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They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School. By K. Tsiarina Lomawaima.

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conception, rather than scalar in organization. What is needed is an adequate notation; involvement of Hopi composers and musicians in the study of this music; and study of the song learning process and the criticism of songpoems in context. List's work will remain an important source in Hopi studies and in ethnomusicology.

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**They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School.** By K. Tsianina Lomawaima. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. 205 pages. \$25.00 cloth.

Until recently, the history of Indian schools has been largely ignored. Often relegated to a handful of pages in reservation histories or policy studies, Indian education has gotten relatively short shrift. But there are brighter days ahead. Building on Margaret Szasz's important research on the history of Indian education, and adding to the works of Robert Trewnert, Michael Coleman, and Devon Mihesuah, anthropologist K. Tsianina Lomawaima's study of the Chilocco School makes an important contribution to our understanding of off-reservation boarding schools. In this brief study, she discusses the history and educational philosophy that guided such schools, and she describes in detail the role played by schools like Chilocco. Most importantly, Lomawaima draws on an extensive collection of interviews with Chilocco alumni to construct a revealing portrait of life among the scores of children who ended up at Chilocco Indian School. On balance, this is one of the most complete accounts yet published of an off-reservation boarding school; in terms of its student perspective, few previous works can match its depth and precision.

Focusing on the era between 1920 and 1940, Lomawaima has crafted a fine account of life at what she says was the government's flagship off-reservation agricultural school (p. 66). At the heart of the study is a discussion of why schools like Chilocco usually failed to transform Indian children. Noting that "[t]his study examines the relations of power within the school to comprehend federal disciplinary practice and to situate the strategies Indian children devised to escape it" (p. xiv), Lomawaima says that

schools like Chilocco were unsuccessful because Indian children refused to be culturally steamrolled. Describing what happened at Chilocco as "the dynamic processes of interethnic and intertribal communication, cooperation, and conflict," she argues that the accounts of former students and employees portray "how an institution founded and controlled by the federal government was inhabited and possessed by those whose identities the institution was committed to erase. Indian people made Chilocco their own" (p. 167). Here is the crux of her discussion, for she writes about how students perceived their predicament. She tells us not only what they did to maintain a sense of autonomy, but also how that autonomy was linked to larger issues of cultural and ethnic survival. Attempts to remold Indian children both physically and psychologically failed when the students themselves adopted postures designed to combat the disciplinary and assimilationist agendas that lay at the heart of Chilocco.

Opened in 1884 near Newkirk, Oklahoma (just south of the Oklahoma-Kansas border), Chilocco was a typical off-reservation boarding school out of the mold established by Pratt at Carlisle. Committed to an industrial and agricultural training regimen, off-reservation schools like Chilocco trained Indian children to be independent, industrious, and self-sufficient. In a word, they were to become models of the civilized, modern Indian envisioned by the government. That much of the story is well known. Less well known is whether such programs were feasible, why they often failed, and to what degree student resistance played a role.

The sixty-one interviews that guide the narrative constitute a remarkable portrait. Lomawaima's consultants remembered an environment in which students labored daily to maintain some control over their lives as Indians. At the same time, however, despite the many limitations and drudgeries associated with Chilocco, they reveal a determination to take their schooling seriously and to make the best of what was offered to them. For many, the training they received is a treasure well worth the discomfort endured on a daily basis. Readers looking for good old-fashioned government bashing will be disappointed; Lomawaima's narrative is more subtle than that and, thankfully, much more complex. Interviews with Chilocco alumni suggest that resistance and rejection are not the same thing; the former was usually the rule, the latter the exception.

As was the case at most boarding schools, Indian children studiously combined two worlds. For example, Chilocco students

undoubtedly comprehended the school's determination to erase their cultural identity, and they regularly resisted it with a variety of measures. Tribal affiliation marked tightly knit groups inside the school through which certain practices (language, dances, and religion, for example) could be protected to some degree. Creek and Cherokee students remembered stomp dances, corn parchings, and singing sessions held in remote locations that "reinforced solidarity among the boys and delineated their separation from the school's control" (p. 138). The same was true for the girls, who often found themselves drawn into groups reflecting tribal lines and age groups that served to enforce cultural boundaries despite the school's determination to the contrary. Like the boys, girls engaged in a wide variety of forbidden practices ranging from the use of native languages to peyote ceremonies conducted by Ponca girls in their dormitory rooms virtually under their matrons' noses.

Interestingly, student life included numerous acts and events that were not intended to maintain ethnic identity as much as they were intended to draw a dividing line between rebellious youths and stodgy schoolmasters. Some of the book's most engaging sections deal with the various attempts by students to carve out their own space; these acts explicitly rejected the authority of the schools and tested the idea of control that Lomawaima says was the critical element in the pedagogical philosophy of the era. For boys, this often meant participating in the highly popular effort to produce home-brewed liquor, "a potent symbol of student collaboration and radical resistance" (p. 140) that apparently knew no limits in terms of ingenuity and creativity. For girls, it often meant testing the bounds of authority through what were remembered as "bloomer stories"—accounts of how girls deliberately broke rules on clothing and behavior in order to create what Lomawaima calls "a flamboyant display of individual identity" (p. 96).

In addition to the telling narratives given by her consultants, Lomawaima offers a brief but useful analysis of the philosophical and educational shortcomings of the off-reservation schools. Noting that they were intended to control as much as to educate, she suggests that the schools were badly (and deliberately) out of step with prevailing societal and economic norms. During Chilocco's hey-day in the early twentieth century, for example, American workers were moving steadily away from the kind of rural, almost menial skills that the Indian schools emphasized.

Instruction in teaching, nursing, business, and cosmetology “lagged several decades behind educational opportunities for white women in the same fields,” writes Lomawaima (p. 81), and boys learned skills designed to provide a safe but very limited future. Thus, just as Frederick Hoxie and Sally McBeth have suggested in their works on Indian policy and education, Lomawaima believes that schools like Chilocco would not emancipate Indians so much as deliberately force them into a carefully defined place on the periphery of the American socioeconomic system. Indeed, Lomawaima believes that Chilocco, and other schools as well, were characterized more than anything else by the exercise of sheer power over the children. This is an indictment of the government’s lofty rhetorical claims and lends credence to the marginalization theories supported by Hoxie and others. Both here and in a recent article on the Indian schools, Lomawaima argues effectively that the Indian schools were rarely concerned with meaningful education; they were designed merely to turn out obedient, docile workers whose place was consistent with that accorded laborers in an industrial milieu.

In the end, however, the Chilocco legacy turned out to be somewhat more promising. Lomawaima’s consultants were generally positive in their assessment of the education and skills they learned. Acknowledging that they did not always get what they were promised, former students nonetheless remembered their school days with genuine affection and appreciation. And although the majority indicated that they would not send their own children to a similar school, they tended to believe that the discipline and social training they received were necessary, considering the era and circumstances.

Only one notable flaw mars this study. The book’s title suggests a much broader examination than is actually given. Chilocco opened in 1884 and closed in the early 1980s; Lomawaima’s narrative only covers the years between 1920 and 1940 in any detail, thus the book’s title is a bit misleading. It is also worth pointing out that Chilocco is usually referred to as the “Light on the Prairie,” not “Prairie Light.” But these are minor problems and do not detract from an otherwise excellent work. Students of Indian education need to read this book closely; it represents a worthy addition to the studies we already have.

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