA, RG-75, Letters Sent, Box 88.
70. Parkhurst describes a decline in band activity at Chemawa after the First World War; see *To Win the Indian Heart*, 39. At Phoenix, the band briefly disappeared during the 1930s; see Greg Handel and Jere Humphreys, "The Phoenix Indian School Band, 1894–1930," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 16, no. 2 (2005): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1177/153660060502600205>.
71. "Band News," *Sherman Bulletin*, October 13, 1939.
72. "Band Adopts Constitution," *Sherman Bulletin*, April 14, 1939.
73. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 34.
74. "Sherman Band Concert Friday," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 21, 1944.
75. Lentis, *Colonized Through Art*, 172–73, cf. Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas*, 80; Medina, "Selling Indians at Sherman Institute," 127.
76. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 126.
77. On Lummis and his advocacy work, see, e.g., Jason E. Pierce, *Making the White Man's West: Whiteness and the Creation of the American West* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2016).
78. Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 99.
79. "Studying Indian Music," *Sherman Bulletin*, June 9, 1909.
80. Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas*, 75–76.
81. *Ibid.*, 77–78.
82. "Hopi Song," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 6, 1907.
83. "Commencement Week: Sherman Does Herself Proud," *Sherman Bulletin*, May 16, 1907.
84. Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas*, 79.
85. Medina, "Selling Indians at Sherman Institute," 109.
86. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 233. Cf. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 26.

87. Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller and Lorene Sisquoc, "Introduction," in Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc, *Boarding School Blues*, 22.
88. Trafzer and Loupe, "From Perris Indian School to Sherman Institute," 27.
89. Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 154–56.
90. "Roster of Band and Program to be Rendered Friday at Corona," *Sherman Bulletin*, March 13, 1912; "Sunday's Concert," *Sherman Bulletin*, 1913 (nd).
91. Michael V. Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 183–85.
92. Donald Biery to Mrs. H. A. Atwood, Feb. 21, 1934, General Correspondence, 1933–1948, Box 98, Records of Sherman Institute, Record Group 75 (Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs), National Archives and Records Administration Pacific Region, Riverside (hereafter RSI, RG 75, NAR).
93. Whalen, *Native Students at Work*, 137–39; Lomawaima and McCarty, "To Remain an Indian," 82–83.
94. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 127.
95. Donald Biery to Mr. R. B. Cregar, March 31, 1936, General Correspondence, 1933–1948, Box 99, RSI, RG 75, NAR; Donald Biery to Margaret S. Horst, Supervisor of Elementary Schools in Corona, February 7, 1941, General Correspondence, 1933–1948, Box 101, RSI, RG 75, NAR.
96. Letter by Superintendent Donald Biery, January 9, 1942. General Correspondence, 1933–1948, Box 101, RSI, RG 75, NAR.
97. *Purple and Gold*, Sherman Yearbook, 1935, 15, Sherman Indian Museum collection, Series 16, Box 180.
98. See, e.g., Trafzer and Loupe, "From Perris Indian School to Sherman Institute," 27.

