

FROM “MOTHERLY” TO “MOTHER”: REFORMERS’ MATERNALISM AND THE
ADOPTION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN BETWEEN 1880-1930, AND THE
PUBLIC MEMORY OF THEIR ACTIONS

by

Emily R. Duren, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Nancy Berlage, Co-Chair

Joaquín Rivaya-Martínez, Co-Chair

Katharine Salzmänn

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REFORMERS' MATERNALISM AND THE REMOVAL OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN	15
III. MATERNALIST IDEALS IN THE ADOPTION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN	53
IV. EXPANDING THE ARCHIVES AND PUBLIC MEMORY OF MATERNALISTS' ADOPTIONS.....	88
V. CONCLUSION	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY	120

I. INTRODUCTION

As more and more White women became reformers—people working for perceived improvements to a social issue—of Native American policy in the late nineteenth century and into the Progressive Era, they created their own rhetoric to justify and support the education of indigenous women and children. This often resulted in Bureau of Indian Affairs (hereafter, BIA) officials removing children from their homes and families to place them in boarding schools, and educating women in housekeeping and motherhood. Reformers' rhetoric echoed that of other women working to expand the welfare state for other White mothers. These reformers' efforts, both for increased welfare as well as for the education of indigenous women and children, all centered around maternalism, an ideology that focused on women and their roles as mothers. Maternalism became important to female reformers who used their own form of maternalist rhetoric to argue that indigenous women were not capable of being mothers until they mirrored White, middle-class women. This thesis examines the unique variant of maternalism involved with indigenous adoption, and thus it expands our understanding of maternalism. It also expands the literature on the adoption of indigenous children by discussing it within the context of maternalism during the Progressive Era. I argue that, as they worked with indigenous women and children, White female reformers created their own variant of maternalism, which they also put into practice through the adoption of indigenous children.

The thesis encompasses the period 1880 to 1930 in order to provide context, but it focuses on the Progressive Era. Historians have traditionally placed this era as occurring between 1890 and 1914. But some scholars, many of whom I reference in this thesis,

have recently extended that timeframe through the 1920s. In particular, historians of women and gender have found it necessary to broaden the chronological scope in order to capture women's reform efforts in relation to the state that would otherwise be left out of the progressive story.¹ Thus, I use this broader periodization. In addition, much of the scholarship on maternalism focuses on the creation of new welfare policies to support women and children. While historians' specific definitions of maternalism have differed, they agree that maternalists believed mothers had specialized knowledge of childrearing and argued that women needed increased authority over issues involving mothers and children.²

Clarification is needed for several terms used throughout the thesis that were not in use or understood in the same way during the time period discussed as they are in present-day historical scholarship. Firstly, my use of the term "White" to describe reformers, adoptive parents, and other people in my discussion refers to Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, mainly Protestant, and middle-class U.S. citizens. Secondly, while the term "maternalism" was not in use during the Progressive Era, I use it as an analytical concept to describe White women's reform efforts that centered around mothers and children. In addition, I use the term "feminism" to describe one woman's views of her

¹ LeRoy Ashby, *Saving the Waifs: Reformers and Dependent Children, 1890-1917* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 1-17; and Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 191-192 use a shorter timeframe of the Progressive Era, placing it between 1890 and 1917. Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890-1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), vi-viii; Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 55; and Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 3 use a broader periodization that extends the era into the 1920s.

² The major works on maternalism used were Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 55; Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 3; and Sonya Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 311-312n16;

place within reform movements for both women's equality and the assimilation of Native Americans.³ Like maternalism, feminism was not in use during the years discussed, but both terms are used by historians to explain and categorize certain beliefs, actions, and rhetoric.

Maternalism Historiography

An overview of the most relevant literature on maternalism helps place my analysis into historiographical context. Historian Sonya Michel credits late eighteenth-century economic growth after the American Revolution as the catalyst for ideologies that widened a gap between economic and domestic spheres. In her book *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights* Michel explains that society increasingly declared the domestic sphere women's space, and childrearing and housekeeping women's work. While larger industries moved manufacturing outside the home, women, especially married ones, could no longer help with production in between household chores. Instead, women were left in charge of domestic duties and childcare while men took jobs outside the home. Those who did not have the means to work as stay-at-home mothers could apply for poverty relief, as could single and widowed women, to help make up for the lack of income from a spouse. This relief took the form of placement in a workhouse where a mother was separated from her children or forced to give them up as indentured servants. A woman might find a job outside the home on her own, but this often meant working for low wages inadequate to support her family. In addition, working mothers who left their

³ A discussion of the differences between maternalists and feminists during the Progressive Era can be found in Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 7-9.

children for work were stigmatized for lacking “maternal tenderness.”⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, it was clear that poverty among mothers was often a result of their unequal wages and their responsibility to both support and care for their children. To help alleviate these problems, middle-class women began drawing attention to these maternal responsibilities that all mothers faced and attempted to help make employment and motherhood compatible. This early maternalism described by Michel upheld the idea that mothers were the best caregivers for their children and therefore needed support to keep their families intact.⁵

In *Mother-Work*, author Molly Ladd-Taylor describes four characteristics that defined the maternalism used to advocate for mother and child welfare beginning in the 1890s. First, maternalists believed that women had value based on their ability to care and nurture, and that it was a unique trait among them. Second, because mothers were raising future citizens and workers, they needed support from the state to do the best possible job. Michel also discusses this idea, which scholars argue had roots in the eighteenth century ideal of “Republican motherhood.”⁶ In the post-revolutionary country, many glorified women for raising the new nation of Americans. This idea continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with women being praised for raising upstanding American citizens. Ladd-Taylor’s third characteristic of maternalism suggests that because of women’s common experiences with motherhood, they had a common responsibility to all children. And fourth, maternalists generally believed that the ideal family life had a male wage-earner while women stayed home with their children. Ladd-

⁴ Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights*, 16-19.

⁵ Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights*, 25-26.

⁶ Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights*, 18; Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 3.

Taylor uses her fourth and final characteristic to distinguish maternalism from the feminism of the period. As discussed previously, although both terms were not in use during the Progressive Era, Ladd-Taylor used both to analyze the difference between reformers working specifically for mothers, and those working for certain aspects of gender equality. While not all historians have separated the two ideas, *Mother-Work* argues that although feminists and maternalists sometimes worked together for the expansion of women's participation outside the home, they also had separate goals and beliefs that sometimes conflicted. As Ladd-Taylor states, maternalists believed that men should be the breadwinners in the household while ideally women stayed home to raise children. In contrast, many feminists during the Progressive Era advocated for women's financial independence from men.⁷

Much like Ladd-Taylor, Linda Gordon divides the definition of maternalism into specific characteristics: one, that motherhood constituted woman's essential role and place in society; two, women involved with activism were working for the less fortunate, and had a motherly obligation towards the poor; and three, maternalists' own personal experiences as mothers gave them authority over women's and children's issues. Gordon's definition of maternalism, found in her book *Pitied But Not Entitled*, mirrors that of Ladd-Taylor's in *Mother-Work*. Reformers working towards mother and child welfare and healthcare based their arguments on the idea that mothers shared a common experience in having children; therefore mothers were the best reformers to claim authority over issues involving the domestic space. Gordon highlights that many

⁷ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 3, 7-9.

maternalists promoting childcare reforms were mothers themselves, and drew from their own backgrounds to advocate for their causes.⁸

These three works on maternalism have influenced more recent historical scholarship on women involved in reforms concerning Native Americans. In *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, Cathleen Cahill uses Gordon's definition and discussions of maternalism in order to describe the rhetoric used by the Women's National Indian Association (hereafter, WNIA), an organization established to support reform efforts regarding Native Americans, and female employees of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Cahill shows that these women took on motherly roles towards indigenous children and women, much like the roles Gordon argues middle-class mothers took while attempting to help working-class mothers.⁹ In *White Mother to a Dark Race*, Margaret Jacobs references the three works on maternalism mentioned above to discuss how reformers' ideologies affected indigenous child removal. Jacobs specifically uses Gordon's three characteristics of maternalism, but adds a fourth, unique feature to characterize the maternalism of reformers involved in indigenous child removal: these maternalist reformers often believed that a domestic role as a mother was the best option for *other* women, but not for themselves.¹⁰

The female reformers involved in indigenous child removal and the education of indigenous women and children formed their own variant of maternalism that differed from others because it rejected the notion that the instinct or capacity for motherhood was

⁸ Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 55.

⁹ Cathleen Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 46, 80.

¹⁰ 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), 88-89.

automatic. In addition, I deviate from Jacobs's unique characteristic in my discussion of how many reformers became mothers themselves by adopting indigenous children, and therefore not all believed that motherhood was only for women other than themselves. Reformers working for an expanded welfare state argued that women and their biological children belonged together because mothers had an innate instinct to care for their child, while those working for reforms in Native American issues supported indigenous child removal.¹¹ Both groups centered their efforts on women and children, but the maternalism used by the reformers involved in indigenous child removal and education was unique in both the rhetoric and application. Reformers worked to remove children from their biological mothers, while arguing that motherhood was not a biological instinct in women. Instead, they believed that Native American women did not know how to be proper mothers unless White women taught them how. The education of indigenous women and girls aimed to assimilate Native American mothers into middle-class culture. Reformers believed that if indigenous women could be assimilated, they would in turn teach their children and lead to the assimilation of future generations.¹² Although many White female reformers were not mothers when they began their assimilation efforts, many put their maternalism into practice and became adoptive mothers to native children.

Women's National Indian Association

Amelia Stone Quinton and Mary Lucinda Bonney established the Women's National Indian Association in 1879, an institution that would work closely with BIA

¹¹ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 4-5; Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 55; Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 88-89.

¹² Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 46-47, 58, 88-89.

officials to support reform efforts. The organization's members sought to bring their White, Protestant, middle-class values to Native American reforms. Quinton and Bonney had backgrounds in charity and social work and founded the WNIA in Philadelphia in order to become involved in public issues dealing with Native Americans. By 1885, members had created over fifty-six WNIA branches in twenty-seven states and territories. The WNIA undertook missionary work, funded the construction of multiple hospitals and schools for Native American reservations, and petitioned Congress for various reforms, most notably, the Dawes Act. WNIA activists used maternalist rhetoric to gain support for their reform efforts, while promoting females' work in these efforts as schoolteachers, field matrons, and other BIA employees.¹³

Bureau of Indian Affairs

The BIA had a long history within the federal government. The U.S. originally established the BIA in 1824 in the midst of forced removals of indigenous tribes from the Midwest and South to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. The government placed the BIA under the War Department because of the agency's prominent relationship with the U.S. military to enforce federal policies that removed Native Americans from their land. After the U.S. annexed new territories in the Southwest following the Mexican-American War, the government made the BIA a division within the Department of the Interior in 1849. Although the change was made to help facilitate the management of the Native Americans on the recently annexed land, but slavery quickly became a much bigger issue. Shortly after the move within government

¹³ Valerie Sherer Mathes, ed. *The Women's National Indian Association: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), 25-35.

departments, the U.S. government shifted attention away from BIA and questions of what to do with the Native Americans in the West. It was not until after the Civil War that the nation again turned its focus on Native Americans, and the BIA became an important division within the federal government.¹⁴

There were key differences in the views espoused by the maternalist reformers that scholars typically study and those involved with indigenous communities. For example, when promoting the expansion of the welfare state with new institutions and policies, reformers worked to *keep* White children with their biological mothers. In contrast, those involved with Native American communities and the BIA actively sought to *remove* indigenous children from their biological families and erase traditional forms of indigenous life and parenting.¹⁵

Another difference between established definitions of maternalism and the maternalism of reformers in Native American issues involves the motherly role many reformers saw themselves in. Many reformers did not have children of their own. In fact, in 1885, when the Indian School Service began hiring large amounts of White women, almost 66% of the females employed were single.¹⁶ Although childless reformers took on motherly roles among the indigenous children and women they interacted with, they did not base their ideas on previous experience like many middle-class maternalists did with White working-class mothers. These characteristics differed from Ladd-Taylor's definition that argued women had a unique ability for childcare as well as a biological

¹⁴ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 1-10.

¹⁵ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 46-47, 58.

¹⁶ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 64.

instinct for motherhood, and from Gordon's statement that maternalists had greater authority over issues because of their shared experience of motherhood.¹⁷

While both Jacobs and Cahill examine the maternalist beliefs held by reformers, the overall definition of maternalism used in their works is closely aligned with Ladd-Taylor's and Gordon's theses.¹⁸ Reformers working to expand the welfare state for women and children believed that women had an inherent biological instinct for motherhood, and thus, argued that children should be kept with their biological mothers. In contrast, reformers working with indigenous women and children believed motherhood could be taught—an indeed must be for some. In addition, they viewed the teaching of motherhood as the main route to Indian assimilation. Instead of relying on first-hand experience with motherhood, reformers took on motherly roles towards indigenous women and children. In doing so, I argue, they demonstrated their particular version of maternalism.

Adoption Historiography

The adoption of Native American children is another relatively understudied topic, especially in relation to maternalism. In *Indians in the Family*, Dawn Peterson discusses the adoption of indigenous children in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Peterson argues that White settlers moving west saw adoption as a way to contain and quickly assimilate Native Americans, while indigenous families used adoption as a way to enter into a rapidly changing landscape of American politics. Many Native American communities in the Northeast agreed to send their children to live with

¹⁷ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 4-5; Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 55.

¹⁸ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 46, 80; Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 89.

White families so that they could learn English. Indigenous communities hoped that the literacy skills learned by their young generations would empower them to hold some kind of influence in economic and diplomatic exchanges with the new nation. Indigenous parents often willingly allowed their children to be adopted in order to help give them an advantage in the policies being formed that would directly affect Native American communities.¹⁹

Margaret Jacobs's book, *A Generation Removed*, extends the history of the adoption of indigenous children into the post-WWII period, illustrating a major shift in policy during the 1950s: assimilation through adoption was in a sense privatized. Prior to this, the federal government, working through the BIA, often forced many Native American families to send their children to boarding schools, beginning in the late nineteenth century. Also, reformers' beliefs that boarding schools would be the quickest path to assimilation contributed to the high numbers of indigenous children sent away. But by the late 1930s, the BIA and the U.S. government saw the boarding school system as a failure, and schools began to close. The dependent children who could not return to their families came under the control of individual state governments. During the 1950s, however, various state governments and the federal government fought over who was obligated to support the children. As a solution, the BIA created the Indian Adoption Project in 1958, through which social workers began to place Native American children in White families as a way to relieve the state of their welfare. Although Jacobs discusses the adoption of indigenous children during a very different time period than Peterson, she also emphasizes that the main factor behind the act was assimilation. Government

¹⁹ Dawn Peterson, *Indians in the Family: Adoption and the Politics of Antebellum Expansion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 12-13, 66.

officials and welfare professionals believed that if White families brought indigenous children into their homes and lives the indigenous culture in the child would eventually be erased. The Indian Adoption Projects that began in the 1950s attempted to shift responsibility for indigenous dependent children into the private sector, and act as a final push to assimilate Native Americans.²⁰

The period between 1880 and 1930 in the history of the adoption of indigenous children is a crucial moment that has not been discussed within the important context of maternalism. Expanding her scholarship on adoption and indigenous child removal, Margaret Jacobs's "Breaking and Remaking Families" examines White women's adoption of indigenous children between 1880-1940, but does not discuss how it was a reflection of reformers' maternalism. She argues that developments during that time period paved the ground for the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act. She also discusses the changing bonds created between White women and their adopted indigenous children, further contending that White women attempted to increase their participation in politics by joining the assimilation efforts through adoption. Although her work discusses reformers' adoptions in the Progressive Era, it does not address maternalism and its effect on the adoptions.²¹

In the first chapter, I examine changing U.S. policies regarding Native Americans and how White females became prominent reformers in these issues. Popular publications at the time that targeted middle-class White women show changing maternalist ideals in

²⁰ Margaret D. Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 5-7.

²¹ Margaret D. Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families: The Fostering and Adoption of Native American Children in Non-Native Families in the American West, 1880-1940," in *On the Borders of Love and Power: Families and Kinship in the Intercultural American Southwest*, ed. David Wallace Adams and Crista Deluzio (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 29.

the Progressive Era, while reports and writings by reformers exhibit how they changed the concept into a unique rhetoric that supported their efforts. Indigenous child removal and the education of native women and children are addressed, as well as reformers' positions within the WNIA and BIA that supported these practices. By examining reform efforts and rhetoric, I discuss the unique rhetoric created by White female reformers.

In chapter two, I discuss how reformers and other White families put the unique maternalist rhetoric created to support their efforts into practice by adopting indigenous children. Reformers' adoptions of indigenous children between 1880-1930 reflected the maternalist rhetoric of White female reformers, but also heavily contributed to the belief that the practice would help assimilate Native Americans. Many reformers saw adoption as a way to accelerate assimilation by being taken out of an environment surrounded with their indigenous culture and placed into a White family. I explain the changing ideals surrounding adoption in American society between 1880 and 1930 and examine how reformers' discussed adoptions in various journal articles. These discussions often mirrored shifting ideals about adoption, as well as their maternalist rhetoric. I also briefly explain the practice of adoption itself, to show how the adoptions of indigenous children were often informal because of racist views that gave less importance to the placement of indigenous children, while also ignoring the consent of indigenous parents. Specific adoptions are examined in the chapter, in order to support my argument that reformers' used adoption to put their maternalism into practice.

Chapter three discusses how the adoption of indigenous children is often forgotten in public memory. Public historical memory is tied closely to the sources preserved and available for research, so I examine the sources that contain discussions of reformers'

adoptions and rhetoric between 1880 and 1930.²² During my research, I noticed a lack of official documents pertaining to the adoptions of indigenous children, which led to my decision to include a chapter focused on archives. In addition to expanding the literature on how maternalism affected the adoptions of indigenous children, I believe it is important to note how the topic is preserved in historical memory. While many female reformers have manuscript collections, the majority do not mention their adoptions of indigenous children. Although contemporary journal articles sometimes included discussions of the adopted children themselves, they were often brief and focused on the adoptive parents. I explain the sources available, as well as archival practices and how they contribute to the creation of public memory. By looking at ways to expand the existing archives to include mentions of reformers' adoptions alongside their rhetoric, I also discuss how to expand the narrative of the practice and recontextualize the collections. I argue in my last chapter that public memory is lacking in the narrative of adopted indigenous children between 1880 and 1930 that resulted from reformers' maternalist rhetoric.

²² Diane F. Britton, "Public History and Public Memory," *The Public Historian* 19 no. 3 (Summer 1997): 19.

II. REFORMERS' MATERNALISM AND THE REMOVAL OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

"No uncivilized people are elevated till the mothers are reached."²³

Introduction

In July of 1890, *The Indian's Friend*, a journal from the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA), an organization dedicated to reform efforts in issues concerning Native Americans, published excerpts from a letter written by a female missionary while visiting Native American communities on the Pacific coast. The letter, which included the above quote, reflected the author's, as well as other female reformers' beliefs that indigenous mothers were the key to assimilating all Native Americans to White, middle-class ideals. The missionary assured readers of the journal that indigenous women and children needed to be uplifted and that White women were the best people to help. The article implored women to consider becoming field matrons, females who visited Native American communities in order to educate indigenous women and encourage assimilation efforts. *The Indian's Friend* told potential field matrons that their duty would be to teach indigenous women, who the article suggested held more "heathenism" than men, how to "make *homes* of their houses."²⁴ The journal even assured potential field matrons that young indigenous girls would be glad for the White women's intrusions when they returned from boarding school, as a field matron could help the girl convince her mother to keep a clean home.²⁵ This journal article reflected White women's belief in the importance of Native American assimilation and the value of focusing on indigenous

²³ "Field Matrons," *The Indian's Friend* 2 no. 10 (July 1890): 2.

²⁴ "Field Matrons," *The Indian's Friend* 2 no. 10 (July 1890): 2.

²⁵ "Field Matrons," *The Indian's Friend* 2 no. 10 (July 1890): 2.

women and motherhood. By recruiting young, White, middle-class women into employment as field matrons, the WNIA hoped to teach indigenous mothers how best to care for their homes and children and persuade them to send their sons and daughters to boarding schools.

This chapter discusses the concept of “maternalism” and how reformers used their unique rhetoric to support assimilation efforts. These efforts included land allotment and the education of native children and mothers, which attempted to change indigenous gender roles and motherhood. The chapter explains U.S. assimilation policies beginning in the 1870s, and examines how many reformers saw themselves in “motherly” roles towards Native Americans while helping to remove indigenous children from their families. By supporting indigenous child removal and the assimilation of all Native Americans, I argue these reformers created their own variant of maternalism, one that defined motherhood as something that could be taught, instead of an innate biological knowledge.

The “Indian Problem” and Assimilation Policy

During the 1870s the government of the United States sought a solution to the “Indian Problem” through a policy of assimilation.²⁶ The expression “Indian problem” broadly encompassed the U.S. government’s struggle to find a way to effectively bring the large populations of indigenous people under its authority and end the decades of

²⁶ Frederick E. Hoxie, *Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2-3; Margaret D. Jacobs, “The Great White Mother: Maternalism and American Indian Child Removal in the American West, 1880-1940” in *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American West* ed. Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 195-196.

violence that had engaged White settlers, the U.S. military, and Native Americans. In an effort to undermine Native American sovereignty and deny claims to valuable land increasingly wanted by White settlers, the U.S. government began a policy of assimilation to bring all indigenous people into the American state.²⁷

The United States' policy of assimilation included various aspects that attempted to change Native Americans' ways of life in order to make them live more like White, middle-class Americans. These policies included increased reservations, specifically for Native Americans in the western U.S., as well as boarding schools, land policies, and the restructuring of government departments dedicated to these efforts. Prior to the 1870s, the U.S. had attempted to keep all Native Americans in Indian Territory in the western part of the country in the hopes that indigenous and White people could live separately. As western expansion increased in the 1870s, White settlement began to overrun the native population and separation was no longer viable. In response, the government began implementing policies aimed at assimilation. If all indigenous people could be brought under U.S. laws, their lands could more easily be taken for settlers pushing west. Attempts at educating Native Americans and forcing them to adopt White culture, increasing reservations with smaller land areas, as well as introducing acts that encouraged family structures similar to middle-class White families were all aspects of the U.S. government's assimilation policy.

²⁷ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 1-3.

White Women Reformers as Part of Assimilation Policies

In the decades following the start of these assimilation policies, some White women began to argue for a place in politics and reform on the basis of womanhood and motherhood. They maintained that women, solely, held specialized knowledge as mothers. As such, they began to advocate for increased authority over all issues that involved women and children. This view of motherhood, which came to be known as “maternalism,” took on many forms between 1890 and 1930. The attention paid to motherhood was pervasive in the gendered reform efforts of the Progressive Era. Many Americans believed that women belonged in the domestic sphere, and not in a social sphere that allowed them participation in politics. To justify reform efforts, then, women used maternalist rhetoric that argued women had a “natural” claim to authority over issues that affected the domestic sphere, including those concerning children. By organizing around reform efforts, women used maternalism in order to expand the domestic sphere by arguing that they were doing so to protect children and other women, with whom they shared the experience of motherhood.²⁸

A common argument aligned with maternalism was that women were experts on children and thus, children belonged with their biological mothers.²⁹ The numbers of mothers in the workforce began to increase in the 1890s. Many single or widowed working-class women found their wages inadequate to support a family, and some married women had to take jobs because their husband’s wages were insufficient.³⁰ In order to help working-class women support their families, many maternalists promoted a

²⁸ Stromquist, *Re-inventing “The People,”* 107-110.

²⁹ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 1-6.

³⁰ Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights*, 53-54.

minimum wage that was high enough to support their family. In addition, reformers worked to overturn laws restricting the hours of female employees.³¹ Along with legislative changes, maternalists advocated for increased numbers of childcare centers, including day cares and nurseries, that were affordable for working mothers and safe for children. Maternalists argued that mothers had the expertise and instinct to care for their children and should therefore not have to give them up in order to work; care centers would help solve the dilemma. Reformers undertook multiple efforts to help promote the idea that even if mothers had to work, they should have the means to support their children and keep their family together.³²

Some middle-class White women found that the jobs created by the government's assimilation efforts offered opportunities to claim new authority. The schools created by the assimilation policies, as well as the BIA, all employed females for various positions. By forming organizations dedicated to Native American reforms, like the WNIA, as well as finding jobs with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), White women became increasingly involved with indigenous child removal, which was part of those assimilation policies.³³ White women participated in the BIA and took an interest in Native American issues in order to teach indigenous mothers White, middle-class values and motherhood ideals. The authority derived from their jobs allowed them to remove native children and help assimilate them into American society. In doing so, White women taught indigenous girls in boarding schools homemaking, a concept undergoing numerous changes during the decades before and after 1900. Their work among

³¹ Stromquist, *Re-inventing "The People,"* 119-123.

³² Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, 84-86.

³³ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 63-66.

indigenous communities led reformers to create a unique variant of maternalism that supported their assimilation efforts.

Creating a Policy of Assimilation

Reservations

Several aspects of U.S. policy towards Native Americans contributed to ideas about assimilation. The establishment of reservations was one component. In the 1870s, rapid westward expansion ultimately resulted in the forced removal of many tribes from their lands. Treaties signed before 1870 between various tribes and the U.S. government protected the rights of indigenous people displaced by early reservations and western settlement to continue hunting on their traditional lands. In the 1870s, however, increased railroads and expansion often intruded on these lands, and went against treaty terms. In response, Congress declared that Native American tribes should no longer be recognized as independent nations, and that no more treaties should be made in the Indian Appropriations Act of 1871.³⁴ In addition to this, the U.S. government began moving indigenous groups onto reservations in order to obtain Native Americans' lands for White settlement. The U.S. government first created reservations during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the East, and established several west of the Mississippi River by the mid-nineteenth century. The boundaries of those in the Midwest and West, however, remained fairly permeable and often shifted throughout the 1850s and 1860s as the government's attention focused on the issue of slavery and later the Civil War. It was not until after the Civil War that the U.S. established many of the reservations in the far

³⁴ Congressional Record, March 3, 1871, 566, 570.

West and Southwest, and began to rapidly decrease the amount of land promised to tribes.³⁵ To better understand the effect of this, it should be noted that the breaking of treaties, the removal of indigenous people onto reservations, and attempts to bring them into the U.S. without sovereignty is classified as “ethnic cleansing” by some current historians, as the actions fit within the present-day definition of the term by the International Criminal Court.³⁶ The forced removal of Native Americans onto reservations in the 1870s and 1880s led to several violent battles between the U.S. military and various tribes, including the Nez Perces, the Poncas, and the Chiricahua Apaches.³⁷

“Peace Policy”

The Grant administration’s notions about ending violence and cultivating peace also helped shape assimilation policy. In 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant declared in his first inaugural address his intention to work towards civilization and citizenship for Native Americans. His efforts along these lines have largely been termed as Grant’s “peace policy.” His policy had two main goals: solidifying reservation boundaries, and reorganizing the BIA. Following the violence between tribes and the military, Grant declared that the U.S. would be peaceful as long as Native Americans stayed within reservation boundaries. The second part of his policy involved replacing the leadership of the BIA, as well as the federal government’s connection to the officials.³⁸

³⁵ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 1-22.

³⁶ Gary Anderson Clayton, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime that Should Haunt America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 260-268.

³⁷ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 1-22.

³⁸ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 18-20.

Grant's first goal in reorganizing the BIA was to end corruption among established reservations' Indian agents in the East, as well as those at new reservations in the West. Politicians appointed Indian agents, who worked under the BIA and whose jobs included establishing and supervising contracts to supply goods that would then be rationed among the Native Americans living on a reservation. The BIA gave Indian agents full authority over these contracts, which often led to "Indian Rings." By cheating Native Americans out of ration goods through these rings, the Indian agent, the politician who appointed them, and the supplier could all profit. In order to end this corruption, as well as ensure that the newly established western reservations did not face the same issues, Grant attempted to create an administration system where the Quakers appointed the Indian agents. To counter Grant's proposal, Congress established the Board of Indian Commissioners (BIC), mostly made up of churchmen of various Protestant denominations, to oversee the BIA. Because the board was still a nonpartisan group, rather than politicians advising and inspecting the BIA, Grant supported the BIC.³⁹

Grant's attempts at establishing honest administration of reservations only benefited the federal government, not indigenous people themselves. Carlos Montezuma, a Yavapai Apache, recalled decades later that Indian agents dominated every aspect of Native Americans' lives on the reservation. "Yesterday, today, our people are in the same benighted condition. As Indians they are considered non-entities."⁴⁰ After discussing the loss of autonomy for indigenous people on reservations, Montezuma called for an end to the BIA. "The sooner the Government abolishes the Indian Bureau, the better it will be

³⁹ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 18-20.

⁴⁰ Carlos Montezuma, "What Indians Must Do," *Quarterly Journal* 2 (1914): 294-296, quoted in Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 90-95.

for we Indians in every way.”⁴¹ Montezuma wanted the U.S. government to return Native Americans’ sovereignty, which Grant’s peace policy removed. For many living on the reservations, Grant’s efforts only served to remove indigenous independence.

In continuing with his peace policy, Grant selected a new Commissioner of Indian Affairs to better administer policies.⁴² To serve as BIA Commissioner, Grant chose Ely S. Parker, a supporter of the president’s mission to eliminate corruption among the BIA.⁴³ Parker was a Tonawanda Seneca, and had served as Grant’s military secretary during the Civil War. The history between Parker and Grant helped Parker obtain his position as commissioner, as well as influenced Grant’s policy.⁴⁴ Parker shared Grant’s notion that Native Americans needed to become more civilized. For example, in a report to the Secretary of the Interior in 1869, Parker stated that reservations and education were important in order to complete the assimilation hoped for by the BIA.⁴⁵

Grant believed that assimilation could be possible by Christianizing Native Americans through mostly Protestant officials. The White culture that assimilationists hoped to force Native Americans to conform to included Christianity. Because anti-Catholic sentiment was rampant in major U.S. cities during this time, Protestant denominations were central to Grant’s peace policy. In fact, these efforts ignored the previous conversion efforts of Catholic religious orders that had centuries of experience and interaction with Native Americans gained through their established mission system.

⁴¹ Montezuma, “What Indians Must Do,” 294-296, quoted in Hoxie, *Talking Back to Civilization*, 94.

⁴² Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 2-3.

⁴³ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 19.

⁴⁴ Joseph C. Genetin-Pilawa, “Ely S. Parker and the Paradox of Reconstruction Politics in Indian Country” in *The World the Civil War Made* ed. Kate Masur Downs (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 183.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Made to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1869* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1870), 3, 8, 18.

White Protestants were nervous that if Catholic missionaries converted Native Americans, they would lose their majority in society.⁴⁶ Methodists and Quakers with no background in Native American policy or the West made up the majority of Grant's Indian Office appointees, in the hope that they strengthened the Protestant's authority over reformers' "civilization" efforts.⁴⁷ In addition to the popular anti-Catholic prejudice, Grant originally chose to make Quakers the center of his plan because of their history as colonial settlers in Pennsylvania in the seventeenth century. Grant and many others believed that the Quaker colonists were the most fair and honest when it came to taking natives' lands for settlement. With this history, Grant believed the Quakers would take a similarly honest approach in their BIA appointments, and end corruption of Indian agents and other officials. In an effort to make his plan more appealing to Congress, Grant later included other Protestant denominations, like Methodists, and eventually Catholics as options to take over reservation agencies whenever there was a vacancy in the administration.⁴⁸

Although Grant's policy attempted to end the violence that characterized the government's previous policy toward Native Americans, it never succeeded.⁴⁹ Violence continued when Native Americans resisted their removal to reservations, and the military attempted to stop them. One of the larger acts of resistance to reservations came from the Chiricahua Apaches in what is today Arizona. The U.S. military had interacted violently with the Apaches for several decades. Felix R. Brunot, Chairman of the Board of Indian Commissioners in 1871, stated that the government's decade-long attempt to

⁴⁶ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 33.

⁴⁷ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 2-3, 15.

⁴⁸ Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, 19-20.

⁴⁹ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 2-3.

“exterminate” the Apaches had cost three to four million dollars a year, with little progress.⁵⁰ Brunot’s report reflected the most violent part of U.S. policy that Grant attempted to change. The policy of extermination supported military violence in order to protect White settlers who encroached on Native Americans’ lands. As the resistance of Native Americans continued during Grant’s peace policy, however, so did the violence.⁵¹ Continued acts of resistance, such as those undertaken by the Chiricahua Apaches, and the Northern Cheyennes, who escaped their consolidated reservation in 1879, marked Grant’s peace policy a failure. The military’s forcible return of these Cheyennes to their reservation became the first in a number of violent incidents that would ultimately lead to a call, once again, for a shift in policy toward Native Americans.⁵²

Land Allotment

Grant’s peace policy drew criticism throughout the 1870s by those who felt his plan did not include adequate plans to “civilize” the Native Americans, and reformers sought an alternative way to assimilation. The former Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis A. Walker joined in these calls for reform. In 1873, he wrote a journal article titled “The Indian Question,” which became the title of an essay Walker published a year later with an additional article discussing citizenship for Native Americans.⁵³ While both articles criticized the efforts of Grant’s peace policy, “The Indian Question” raised two issues regarding Native Americans and Anglo settlement: “What shall be done with the

⁵⁰ Board of Indian Commissioners, *Third Annual Report*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1871), 5-6.

⁵¹ Clayton, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*, 260-268.

⁵² Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 3-4.

⁵³ Francis A. Walker, *The Indian Question*, (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 11-13, 101-102.

Indian as an obstacle to the national progress? What shall be done with him when, and so far as, he ceases to oppose or obstruct the extension of railways and settlements?”⁵⁴

Reformers frequently discussed these questions throughout the 1870s and into the 1880s and argued that something different from the reservation system had to be implemented. The major solution was distributing reservation lands in severalty. Reformers argued that reservations stood in the way of national citizenship and cultural unity by remaining legally separate from U.S. They came to the conclusion that rather than placing a tribe on a communal reservation, Native Americans should own individual plots of land which would help “civilize” them and open up even more territory for White settlement.⁵⁵

By the late 1870s, Native American reform and land allotment were popular issues among the American public. Several organizations formed around reform efforts between 1879 and 1882, including the WNIA, Boston Indian Citizenship Committee, and the Indian Rights Association.⁵⁶ While assimilating Native Americans into White culture remained the main goal of reformers, the associations emerging from the peace policy’s failures focused on dismantling reservations.⁵⁷ In March of 1880, the *New York Daily Tribune* reported that the government persuaded the Utes in Colorado to give up their reservation, and instead agree to receive individual land allotments per family. “For the first time in the history of the dealings of the Nation with its troublesome wars a blow has been struck at the vicious tribal and reservation system.”⁵⁸ The newspaper article reflected a popular view among the American public that individual property ownership

⁵⁴ Francis A. Walker, “The Indian Question,” *The North American Review* 116 no. 239 (April 1873): 337.

⁵⁵ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 7-14.

⁵⁶ Mathes, *The Women’s National Indian Association*, 8-9.

⁵⁷ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 7-14.

⁵⁸ “Solving the Indian Problem,” *New York Daily Tribune*, March 8, 1888, 4.

was the solution to fully assimilate Native Americans. Individual land allotments would force indigenous people into nuclear families, which also proved the dominance of the White, middle-class reformers who worked to change Native American culture to resemble their own.⁵⁹ The *New York Daily Tribune* article reflected the attitudes of reformers who believed that if the U.S. government persuaded Native Americans to own individual property over communal reservations, it would symbolize the first step in the civilization.⁶⁰

In order to better understand this development, it makes sense to step back and discuss the broader context in which reform took place. First, during the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the Progressive Era of the twentieth, the rhetoric about being “civilized” gained importance and new meaning. During that time, more Americans, especially those trained at universities, began to embrace “science.” The definition of “civilized” came to be scrutinized and studied as having a scientific and evolutionary justification. Some White social scientists suggested that all humans had the potential to progress culturally. Unsurprisingly, from this viewpoint the highest level of culture a society could reach closely resembled that of the White middle-class. Individual property ownership, industrialized machinery, and nuclear families were the main signifiers of cultural development. With this conviction, White policy makers believed that if the U.S. government forced Native Americans to give up communally held lands and reservations, and accept small, individual allotments, the process could help accelerate assimilation and “civilization.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 14-15.

⁶⁰ “Solving the Indian Problem,” *New York Daily Tribune*, March 8, 1888, 4.

⁶¹ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 20-21.

The perceived progress that Native Americans could potentially undergo was known as social evolutionism. Lewis Henry Morgan, a leading anthropologist, spearheaded the concept of social evolutionism as early as the late 1870s. In opposition to many other anthropologists at the time, Morgan rejected the concept that perceived biological racial differences in the Native Americans meant they could never advance to a civilized status. Instead, Morgan argued that if social change was brought to the indigenous communities, they could easily be assimilated and incorporated into American society.⁶² In some ways, this was not a brand new idea. The Spanish mission system previously promoted the idea that conversion, education, and social change could “civilize” Native Americans for centuries before the intervention of Protestant reformers. The WNIA, in fact, published a recurring column in *The Indian’s Friend* that discussed the missions and Spanish rule of the Southwest. Indeed, the WNIA admitted that the organization held similar ideas, and called the mission system “the only wise scheme for the civilization of the Indians.”⁶³ The article, however, concluded that the idea failed because the Spanish rushed the process and ultimately blamed the male friars.⁶⁴ Morgan and other reformers mirrored the idea that Native Americans could be assimilated. But they took it further in arguing that individual ownership of land was the primary way to complete the process.⁶⁵

The belief in individual property ownership and its potential for civilizing Native Americans led to new federal policies focused on the “Indian problem,” most notably, the Dawes Act. Senator Henry Dawes loudly and passionately opposed the tradition of

⁶² Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 19-21.

⁶³ “The Mission Indians III” *The Indian’s Friend* 1 no. 9 (May 1889): 3.

⁶⁴ “The Mission Indians III” *The Indian’s Friend* 1 no. 9 (May 1889): 3.

⁶⁵ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 19-21.

making peace treaties with Native American tribes in the 1870s. In the early 1880s, Dawes instead began to work towards the creation of assimilation policies. Dawes also worked to expand education for indigenous children and supported various land cessions. Ultimately he was responsible for the creation and passage of the General Allotment Act in 1887.⁶⁶ This act, also known as the Dawes Act, allowed the U.S. government to divide a reservation into individual plots and allot land to indigenous heads of household based on the size of their family. A head of household received 160 acres, while single men received 80. After distributing allotments, the remaining land could then be sold to White settlers.⁶⁷ The Dawes Act sought to accomplish what so many anthropologists believed was the way to culturally advancing the Native American population.⁶⁸

A group of White female reformers promoted individual land ownership and lobbied for the Dawes Act. Those associated with the WNIA (established 1879), assumed a leading role. The WNIA helped gain public support for general allotment by gathering signatures from the American public for petitions supporting the passage of the General Allotment Act. Thus, from the beginning of the WNIA's establishment, when the idea was not fully formed into policy, congressmen experienced the force of these women who lobbied in support of Native American reforms. WNIA women helped craft a new form of lobbying. After the WNIA collected signatures for a petition supporting individual property ownership for Native Americans, Dawes presented Congress with the petition and its signatures and reported that the petitions had been gathered by individuals

⁶⁶ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 29-33.

⁶⁷ Mathes, *The Women's National Indian Association*, 6-8.

⁶⁸ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 29-33.

of “unusual character.”⁶⁹ In the WNIA’s fourth annual report, the organization’s president, Amelia Stone Quinton, announced that Senator Dawes had introduced a bill to Congress that would allow the government to allot reservation lands to individual Native American families. Quinton announced the WNIA’s support for the bill, and the members’ hopes that the bill would easily pass.⁷⁰

The WNIA members agreed with Morgan, Dawes and so many others that individual land allotments would help to naturally “advance” Native Americans into living as nuclear families. Anyone who accepted and lived on their allotment would then also be subject to any U.S. laws and regulations. The distribution of land based on family structure led the WNIA to hope that the Dawes Act would help Native Americans create “homes” and mold their families to look like White, middle-class, Protestant families.

The reality was far from this, but the passage of the Dawes Act marked a win for the reformers’ efforts. Instead of leading to prosperous nuclear families, the size of allotments resulted in over two-thirds of Native Americans’ lands given up to White settlers. Although the act was a failure, the WNIA’s involvement reflected a new trend in policymaking of women’s organizations lobbying politicians for reform issues. Congress saw the petitions from female reformers as being grievances from a subordinate. Because of this, the male congressmen felt obligated to address the issue and respond. The WNIA continued to use a tone of deference to the power of male politicians in petitions created by the organization.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Congressional Record, February 21, 1882, 1326-1327.

⁷⁰ Fourth Annual Report of the WNIA, November 1884, 9-10.

⁷¹ Mathes, *The Women’s National Indian Association*, 6-40.

Maternalism

During the 1890s, women's reform efforts entered a new stage that focused on protecting women's and children's welfare and health. Maternalists, who were often middle-class White women, led these efforts with demands that the state protect the health of women and children. This shift to what historian Molly Ladd-Taylor calls the "medicalization" of motherhood and childhood caused increased support of maternalism and advocacy of child welfare.⁷² During the Gilded Age, infant mortality rates had been high. Now, mothers hoped that the expanding scientific discoveries in the field of child development would help save their children. In order to help save infants, White, female, middle-aged maternalists turned to grassroots activism to spread information and increase every mother's knowledge of their children and home.⁷³

One major way that maternalist-minded women attempted to increase knowledge was through publications targeted towards other women. *The Delineator*, a magazine published by the Butterick Company, began to include more and more articles about childcare, motherhood, and domesticity in the late nineteenth century. Prior to the 1890s, the magazine mainly carried articles about fashion. In the April 1894 issue, among illustrations and advertisements for spring fashion trends, *the Delineator* included an article about mothers and daughters. The article discussed important moments in the lives of a girl and explained why it was important for mothers to form strong bonds with their daughters. While tracing different stages of development for a female child, the article gave advice to mothers on how best to care for her daughter during those different stages

⁷² Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 3-18.

⁷³ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 32-33.

and prepare the girl for her future.⁷⁴ In 1896, the magazine published an article about cleanliness in the household. It suggested that “[t]he hygienic construction of the home saves its occupants many a doctor’s bill, and many a life.”⁷⁵ The article, and others like it, told its readers that women held the lives of their family in their hands, as it was the mother’s job to properly clean and care for the home and their family.

With the advent of scientific motherhood, middle-class White maternalists became the notion’s first and largest supporters. Native-born White mothers had the smallest family sizes and on average the fewest children among all ethnic groups, and therefore were less likely to have other female family members in their homes with them to help with childrearing and housework. In addition, they tended to have a higher level of education than others. Because of these conditions, it was White, middle-class mothers who most sought to educate working-class mothers about scientific advancements in motherhood.⁷⁶

In addition, many male physicians also promoted scientific motherhood. They began writing articles for magazines, such as *The Delineator*, aimed at middle-class women. The articles discussed topics such as feeding, bathing, stages of development, and when mothers should take their babies to medical professionals. As scientific motherhood gained attention in the 1890s and early 1900s, women began relying on physician’s advice while still arguing mothers were the ones best equipped to carry out

⁷⁴ M. C. Murray, “Mothers and Daughters” *The Delineator* 43 no. 4 (April 1894): 433-434.

⁷⁵ A. Buchanan, “Domestic Sanitation-No. 1” *The Delineator* 47 no. 5 (May 1896): 620.

⁷⁶ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 32-33.

doctors' directions. By discussing the latest medical discoveries and advice from trained physicians, many maternalists argued for increased aid for mothers and children.⁷⁷

Reformers' Unique Maternalism

Reformers involved with Native American issues created their own maternalist rhetoric and directed it at indigenous women. This focus different from that of other maternalists who advocated for scientific motherhood and domesticity as protections for White mothers and children. The WNIA's involvement with the passing of the Dawes Act reflected its early commitment to a unique variant of maternalism among reformers of Native American policy. In 1884 the WNIA began sending missionaries to various indigenous groups in order to help educate them on family structure, specifically the women. The goals of the missionaries included, "teaching young parents how to make comfortable and attractive homes out of scanty materials," and "teaching the women how to cook the foods of civilization, and how to care for their children."⁷⁸ These reformers' maternalism emphasized that indigenous women needed to be educated before being acceptable mothers. Reformers argued that while women's main value lay in their capacity to be mothers, they needed education in order to be the ideal mother.

Reformers supported land allocation through the Dawes Act in the hopes that it would encourage Native Americans to adopt the nuclear family structure they believed was predominant. As such, they also pushed indigenous families to embrace rigid gender roles. Instead of recognizing how gender roles within indigenous communities worked,

⁷⁷ Rima D. Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick: NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 12-15, 34-37.

⁷⁸ Fourth Annual Report of the WNIA, November 1884, 33.

they were seen as a main target. Native traditions needed to be dismantled for assimilation to occur. Some White women thought rigid gender roles were ideal. They believed that any society in which women had jobs other than being the primary caregiver for their children was oppressive. In various indigenous communities, women were in charge of agriculture, preparing food, and making clothing and tools. Since women were in charge of so many responsibilities important to sustaining the family, they often owned the resources needed for those tasks. In addition, many Native Americans relied on extended family and kinship networks to help raise children instead of having the biological parents take sole responsibility.⁷⁹ White women, who adhered to the view that females belonged solely within the domestic sphere, saw indigenous women's involvement with physical labor and their status as heads of households as oppressive. Ironically, many reformers referred to Native American women as "slaves" to their men. In contrast, reformers suggested that many middle- and upper-class White women were in positions of elevated status because they were given the opportunity to stay home with children while their husbands were the source of income for the household. Reformers believed that if Native Americans were given the opportunity to "advance" with nuclear family structures, the roles of women and men within the family would change to mirror those of White, middle-class, Protestant families. This would lead to men working outside the home and providing income, with women caring for their children and overseeing domestic duties.⁸⁰ These gender roles were consistent with the maternalist rhetoric used by reformers. By teaching indigenous women how to parent

⁷⁹ Brianna Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 24-26.

⁸⁰ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 112-114.

according to the ideal motherhood of White women, the gender roles that supported motherhood would also be instilled in indigenous families.

Alice Cunningham Fletcher was a major advocate behind the Dawes Act. Four years before Congress passed the Dawes Act in 1887, the BIA divided up the lands of the Omaha tribe and appointed Fletcher to be a special agent in charge of the allotment.⁸¹ In many ways, Fletcher embodied the reformers' maternalism and involvement with Native Americans. She recruited indigenous children for the Carlisle school, spoke frequently at WNIA meetings, and worked as an anthropologist in the late nineteenth century.⁸²

Fletcher supported the maternalist rhetoric that encouraged rigid gender roles that put women in charge of childcare while men worked outside the home. Fletcher's maternalist beliefs, however, conflicted with her feminist ones, particularly when it came to indigenous women. She recognized indigenous women's autonomy in various groups, and she drew on this example of autonomy to argue against the patriarchal society within which she existed. For example, in speeches supporting women's suffrage Fletcher mentioned the experiences of indigenous women who owned their own homes and performed physical labor. But the feminist rhetoric Fletcher used to advocate for White women's rights became incompatible with the reforms she supported for indigenous women and children. While she recognized that many Native American laws allowed women to own property and protected the autonomy that U.S. laws denied White women, Fletcher continued to argue for the assimilation of indigenous families into White

⁸¹ Dolores Janiewski, "Giving Women a Future: Alice Fletcher, the 'Woman Question' and 'Indian Reform'" in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 327.

⁸² Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 67, 145, 195-196.

American culture.⁸³ Fletcher's beliefs emphasized an irreconcilable difference between maternalism and feminism. While reformers believed that women had value because of their potential for motherhood, their idealized vision of it meant that women stayed in the home. Reformers' attempted to teach indigenous women and children scientific domesticity and childcare and shape them into nuclear families, but by doing so took away many rights that indigenous women already held.

On reservations, the implementation of new gender ideas within indigenous communities and education in scientific motherhood led to an increased focus on pregnancy and childbirth. This had important ramifications. Because reformers often argued that indigenous women did not know how to mother without an education in proper practices from White women, scrutiny began with their childbirth traditions. Prior to the reservation period, birth among many Native American communities involved rituals and practices that only involved women and midwives. Skilled midwives were common, and many indigenous communities had high levels of maternal health and low infant mortality rates. After the U.S. moved Native Americans onto reservations, infant mortality rates began to rise among various groups. Yet, reports created by White physicians on reservations circulated a myth that "uncivilized" women had pain-free childbirths. This condition of civilization led to a ranking of individual communities as "savage" or "civilized" based on the average length the women were in labor. In addition, employees began to write reports supporting false claims. They argued indigenous women were more promiscuous than White women, especially because of abortion practices that involved the ingestion of various plants. The reports relied on inaccurate

⁸³ Janiewski, "Giving Women a Future," 325-331.

information about indigenous childbirth, and covered up the actual reasons behind increased infant mortality rates. In actuality, government food rations given out on reservations led to severe malnutrition, and a shift from demanding physical labor to domestic labor put new pressures on women's bodies. After the circulation of untrue reports created by physicians and government employees, maternalists argued that high infant mortality rates were not a result of conditions on reservations, but instead another example of how indigenous women were unfit mothers. The fabricated reasons given in official reports attempted to justify the U.S. government's intervention with the intimate practices of childbirth.⁸⁴

Intervention for assimilationist purposes extended beyond childbirth and pregnancy to childhood and schooling. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the areas of Native American policy and maternalism combined with the beginnings of the boarding school movement. In order to recruit children for the schools, many of which were far off the reservation, many school officials and the BIA began to employ White women to help convince indigenous parents to give up their children. Henry Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania and a vocal advocate for boarding schools and their potential for assimilation, employed multiple White women as recruiters for his Carlisle Institute in Pennsylvania. One of the women employed, the abovementioned Alice Fletcher, became crucial to indigenous child removal efforts.⁸⁵ The BIA encouraged Indian agents in charge of schools to place all indigenous children ages 5-18 in schools, which field matrons helped agents accomplish.⁸⁶ Women used multiple arguments to

⁸⁴ Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 31-36.

⁸⁵ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 195-196.

⁸⁶ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian Schools Service*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 5.

convince parents to allow their children to be sent away to schools. Many recruiters assured parents that the education their children received would lead to indigenous independence and acceptance in American society.⁸⁷

The U.S. government required indigenous parents to send their children to school. In 1891, with support from many White women reformers, Congress passed a compulsory attendance law. With this law, Indian agents on reservations withheld necessities like rations from indigenous families until they agreed to send their children to school. Multiple boarding schools enrolled students from multiple reservations, meaning many students had to travel long distances from their homes and families. While some reservations had schools within their borders, officials hoped that removing children from the reservation completely would further “civilize” children by keeping them away from their families. Indigenous parents instructed their children to hide when school employees attempted to take them away. BIA officials, however, supported the use of force in taking children, and kidnapped children in order to force them to attend schools.⁸⁸

The BIA and Indian School Service officials created the position of “field matron” in order to help with compulsory attendance laws, as well as educate indigenous women. Field matrons entered indigenous communities in order to help convince parents to send their children away, while teaching the women who remained how to be better mothers. Field matrons taught women the exact same things that publications like *The Delineator* were publicizing to middle-class White mothers. Reformers believed the

⁸⁷ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 190.

⁸⁸ Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 13-24.

indigenous women's ways of mothering were completely backwards, more proof of their need to be assimilated.⁸⁹ These views were in direct opposition to common Progressive maternalist rhetoric that argued children belonged with their biological mothers. Many maternalists believed that while scientific advancements were important for mothers to learn, their natural instinct to care for their children made it crucial mothers kept their children with them.⁹⁰ White women who supported indigenous child removal rejected the ideas that women had the common ability to nurture and protect their own children, and entered indigenous communities to teach their ideal view of motherhood, as well as convince families to give up their biological children. In this way field matrons were a major part of the unique view of maternalism used by reformers. A matron's job was to educate indigenous women, believing that native mothers were not inherently capable of parenting, but instead needing guidance from White women.

Although female BIA employees became crucial to indigenous education efforts, there was a small group of reformers who disagreed with child removal. Estelle Aubrey Brown worked in a boarding school on the Navajos' reservation, where she later recalled the BIA sending out employees to search for any children not already enrolled in the school. Brown argued that the Native Americans had no want or need of the culture imposed on them, and the attempts to force removal and assimilation were unfair. "[Children] were in school against their own will and, in most cases, the will of their parents. What right have we to take these children from their parents? What right have we to break up Indian homes?"⁹¹ Brown and several other reformers who worked closely

⁸⁹ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 87-88.

⁹⁰ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 4.

⁹¹ Estelle Aubrey Brown, *Stubborn Fool: A Narrative*, (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1952), 137, 233-234, 256-257, quoted in Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 393.

with Native American children came to reject maternalist rhetoric that supported indigenous child removal. This opposition, however, did not begin to gain major support until the 1920s.⁹²

In the early 1900s, reservation officials began a new strategy to focus on infant mortality rates and indigenous forms of childbirth with “Save the Babies” campaigns. These efforts created increased attention on indigenous women’s reproduction systems and childcare practices. BIA field matrons began to include inspections of infants in their home visits. In addition, the increased medicalization of childbirth and childcare led to “baby shows” that involved physicians examining babies and advocating for hospital births among indigenous mothers. “Baby shows” became common throughout the U.S. during the 1910s and 1920s. The shows promoted the medicalization of childbirth and motherhood, while showcasing healthy babies, usually born to White women. Contest officials weighed, observed, measured, and passed the babies around to pediatricians for inspection. Judges deducted points if the babies exhibited any perceived abnormalities, or fell below the national standards for height and weight.⁹³ On reservations, officials used the baby shows to promote medical visits and any advice given by field matrons to indigenous mothers. These campaigns fit within the larger movement of maternalism centered on scientific motherhood while still focusing on indigenous women and children. The campaign brought increased focus on indigenous women’s bodies and ability to have children. Although efforts brought assistance in medical care to reservations with high infant mortality rates, the fact that they did not attempt to fix the

⁹² Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 404.

⁹³ Alexandra Minna Stern, “Making Better Babies: Public Health and Race Betterment in Indiana, 1920-1935” *American Journal of Public Health*, 92 no. 5 (May 2002): 742-752.

root of the problem led to false hope. Instead of targeting malnutrition, Save the Babies often only led to intense scrutiny of indigenous women attempting to adjust to life on the reservation. Because these issues involved women and children, White reformers sought to involve themselves in campaigns to increase medical care on reservations. The BIA's efforts therefore fit within broader maternalist fights for increased sanitation and education on scientific motherhood.⁹⁴ Similarly to these campaigns, field matrons began to take on other responsibilities beyond educating mothers within their homes. In a letter to a prospective field matron, supervisor Elsie Newton wrote, "I would place a good deal of emphasis on the keeping of such records as will show in the course of time the progress of a family. Records that are not too complex...are invaluable in the study and solution of social problems."⁹⁵ After the first decade of the 1900s, field matrons recorded infant mortality statistics and advocated for hospitalized childbirths among indigenous women, playing a major role in maternalist BIA assimilation efforts.⁹⁶

In addition to field matrons, the BIA also employed "female industrial teachers." Although the BIA included instructions for female industrial teachers with those for the Indian School Service, these teachers educated indigenous women in their own homes. The teachers' duties included all things domestic: sewing, nursing, housekeeping lessons, childcare, and the organization of societies to advance the morality of indigenous women. The school service expected these specialized teachers to go house to house and give indigenous women lessons in homemaking and childrearing. The main goal of these lessons was making indigenous houses into "homes." The expectations for teachers were

⁹⁴ Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 44-49.

⁹⁵ Elsie E. Newton, "The Work of the Field Matron," *The Indian School Journal* (November 1913): 109.

⁹⁶ Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 44-49.

numerous, but the school service summed them up as “anything which women of good judgement, quick sympathies, fertility of resources, large practical experience, abundant energy, and sound health can find to do among an ignorant, poor, superstitious, and confiding people.”⁹⁷

Many reformers argued that Native Americans’ greatest need was education, which revolved around scientific domesticity for female students. The WNIA stated that laws and regulations themselves could not fully change a culture, but education could.⁹⁸ Once field matrons persuaded parents to give up their children, White women were also crucial to the boarding schools themselves. White women became teachers and caretakers in boarding schools, and the BIA employed many. One of the most prominent supporters of compulsory education for indigenous students was Estelle Reel. President William McKinley appointed Reel, a former schoolteacher and superintendent in Wyoming, to the position of superintendent of Indian education in 1898. In addition to pushing for a compulsory attendance law for Native American students, Reel’s other major goal was to create a common curriculum for the schools under her leadership.⁹⁹ In 1901, Reel completed her curriculum, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States*. Included in her curriculum were courses that Reel believed would most prepare indigenous children to become American citizens. The courses directed boys to learn agricultural practices, blacksmithing, carpentry, and engineering to prepare them for jobs in the American workforce. Indigenous girls, however, would learn baking, housekeeping, laundry, and cooking. School teachers and administrators expected

⁹⁷ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian Schools Service*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 14-15.

⁹⁸ Fourth Annual Report of the WNIA, November 19, 1884, 40.

⁹⁹ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 101.

indigenous boys to enter the workforce and help their family become self-sufficient, while indigenous girls stayed within the home. Scientific domesticity became an important part of the Native American school system. One of the major parts of housekeeping curriculum for indigenous girls was cleanliness. “The ideal training for girls is that which will instill a love for home and make good, neat housekeepers.”¹⁰⁰ Various aspects of the course included teaching girls the importance of soap and water for both the home and personal hygiene; making a neatly set table with healthy meals; and ensuring waste was not placed near the drinking water. In order to assimilate Native Americans into Anglo American culture, White women sought to teach indigenous women and girls to be the kind of mother the American public expected White women to be. To accomplish this, the course guide directed the woman in charge of teaching housekeeping to ensure their female students knew how to prepare meals, make clothing, and clean the house.¹⁰¹

Lessons in housekeeping often extended outside of the classroom. Many teachers expected female students to be a source of labor for domestic jobs around the boarding schools. The students themselves often saw this labor as impeding their learning. Irene Stewart, a Navajo who attended boarding school, recalled having to do the laundry and sewing for all students; can food; wash dishes, windows, and floors; and clean classrooms and dormitories. “By the time I graduated from the sixth grade I was a well-trained worker. I think this is why...it was so hard to learn. We were too tired to

¹⁰⁰ Estelle Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 3-6, 148-149.

¹⁰¹ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 3-6, 148-149.

study.”¹⁰² While teachers often framed the extra work as the hands-on lessons from the curriculum, the female students often saw it for what it was, unpaid domestic labor that interfered with their academic studies.¹⁰³

The school curriculum created by Reel also sought to erase any kind of traditional motherhood practices from indigenous families in addition to teaching native girls how to be mothers and housewives. Reel instructed female teachers in charge of housekeeping lessons to remind girls that the way their grandmothers and mothers kept their homes was not something to which they should aspire. The main goal of the curriculum for indigenous girls was to undermine any sense of traditional gender roles and instill in girls the specific knowledge that the White women believed made a woman a mother. Reel stated that because Native Americans had evolved from constantly moving around with tents to fixed homes, women needed to know how to disinfect the living space and keep their family healthy. Reel based her argument on false information, as multiple Native American groups were not nomadic. Despite this, her curriculum continued to use fallacies and assumptions about indigenous cultures as examples of why the lessons for women were so important.¹⁰⁴

Indigenous students had mixed reactions to the curriculum of boarding schools. Laura Kellogg, an Oneida who attended a Protestant school in the late-nineteenth century, criticized the education aimed at erasing indigenous culture. “There are old Indians who have never seen the inside of a classroom whom I consider far more educated than the

¹⁰² Irene Stewart, *A Voice in Her Tribe: A Navajo Woman's Own Story*, ed. Doris Ostrander Dawdy (Socorro, NM: Ballena Press, 1980), 17, quoted in David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 153.

¹⁰³ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 153.

¹⁰⁴ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 148-149.

young Indian with his knowledge of Latin and Algebra.”¹⁰⁵ In an opposing view, Henry Roe Cloud, a Winnebago, supported the education of Native Americans, and became an activist for the cause. After attending several Native American boarding schools, Roe later became a BIA employee and the superintendent of the Haskell Indian School in Kansas in the 1930s. He believed native children were at a disadvantage because of their home lives. “The vast amount of education which the White child receives in the home...goes to make up for the deficiencies of the public schools. The Indian youth goes back into homes that have dominant interests altogether different from what has been taught at school.” Similarly to reformers, he argued that education was the key to assimilation for the entire culture. Once students no longer went home to parents uneducated by BIA schools, they would no longer be in conflict between “civilization” and traditional practices.¹⁰⁶

The WNIA and other reformers also supported efforts based on a misunderstanding of indigenous traditions and family structure. “Unfortunately among our people almost every woman and man is married more than once, and the children of these various marriages, though often both parents may be living, are really orphans. Luella was an orphan...Her old grandmother is a medicine woman, and used all her arts to draw Luella away from Christ, but in vain.”¹⁰⁷ Reformers often misunderstood indigenous forms of family organization, as well as childcare. Although reliance on female relatives outside of a nuclear family unit to help in childrearing was common

¹⁰⁵ Laura Cornelius Kellogg, “Some Facts and Figures on Indian Education,” *Quarterly Journal* 1 (1913): 34-46, quoted in Hoxie, *Talking Back to Civilization*, 51-56.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Roe Cloud, “Education of the American Indian,” *Quarterly Journal* 2 (1914): 203-9, quoted in Hoxie, *Talking Back to Civilization*, 56-61.

¹⁰⁷ Mary Collins, “Ta-Sina-Sna-Win (Her Sounding-Robe)” *The Indian’s Friend* 2 no. 10 (June 1890): 2.

among various Native American communities, some reformers used it to argue that indigenous mothers neglected their children.¹⁰⁸ Luella's story reflected the misunderstandings of kinship networks and traditions that maternalists used to support their argument for the education of indigenous girls and women.

Oftentimes reformers gave their female students the responsibility for assimilating native men. Maternalists argued that if they taught women motherhood and housekeeping, it would eventually help assimilate the entire family. Indigenous girls were taught that if they kept their husbands and children healthy, the men in their family would be able to grow strong and keep clear heads. This, in turn, would make the men good citizens, which White women reformers hoped the creation of individual family homes and Native American education would create beginning with the passing of the Dawes Act.¹⁰⁹

Another important aspect of Native American education that White women were crucial to was the "outing system." To further the lessons aimed towards indigenous girls, the outing system placed Native American students into the homes of White families. Although this system existed before Reel wrote her curriculum, she was a large advocate of placing children in White families, and encouraged educators reading the curriculum to continue supporting the practice. Reel believed that the biggest advantages to the outing system included the possibility that being placed in the home of a White family would rid the indigenous child of any "inherited weaknesses and tendencies."¹¹⁰ Through the outing system, educators expected girls to learn how to run a household through first-

¹⁰⁸ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 148-149.

¹¹⁰ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 190.

hand experience. By cooking, cleaning, and sewing for a White family, alongside a White woman, an indigenous girl would “unconsciously” take on the traits that Reel believed girls needed to be model American citizens. Reel also explained that the longer an indigenous child was with a White family, the more closely they would resemble a civilized citizen when they grew up. This idea advocated a long-term placement of indigenous children with White families. Any discussion of how the indigenous parents or family should give consent for their child to live with a White family, or how the biological family should keep in contact with the child was not discussed in Reel’s curriculum. White officials created the outing system to educate indigenous children in a more direct way than schooling alone.¹¹¹

The outing system encouraged White families to treat the indigenous children placed in their care like family, but that experience was rare. Although the creation of the outing system was to teach children how to live like citizens, families paid indigenous children for the chores they completed as part of their education. While in many ways this was paying for domestic labor, the curriculum argued that the work and pay received would lead the Native American children to want to return to their reservation when they were fully grown and buy a house.¹¹² This vision, however, was often not reality. White families frequently took advantage of the labor provided by indigenous students and refused to pay them the wages agreed upon. At the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, over one thousand students participated in the outing system in 1903. All students agreed to write back to Carlisle and their families once a month when accepting an outing experience. While the school created this requirement in order to print letters

¹¹¹ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 189-191.

¹¹² Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 189-191.

from students that praised the system, several of the participants wrote back to school officials describing their loneliness among the family, and the exploitation they faced while under the family's power. One student told the school that the woman in charge of the students repeatedly called them lazy and ugly and complained about their work ethic. The student was one of several who begged the school to change their placements. Even if students did enjoy experiencing the new culture and family, many often received low, if any, wages, making it difficult for them to save money to eventually return to the reservation and purchase a house. Additionally, the outing system eventually fell apart at many schools. Instead of placing individual students with individual families for semester- or year-long arrangements, the schools would send out large groups of male students to local ranches or farms as work gangs.¹¹³ These students never experienced being incorporated into a White family, and officials' original ideas of the outing system making indigenous children want to return to their reservation and emulate the family structure rarely occurred.

As attention turned to the medicalization of childbirth, some reservations attempted to instruct indigenous women in healthcare. The BIA believed that pregnant indigenous women would be more likely to give birth in hospitals if more Native American women were nurses. While the government wanted more births in reservation hospitals, they feared that women from the same tribe being employed to assist their community would still encourage traditional practices. For this reason, many Indian agents tried to stop indigenous women from being employed by their own reservation's hospital. Susie Yellowtail, a Crow woman trained as a healthcare worker on the

¹¹³ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 156-163.

reservation in Montana, received continuous complaints from superiors while training in the Crow Agency hospital in the 1930s. The complaints kept her from being fully employed by the hospital, and instead led her to resign and become an activist in indigenous women's healthcare issues. Yellowtail's story mirrored multiple other women's who received training for health-related careers before their reservation agency eventually pushed them to leave for another hospital.¹¹⁴

The encouragement of family bonds between White women and indigenous children was not unique to the outing system. The BIA also asked that boarding school employees not have their own children in their care, so that the employee's attention could be fully focused on the indigenous students. Additionally, the BIA asked White female teachers and workers to continually ensure they kept boarding school rooms clean and decorated. By keeping up rooms, the BIA hoped the school would become a "home" for the indigenous students.¹¹⁵

The BIA also instructed female employees in day schools, as well as boarding schools, to ensure the indigenous girls constantly had an example of an ideal home. When female teachers were not busy with lessons, BIA rules asked them to visit the mothers of students and instruct them in housekeeping duties, including cooking, cleaning, and garment mending, much like female industrial teachers. While in the day school, however, the BIA and officials in the Indian School Service, like Reel, expected all employees to make the school "a civilized home among the Indians."¹¹⁶ As the outing system encouraged the creation of family-like bonds, so did the day school. BIA rules

¹¹⁴ Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 79-80.

¹¹⁵ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian Schools Service*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 19-24.

¹¹⁶ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian Schools Service*, 20.

instructed the female housekeepers of schools to act like a mother to indigenous girls. The housekeeper would ask female students to help prepare lunch and give lessons in domestic duties.¹¹⁷ In all aspects of Native American education, female employees held positions as examples of the kind of mother and homemaker U.S. officials wanted indigenous women to become, in order to assimilate them into White American culture.

Ramifications in Reproductive Health

Reformers' focus on reproductive health and model of motherhood based on White women led to further attention on childbirth among indigenous women. The BIA used White boarding schoolteachers and families incorporating indigenous children into their homes as a strategy to teach girls how to be mothers and housewives themselves. A major aspect of the motherhood that reformers hoped indigenous women would emulate, however, was childbirth practices. Because hospital birth gained attention with middle-class White women with the advent of scientific motherhood, reformers hoped it would also become part of indigenous women's practices through assimilation. Despite this push, many native women continued to use traditional practices combined with the new push for a medicalization of childbirth. For example, indigenous women would still have midwives present in the hospital, or would request physicians attend a homebirth. Physicians, however, argued that these traditions stood in the way of total assimilation, and that hospitals were responsible for ending the practices.¹¹⁸

These arguments set the stage for physicians to intervene in reproduction with selective breeding. Throughout the twentieth century, eugenicists would target Native

¹¹⁷ Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian Schools Service*, 20.

¹¹⁸ Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 89-91.

Americans for sterilization, with a strong resurgence in the 1920s. Many White Americans believed in eugenics, the idea that the Anglo-Saxon race was biologically superior and could be further improved by directly stopping the reproduction of any other race. Within indigenous communities, reservation officials encouraged sterilization to young women in order to permanently keep them from having children. Sometimes, however, physicians performed sterilization procedures without the woman's consent. Surgeons performed sterilizations without informing women while they were under anesthesia for other gynecological procedures. Physicians in reservation hospitals supported and carried out eugenical practices in order to keep who they perceived as "unfit" from reproducing. For a two-year period in the 1930s, one surgeon on the Crows' reservation carried out one sterilization procedure for every six and a half births.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Between 1880-1920, the U.S. government undertook many efforts to erase Native American culture and replace it with that of Anglo Americans. One of the major ways assimilation policies took shape was through education. By forcing indigenous children to attend schools created specifically to assimilate students, U.S. policy attempted to target the youngest generation of Native Americans and teach them how to be ideal citizens. Through these efforts, White women reformers found a space to create mother-like bonds with indigenous children and serve as examples of ideal mothers and homemakers. White women used maternalist rhetoric to argue that women could be taught how to be mothers. Many field matrons told indigenous parents that sending their

¹¹⁹ Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 89-91.

children to school would help them reach equality among American society.¹²⁰ Instead, lessons taught indigenous girls their place was in the home, on the reservation. The outing system in place at numerous schools even made indigenous girls domestic laborers in White homes under the guise of teaching them housekeeping and setting them up for financial independence. While classes taught girls how to be housewives and mothers based on the expanding field of scientific domesticity, White females employed among schools and communities served as examples of the ideal female citizen. Some maternalists argued that women had a biological instinct to nurture and protect their children, but many reformers involved in U.S. Indian policy were convinced that women could be taught how to be mothers, and in that way, could assimilate a culture.

¹²⁰ Hoxie, *Final Promise*, 191.

III. MATERNALIST IDEALS IN THE ADOPTION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

Introduction

In 1890, Hope Ghiselin, a schoolteacher on the San Carlos Reservation of the Western Apaches, in Arizona, wrote to the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA) who published her letter in their journal, *The Indian's Friend*, informing them that she had recently taken in an orphan Apache girl. According to Ghiselin, she had been begging the Indian agent on the reservation, Captain Bullis, to find her a child to take in since she arrived at the reservation three years prior. She called the girl her "Thanksgiving present" from the agent. In her letter, Ghiselin stated that after being asked to take in the orphan, she named her Lizzie after her mother and dressed her up in new clothing.¹²¹ Almost fifteen years later, another schoolteacher, Mary Disette, legally adopted a three-year-old Zuni girl, whom she named Dorothy. Disette herself, however, did not intend to raise the child. Dorothy was actually the second indigenous child Disette adopted. By adopting Dorothy, Disette attempted to continue a practice she saw as benevolent. "[Dorothy] is being raised by my adopted Zuni daughter Daisy. It is very gratifying to see Daisy's willingness to pass on to another helpless orphan the care and affection which she has had, and which have borne such rich fruit in her own transfigured life."¹²² Ghiselin and Disette both used their connections as schoolteachers in order to adopt indigenous children.

¹²¹ "From San Carlos, Arizona," *The Indian's Friend* 3 no. 2 (November 1890): 1.

¹²² "News and Notes," *The Indian's Friend* 16 no. 6 (February 1904): 5.

The maternalism used by reformers to support indigenous child removal, as well as the education of indigenous women and children in motherhood, created spaces where White women saw themselves in motherly roles towards indigenous children. During their work as field matrons, school recruiters, teachers, and boarding school employees, White women like Ghiselin and Dissette interacted with indigenous children in ways that modeled the maternalism they sought to teach others. White women were in charge of keeping children's living spaces clean, looking after the health of their students, and teaching lessons in domesticity. These lessons and actions reinforced the maternalist rhetoric used by reformers who argued that an ideal form of motherhood could be taught, and that assimilation efforts would be successful through the education of indigenous children.

Maternalist rhetoric that argued that mothers did not have an inherent instinct to care for their biological child supported the idea that indigenous women should be educated for motherhood. A letter published in *The Indian's Friend* offers a good illustration of these ideas. After discussing indigenous men learning from industrial and agricultural schools, the letter stated, "the women (except a few younger ones who may have attended some Industrial School), are left to plod on in ignorance of even the lesser essential acquirements of the mother of a home—such as cleanliness, good management, and the advantages and comfort of the household methods of civilization."¹²³ The article continued with a congratulation for a White woman recently hired as a field matron. Reformers believed that instruction from White teachers was the only way indigenous women would learn to be acceptable mothers.

¹²³ "Another Testimony," *The Indian's Friend* 2 no. 12 (August 1890): 2.

These ideas led multiple reformers, including Ghiselin and Dissette, to adopt indigenous children and formalize their perceived motherly role. As more and more White families adopted indigenous children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the practice reinforced U.S. Indian policies aimed at assimilation as well as the role of mothers in American society. The adoption of indigenous children into White families was a direct reflection of the maternalist rhetoric used by reformers to support indigenous child removal and the education of native women and children in scientific motherhood.¹²⁴

The Importance of Motherhood and Growing Approval of Adoption in Society

Progressive Ideals that Supported Adoption

In order to understand and analyze the maternalist ideals of reformers who adopted indigenous children, one needs to understand how ideas about moral training and good citizenship intertwined more broadly in society. Many saw women as the expert in charge of moral instruction. Maternalist rhetoric asserted that children needed guidance from their mothers in order to learn the values important to American society. But orphaned children, who were in foster care and other state-supported institutions that relied on government funding, lacked this instruction. These children threatened the nation's ability to have upstanding citizens and a harmonious society. Because of this

¹²⁴ "Scientific motherhood" refers to the Progressive Era focus on personal hygiene, sanitation, and other scientific information about child development in an attempt to decrease infant mortality rates. Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 32-33. Elliott West, "Children on the Plains Frontier," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950* ed. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 26-41, which focuses on the role of children in the American West, also informed my research.

threat, maternalists often saw adoption as a way to provide orphans with important moral training.¹²⁵

Ideas connecting moral training to good citizenship development contributed to the growing popularity of adoption in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly when combined with ideals equating women with motherhood. The act of adopting a child served two goals important to Progressive reformers: saving a child and becoming a mother.¹²⁶ *The Delineator*, a monthly magazine advertised for middle-class women, helped to circulate and popularize the idea of adoption. In 1907, *The Delineator* started a “Child-Rescue Campaign” that featured photos of different orphaned children in each month’s issue in the hopes that the magazine’s readers would “rescue” a child by adopting. *The Delineator* had the ability to reach large numbers when promoting the campaign: first published in 1873 for middle-class women, the magazine had 30,000 subscribers in 1876. By the early 1900s, when the campaign began, the magazine’s readership exceeded 480,000. The main focus of the magazine was to provide articles to women involved in Progressive Era reforms but still in charge of household duties.¹²⁷ In February of 1908, the magazine accompanied photos of four orphans with stories about the adoptions of previous “Delineator children” previously highlighted by the magazine.¹²⁸

In its attempt to popularize adoption, the child-rescue campaign circulated the twinned notions motherhood was a woman’s highest calling and that the ideal American

¹²⁵ Julie Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own: Adoption and the Changing Culture of Motherhood, 1851-1950* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 41, 75-81.

¹²⁶ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 41, 75-81.

¹²⁷ Sidney R. Bland, “Shaping the Life of the New Woman: The Crusading Years of *The Delineator*” *American Periodicals* 19 no. 2 (2009): 165-167.

¹²⁸ “The Delineator Child-Rescue Campaign,” *The Delineator* 71 no. 2 (February 1908): 249-251.

family included children. These notions placed a higher value on nurturing and caring than on biological familial ties. Articles related to the campaign repeatedly told readers how much joy children could bring into childless households. In addition, previously adopted children had their stories told to inform potential adopters that with parents, dependent children could go on to accomplish great things. These articles in *The Delineator*'s child-rescue campaign attempted to appeal to a perceived "maternal instinct" by persuading women that their homes and lives were incomplete without children, whose futures parents could help shape.¹²⁹

In addition to publicizing how mothers and children needed each other and the importance of adoption, the child-rescue campaign continuously warned readers of the dangers behind motherless children. To promote the campaign, Charles R. Henderson, president of the National Children's Home Society, informed readers of what was at stake for orphaned children. "Some one [*sic*] has said that half the vagabondage of the world lies in neglected childhood. And if this hundred thousand should drift uncared-for into vagabondage and crime—and the next hundred thousand—but we need not follow the picture."¹³⁰ Discussions of life within an orphanage and stories of children transformed by moral guidance from adoptive mothers were frequent in the campaign's articles. *The Delineator* attempted to appeal to women's patriotic duty to raise upstanding citizens; orphaned children who did not receive proper mothering threatened the character of the nation. Although some maternalists sought to unite mothers across class and ethnicity, others sought to privilege Whites of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant traditions; adoption

¹²⁹ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 53-54.

¹³⁰ Charles R. Henderson, "Home-Finding: An Idea That Grew," *The Delineator* 71 no. 4 (April 1908): 609.

could be a way to overtake the birth rates of undesirable immigrants, namely those from South and Central Europe that were arriving in such high numbers during the Progressive Era. While the birthrate among White, middle-class women dropped, that of European immigrants increased.¹³¹ To combat this issue many believed it was the duty of White women to adopt and raise dependent children, whether they were White or not. If all dependent children could be assimilated into White, middle-class culture by their adoptive mothers, they could grow to be a large generation of American citizens with moral instruction that many believed only White mothers could teach. Supporters of this idea, like those behind *The Delineator*, consistently reiterated the ideal aspects of motherhood that orphaned children would miss out on, like guidance in moral values, while appealing to a woman's sense of patriotic duty. While arguing that women deserved the right to vote because they raised the next generation of citizens, maternalists also reminded women of their duty to continue to help future voters by any means necessary—specifically by adopting children.¹³² At the end of *The Delineator's* "Child-Rescue Campaign," the magazine claimed to be responsible for 150 adoptions of the children featured in the articles.¹³³ The campaign attempted to appeal to women's sense of civic duty, as well as their perceived inherent knowledge of nurturing and childcare. The concept of citizenship, however, was different between women and the male children they raised. While mothers were expected to raise future voters, the women themselves did not have the vote. In addition to advocating for increased participation in issues affecting women and children, maternalists argued that women should be given the vote.

¹³¹ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 57.

¹³² Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 56-58.

¹³³ Claudia Nelson, *Little Strangers: Portrayals of Adoption and Foster Care in America, 1850-1929* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 116.

The maternalist argument for suffrage added to the belief that motherhood should give women greater authority outside of the domestic sphere.¹³⁴

Why Childless Women Looked to Adopt

“Nontraditional” adopters used adoption to construct a common identity around motherhood. Single women, divorcees, widows, lesbians, and women who could not biologically have children all fell under the label of “nontraditional.” While some reformers argued that women deserved greater authority because of their knowledge of childcare, those without that experience were left behind. As American culture and maternalist rhetoric placed increasing value on women’s ability to parent, motherhood became central to women’s identities. Maternalist rhetoric argued that women’s greatest achievement was being a mother, and that they held a special instinct to care for their children that was central to American society and its future generations. Because of this, many women who looked to adoption to create a family did so because without children they could not navigate the increasing sphere of society that maternalists were attempting to open to women.¹³⁵ The glorification of motherhood and its importance to women’s identity and place in society was an important reason behind many women adopting.

In response to motherhood becoming crucial to the female identity, married women without children were seen as selfish by maternalists who argued that motherhood was a woman’s highest calling. The wife of former Vice President Adlai Stevenson, Letitia, wrote an article in *The Delineator* in 1908 titled “The Joys of

¹³⁴ Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 43, 49-50.

¹³⁵ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 61-62, 75.

Motherhood.”¹³⁶ After praising a woman she noticed at church with five children, Letitia stated, “I have no criticisms to offer in regard to the women whose lives are spent in ease and affluence, and whose selfish love for display or self-indulgence leads them to a barren life and a childless old age.”¹³⁷ In addition to the belief that childless women were selfish, others questioned a woman’s gender identity if she had no children. Individuals wrote to *The Delineator* to tell readers that females who said they did not want children must not understand their womanhood, or were just hiding their strong desire to have children. Maternalists could not believe that a woman who said she did not want children was telling the truth. In 1913, a working-class woman wrote to *The Delineator* to express her desire to be a man instead of a woman who could only work for unequal wages. The next issue held responses from multiple women and men who criticized the woman’s values. One woman replied that the other did not actually want to be a man, but instead a mother capable of staying home with her children. “But what this woman is really craving with all her heart is not the privilege (which it might be in cases like hers) of being a man, but the God given right to be a woman.”¹³⁸ A male responder argued that the maternalists advocating for increased authority over issues affecting women and children would help the working-class woman achieve greater power if she had children. “[Women] will achieve all rights to which their bodies and brains give them an implicit title. They will have a larger political life, a larger motherhood.”¹³⁹ The expression of a desire for anything other than motherhood from women was met with suspicion and

¹³⁶ Mrs. Adlai E. Stevenson (Letitia), “The Joys of Motherhood,” *The Delineator* 71 no. 3 (March 1908): 410; “Adlai Ewing Stevenson,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 7 no. 2 (July 1914): 125.

¹³⁷ Mrs. Adlai E. Stevenson (Letitia), “The Joys of Motherhood,” *The Delineator* 71 no. 3 (March 1908): 410, 483.

¹³⁸ “I Want to Be Really a Woman,” *The Delineator* 83 no. 1 (July 1913): 10.

¹³⁹ “I Want to Be Really a Woman,” *The Delineator* 83 no. 1 (July 1913): 10.

disbelief. Maternalism held that women were biologically destined for motherhood, and that wanting anything else was unpatriotic, against women's equality, and unwomanly.

The pervasive notion that motherhood was a woman's destiny led adoptive mothers to use the increasing importance of scientific domesticity and childcare in order to be accepted by biological mothers. Much like field matrons and female teachers in Native American boarding schools, a campaign to develop classes on childhood development sought to teach women new aspects of motherhood. While scientific domesticity was a large part of reformers' platforms for Native American education, other maternalists, especially those attempting to expand the welfare state, did not begin to really accept the idea until the 1920s. After this, the concept of a maternal instinct was rejected in favor of scientific facts. Adoptive mothers argued that *all* women needed to be educated in scientific domesticity in order to be the best mother possible. Regardless of whether their child was biological or adopted, many argued that women could not rely on a maternal instinct alone.¹⁴⁰

Reformers and Adoption

How Adoption Practices Began to Mirror Reformers' Maternalism

As adoption gained approval among American society, reformers began to use their positions to adopt indigenous children and reinforced their maternalist rhetoric. Reformers who adopted indigenous children emphasized the belief that children did not automatically belong with their biological mothers. Instead, White women took indigenous children away from their biological mothers on the argument that they were

¹⁴⁰ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 84-85.

unfit parents, or because of the assumption that White children *should* stay with their biological mothers. Many women were afraid that if they adopted a White child, a social worker would eventually come to take the child away to reunite them with their biological family. For this reason, adopting an indigenous child was thought to be more secure for keeping the child long-term. Even if indigenous parents did not agree to place their child up for adoption, the argument that they could not raise the child correctly often led to the adoptive parents gaining custody. Again, maternalists' thought that the ideal motherhood was one that mirrored White, middle-class practices. Although the BIA employed field matrons to educate indigenous women, many reformers believed Native American women would never fully be ideal mothers. For this reason, multiple reformers adopted children away from Native American parents by labeling them unfit. Dissette, and Ghiselin, the two schoolteachers mentioned above, and others like them, never explained to the WNIA where their adopted child's parents were, nor the potential pain separation caused them. Instead, *The Indian's Friend*, the WNIA's monthly publication, emphasized the good deed these women did by adopting a child. Dissette even framed her own adoption of Daisy as transfiguring the girl's life and believed that Dorothy would most likely have the same experience under the care of Daisy. Dissette assumed that because she raised Daisy instead of indigenous parents, Daisy was then capable of raising another child correctly. Dissette also told the WNIA she adopted two other indigenous children at the same time as Dorothy but placed them in a boarding school in Albuquerque. She referred to all three children as "waifs," but again gave no indication of where the children's parents were or how she came to be the guardian for the four

children that she obtained legal control over through her years as a schoolteacher.¹⁴¹

Dissette's adoption of multiple children reflected the maternalist beliefs of reformers that indigenous children needed saving, as well as the ease with which White women could adopt Native Americans. Almost a decade after Dissette's adoption of Daisy however, public opinion about the practice itself began to change.

By looking at the changes in adoption practices, one can see that adoptive parents began to use the same ideals behind assimilationist reformers' unique variant of maternalism to support their adoptions, especially regarding the presence of a biological instinct in mothers. Assimilationists continued to push back against the idea that an inherent instinct drove motherhood, but some maternalists argued that biological mothers knew innately how to care for their children. The idea of a biological instinct was the most popular argument against adoptive mothers. Because they did not physically birth their children, they were not seen as "real" mothers.¹⁴²

In order to fight against the claim that motherhood was dependent on biology, adoptive mothers took any chance possible to tell the public about their experiences. At the end of 1908, *The Delineator* published letters from women inspired by their child-rescue campaign. Six women wrote to inform the magazine that after seeing the stories and pictures of children featured in the magazine's campaign, they contacted orphanages in the hope of adopting. The women all wrote that their lives had improved with children, and that they were thankful the magazine brought up the possibility of adopting.¹⁴³ In a 1922 article from *The Survey*, a monthly journal that focused on social reforms during the

¹⁴¹ "News and Notes," *The Indian's Friend* 16 no. 6 (February 1904): 5.

¹⁴² Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 75-76, 116-117.

¹⁴³ "A Christmas Gift to the Delineator," *The Delineator* 72 no. 6 (December 1908):995-996, 1058-1059.

Progressive Era, an adoptive mother wrote about her day-to-day life with two boys. She explained that she decided to adopt after six years of marriage with no children. After adopting, though, she was met with constant advice and criticism from people who knew she adopted. Her neighbors wondered if the children remembered their biological parents and worried that if the parents were unknown, the adoptive mother would have no idea how the children might turn out. The neighbors placed extreme value on genetics and inherited traits, warning the mother that she had no idea what might happen. To counter the invasive questions and advice from her acquaintances, the mother informed the magazine that the love and care she gave the children was all that really mattered. She reminded readers that sometimes the most difficult children came from parents who did not care about them and that often people had children who never actually wanted them. By adopting orphaned children, the woman stated, she was ensuring love and care were given, and attempting to shape “minds of future voters” as best she could.¹⁴⁴ Her arguments pushed back against the claims that biological mothers were superior mothers.

The discussion of inherited traits was part of a larger body of thought during the early twentieth century. Before the 1890s, many believed that children inherited characteristics such as laziness and poverty from their parents. During the Progressive Era, however, reformers began to argue that unattractive traits came about because of an immoral environment, not biological inheritance. Many adoptive parents agreed with reformers, and argued that if they provided a nurturing and healthy atmosphere, the child could overcome any inherited trait perceived as “bad.”¹⁴⁵ While adoptive parents pushed back against an emphasis on biology, social workers took an opposite view. They began

¹⁴⁴ “An Adopted Mother Speaks,” *The Survey* 47 no. 25 (March 18, 1922): 962-963.

¹⁴⁵ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 28-29.

to pay close attention to dependent children's physical characteristics and personality in an attempt to place them with families that had similar perceived traits. Social workers believed that if they placed a child with parents who shared a variety of traits, including appearance, race, and intellect, it would make the family more "natural." Many adoption agencies argued that by placing children with similar parents, it would be easier for the parents to understand and care for the child.¹⁴⁶

How Changes in the 1920s Led to Adoptions of Native American Children

Although adoptive parents continued to promote their ability to care for children, the stigma against adoption itself continued; moreover, nontraditional adopters were increasingly met with suspicion in the 1920s. It was the policy of many adoption agencies to ensure single women could support a child on their own before a social worker would approve a woman for adoption. This meant that the majority of single adopters were independently wealthy or earning enough in a profession to be able to support themselves and a child.¹⁴⁷ Before 1920, single women were seen as fulfilling their duty to the state and their gender by adopting on their own. Even nontraditional adopters had little difficulty adopting a child as a single mother, and some were even pushed to do so by maternalists who felt motherhood was every woman's calling. In another reply to the woman claiming she wished she was a man, *The Delineator* published a response from a woman telling unmarried women they should "enrich [their] life...by choosing one

¹⁴⁶ Brian Paul Gill, "Adoption Agencies and the Search for the Ideal Family, 1918-1965," in *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives* ed. E. Wayne Carp (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 160-162.

¹⁴⁷ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 104-105.

among the destitute children”¹⁴⁸ The ease of adoption for single women, however, did not last as gender roles became more severe in the following decade.

This shift in attitudes toward adoption was linked to the development of more rigid ideals about family life and gender roles. During the 1920s, changing views of family and childhood development led social workers and the public to regard nontraditional adopters with suspicion. Social scientists and psychologists believed that the ideal family included a father and mother who shared emotional intimacy, who regarded their children as invaluable.¹⁴⁹

In addition, social scientists increasingly argued that women should have personal fulfillment and sexual pleasure with their partner, making it strange that any woman would not marry. For this reason, unmarried single women and lesbians were seen by the majority of society as deviating from the new sexual norm. Prior to the 1920s, when single women were presumed celibate it was seen as acceptable and suitable for motherhood. By the late 1920s, however, homophobia and rigid ideals about gender roles in a traditional family led to a mistrust and skepticism of single women attempting to adopt a child.¹⁵⁰

The changing gender norms of the 1920s affected male parents as well. Sociologists and social workers expected fathers to be an example of how men should behave for their sons, and an example of an ideal husband for their daughters. Like those who discouraged adoptive single-mothers, family experts believed men were crucial to

¹⁴⁸ “I Want to Be Really a Woman,” *The Delineator* 83 no. 1 (July 1913): 10.

¹⁴⁹ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 114-116.

¹⁵⁰ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 114-116.

socializing children. For this reason, both prospective adoptive parents had to prove their ability to be parents based on the gender roles expected of them.¹⁵¹

Many adoptive parents believed they had a gender-specific role in a child's life. Women most often discussed adoption in terms of their capability to nurture and care for a child. Men, however, discussed it in terms of their ability to provide for a child. Adoptive fathers assured social workers they had a well-paying job, had completed their education, had no debt, and owned their home.¹⁵² While the gender norms of the 1920s led to an increased importance on adoptive fathers, they continued to scrutinize nontraditional adopters.

Leading the opposition against single adoptive mothers were a group of maternalists working towards expanding the welfare state. These reformers believed that adoption policy and placements should fall under social welfare professionals' authority, as well as that of "the state." Arguing that adoption fell under the reformers' agenda, this group of maternalists worked to circulate propaganda against single women looking to adopt. One social welfare professional provided her expert information to an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* about adoption. The expert discussed the needs of orphaned children, their development, and the importance of a stable, middle- to upper-class married couple in adopting. To explain why single women were not ideal adopters, the welfare professional stated, "we are not trying to fill the psychic or emotional needs of the unmarried women; that's their problem, not ours."¹⁵³ The expert giving an interview to the magazine did not believe that single women were capable of being the ideal parent

¹⁵¹ Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 116-177, 144-145.

¹⁵² Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 116-177, 144-145.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Frazer, "The Baby Market," *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 1, 1930, 25, 85-88.

to a child. Some maternalists argued that without a male parental figure, adopted children would not have adequate support. Instead, they believed the adoptive mother would smother the child with the attention that, without a husband, had no correct outlet.¹⁵⁴ The magazine article served as one of many examples of how maternalists fought against single women adopting after 1920.

To circumvent stigmas, single women looked to the adoption of Native American children as a solution. In the same way that indigenous children were easier to adopt because their potential to be reunited with their biological families was lower than White children's, they were also easier for single women to adopt. As social workers began to take over more aspects of adoptions, they held tighter control over child placements. The adoptions of indigenous children, however, continued to have less state regulation and oversight from social workers than those of White children. Single women did not face the same judgement and rejection with their attempts at adopting Native American children than they did with White children. For this reason, many "nontraditional" adopters sought out indigenous children in order to bypass regulations and policies of adoption agencies and laws.¹⁵⁵

Adoptions of Indigenous Children

To better understand how the changes in the practice of adoption affected indigenous children, as well as how reformers put their maternalist rhetoric into practice, this section looks at individual adoptions. Not only did the adoptions mirror American societal ideas about race and child placement, they also reflected how reformers

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Frazer, "The Baby Market," *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 1, 1930, 88.

¹⁵⁵ Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 29.

solidified their roles among Native Americans by adopting children. By examining specific adoptions, one can see how adoptions of indigenous children exhibited reformers' maternalism and society's ideas about dependent children.

Throughout the Progressive Era, race informed a multitude of reform efforts. Many social theorists argued that different races had genetically inherited characteristics that made them "inferior" to Anglo-Saxons. This idea was known as scientific racism. Some progressives promoted the idea that education could alter biological traits and improve various races. Their improvement, then, would make them deserving of equal rights, including voting. Some progressives thought that the U.S. government passed the fifteenth amendment, which gave all men the right to vote, prematurely. Reformers argued that recently freed Black men did not understand democracy and could not be counted on to vote correctly. For this reason, many supported the disenfranchisement rampant in the southern U.S. and believed that segregating African Americans until they received an education and "advanced" was the best solution. Scientific racism supported segregation and southern Jim Crow laws in the hopes that they would encourage racial "progress."¹⁵⁶ The goal of many progressives was to assimilate *all* races into White American culture, which informed multiple different reform efforts, including that of maternalists and Native Americans.

Race played a large role in social workers' decisions of child placement. Indeed, perhaps it played a greater role than shifting, hardening family and gender norms. While social workers were hesitant to place a White child with a single White mother, a single White mother was believed to be a better guardian than an indigenous child's biological

¹⁵⁶ Stromquist, *Re-inventing "The People,"* 131-152.

parents, single or not.¹⁵⁷ Maternalist reformers and White families often adopted indigenous children away from their biological parents whether they were unfit to care for the children or not.

Some indigenous children had positive experiences after being adopted into a White family, which is seen in the stories of the Wetherill family, told from both the adoptive mother's and child's perspective. Louisa Wade Wetherill was an established figure in the Navajo community by the turn of the twentieth century. Having moved to Arizona to set up a trading post with her husband John, Louisa quickly attempted to immerse herself in Navajo language and culture to better interact with the patrons of her trading post. She claimed that they eventually called her *Asthon Sosi* ("Little Mother of the Navajos"), and came to her for help with conflicts on the reservation and sickness.¹⁵⁸ By 1920, the Wetherills had adopted three Native American girls throughout their time living in Kayenta, Arizona. Louisa stated their first adopted daughter was brought to them by a Ute slave woman when her chief needed medical help, who later asked for their help with another child. Louisa stated that the woman's husband was cruel and had multiple wives. When asked if they would take in the second girl, the Wetherills brought the child to the Tuba City Boarding School along with her older sister and their first adopted child, Esther. When they returned to take Esther home from school in the spring, they also took her younger sister, whom they named Fanny. Unfortunately, Esther contracted tuberculosis in the boarding school and did not survive her stay at a sanitarium

¹⁵⁷ Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 29.

¹⁵⁸ Louisa Wade Wetherill, *Traders to the Navajos*, 1934 (Reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953), 212, 220-224.

meant to help her recover. Shortly after, the Tuba City school contacted the Wetherills to ask them to take in another young girl, Betty Rodgers.¹⁵⁹

While Louisa's version of Betty's adoption mentioned only the school asking her to take in another child, Betty's own account differed slightly. She recalled being removed from her biological family and placed in a boarding school. "I was taken from my Navajo people. I don't know why they picked me. I was just a baby."¹⁶⁰ In addition to being placed in the Tuba City school, Betty also remembered their mistreatment of the students. After learning about the schoolteachers beating the students for speaking their own language and seeing a boy being whipped, Louisa informed government officials of the cruelty and demanded they stop. When Betty was able to leave school for a break in the spring, several of the Wetherills' nephews took her to their home. Betty was four years old when she arrived at the Wetherills'. "Well, they raised me then, and took care of me, and treated me just like one of their own."¹⁶¹

Racial ideas had real implications, often negative, for the adopted indigenous children. Children grew up away from their own culture and family, which was often a difficult situation for them. While some adoptive parents seemed to have formed genuine familial bonds with their adopted children, many were not as lucky and grew up feeling the results of their familial displacement.¹⁶² While Betty described herself as fortunate to be adopted by the Wetherills, the experiences of other indigenous children taken in by White families were not as positive. On December 29, 1890, the U.S. army killed almost

¹⁵⁹ Wetherill, *Traders to the Navajos*, 231-232.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Betty Rodgers by Brad Cole, July 14, 1999, United Indian Traders Association Oral History Project, Cline Library Special Collections, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Betty Rodgers.

¹⁶² Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 32.

300 Lakotas, almost two-thirds of whom were women and children, at the Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota.¹⁶³ Following the violence, President Benjamin Harrison fired the general responsible for Wounded Knee and replaced him with leadership directed to investigate the massacre and those involved. On January 1, 1891, army officials returned to the site of Wounded Knee in order to bury the dead but instead found ten people still alive, including an infant girl. Before dying, a Lakota woman who was shot at close range turned to wrap herself around her baby in order to cover the girl from the cold and wind. Three days later, soldiers heard the baby's cries and pulled the living infant from her mother's frozen arms. Several people cared for the child, from an army doctor immediately after the infant's discovery to a Lakota woman who passed the baby around in search of a wet nurse, before the girl ended up at a trading post under the care of Annie and John Yellow Bird. John Yellow Bird was the half-brother of Chester White Butterfly, a Lakota, who believed the Yellow Birds would be good parents to the infant. Four days after the baby was found, General Leonard Colby visited the trading post and heard the story of the infant. General Colby commanded the Nebraska National Guard. He traveled to South Dakota in order to lend his troops and his leadership to the investigation into the massacre. Colby was met in South Dakota by Buffalo Bill Cody, who took him to the Yellow Birds' trading post where he learned of the Lakota infant. Buffalo Bill had plans to keep her himself. Whether Buffalo Bill intended to add the child to his Wild West show or give her to friends of his who wanted to adopt never mattered. On the night of January 6, General Colby outbid Buffalo Bill in a heated bartering

¹⁶³ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

exchange within the Yellow Birds' store. Once Colby was given the child, he returned to Nebraska in order to legally adopt the baby.¹⁶⁴

After obtaining the Lakota girl, Colby informed his wife by telegram that he was bringing the child back to their home in Beatrice, Nebraska. Clara Bewick Colby was an active suffragist as well as publisher and editor of *The Woman's Tribune*. When General Colby decided to bring an indigenous child back with him, Clara was not even in Nebraska but was instead in Washington, D.C.¹⁶⁵ In the February 21, 1891 issue of *The Woman's Tribune*, Clara reported that her husband had acquired "one of the most pathetic mementoes" of Wounded Knee.¹⁶⁶ Her description of the massacre led to a depiction of the discovered infant as a historic relic from a battle between Native Americans and the "progress" that the U.S. Army symbolized. "The little dusky maid, although a full blood Indian of the most warlike and uncivilized race, seems to take kindly to all the favors of civilization."¹⁶⁷ Clara informed her readers that her husband had adopted the child and given her the name Marguerite Elizabeth. The Lakotas, however, had named the girl *Zintka Lanuni*, "Lost Bird."¹⁶⁸ Clara continued to use the name *Zintka Lanuni* when writing about the girl, who became a frequent subject in Clara's newspaper.

Clara's use of the indigenous girl to fill space in her paper reflected her attempts at reconciling her activism with her sudden role of "mother." These two things, however, remained incompatible. While her husband served as assistant attorney general, Clara was left to care for two-year-old *Zintka* on her own. Even though he adopted *Zintka*

¹⁶⁴ Renee Sansom Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee: Spirit of the Lakota* (New York City: Scribner Press, 1995), 44-46, 55-62, 70-71.

¹⁶⁵ Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 85.

¹⁶⁶ Clara Colby, "Zintka Lanuni: The Waif of Wounded Knee," *The Woman's Tribune*, February 21, 1891, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Colby, "Zintka Lanuni: The Waif of Wounded Knee," *The Woman's Tribune*, February 21, 1891, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Colby, "Zintka Lanuni: The Waif of Wounded Knee," *The Woman's Tribune*, February 21, 1891, 2.

before discussing it with Clara, General Colby did not believe Clara's work was as important as his and reminded her that it was her job as the mother to take care of the child. When Zintka was five, General Colby had an affair and blamed it on Clara's suffrage work that took her away from him. After leaving with Zintka, Clara remained in Washington, D.C., waiting for her husband to come back to her and acknowledge his daughter. The two remained on their own, however, struggling to adapt to Washington society. Zintka, often left with caregivers, never knew exactly where she fit in.¹⁶⁹

Clara brought Zintka with her to the printing offices out of necessity, which inspired her to dedicate an entire section of *The Woman's Tribune* to her adopted daughter. Named "Zintka Lanuni's Corner," the column included stories about the indigenous girl from her adoptive mother. In one "Zintka Lanuni's Corner," Clara wrote that her daughter was often confused about her lineage, allowing people to refer to her as Japanese but not Chinese or Eskimo. Zintka would often ask Clara about terms associated with Native American children, including "pappoose [sic]." Clara admitted that she would rather reject any affiliation with Native Americans, but knew she could not in order to give her daughter an understanding of her background.¹⁷⁰ At Clara's lectures and suffrage meetings, her fellow activists often discriminated against Zintka and ridiculed her along with her mother. Clara continued to support Zintka and attempted to find a way to help them both adjust.¹⁷¹

Being constantly on the move both with and without her mother, as well as being unsure about her own culture and background left Zintka extremely unhappy as she grew

¹⁶⁹ Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 128-140, 173-181, .

¹⁷⁰ Clara Colby, "Zintka Lanuni's Corner," *The Woman's Tribune*, August 17, 1895, 4.

¹⁷¹ Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 182-184.

up. General Colby never returned to his wife and daughter, and the anger and ridicule from Clara's peers for adopting a Native American child left her unsure of her next steps. Clara eventually attempted to place Zintka in a boarding school in North Carolina. A week later Clara received a telegram that told her the school had expelled Zintka and was sending her home. After placing Zintka in another boarding school, Clara and General Colby began fighting about who was responsible for her. While Clara begged the general to help with tuition costs, the general begged Clara for a divorce. In the midst of their fighting, Zintka begged to come back home to her mother.¹⁷² After she was able to leave boarding school, Zintka moved out on her own. Zintka remained impoverished for the rest of her life and in constant bad health after contracting syphilis from her first husband. She played an extra in various cowboy-and-Indian movies in 1912, and in a harsh twist of fate, joined Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show in 1914. In 1920, Zintka died of heart failure after catching the flu.¹⁷³

Betty and Zintka's vastly different lives with their adopted families reflected the complex bonds formed between indigenous children and White parents. Betty, adopted by the Wetherills, looked back fondly on her adoptive family and the time she spent with them. She worked at the family's trading post, and Betty and her husband, Buck Rodgers, eventually opened their own trading post. The Rodgers stayed in Arizona, running their business and raising their children. After giving up the trading post in the 1980s, Betty, in her seventies at the time, moved back to the land she and her husband purchased in

¹⁷² Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 209-210, 220, 230-233.

¹⁷³ Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 270-271, 279, 298-299.

Vermilion Cliffs.¹⁷⁴ Zintka, however, adopted by the Colbys, remained constantly on the move, unable to find her place in society after being taken from the Lakotas.

Despite increasing adoption laws, the act of adopting an indigenous child remained relatively easy. Even when there were state adoption laws, they were sometimes dismissed in cases involving indigenous children. In addition, White adoptive parents found several ways around the legal system in order to ensure they ended up with custody. As discussed previously, as public opinion around adoption changed to favor married couples as well as keeping White children with their biological parents, the adoption of indigenous children began to be seen as a way around those issues. Compounded with that, however, was a more lenient legal system that favored White adopters. In 1851, Massachusetts passed the Adoption of Children Act, the first law that ensured adoptions occurred for the best interests of the child, not the adults, in the U.S.¹⁷⁵ States began to pass similar laws, but they were not nation-wide until 1929, when every state had implemented some kind of regulation for adoption. While fighting to keep adoption under their authority in order to keep single women from adopting, social welfare professionals generally ignored any cases involving indigenous children during the 1920s. Because social workers gave so much attention to placements of White children to prove their expertise and importance in the adoption process, all other cases had much less oversight and regulation.¹⁷⁶ For this reason, the process of adoption, especially of indigenous children, remained somewhat informal and easy to manipulate between 1880 and 1930.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Betty Rodgers.

¹⁷⁵ An Act to Provide for the Adoption of Children, *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts* (May 24, 1851).

¹⁷⁶ Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 29.

In addition to the lenient process, reformers' maternalist rhetoric created an atmosphere where adoptive parents often never asked for the consent of the biological parents to adopt their child, because native mothers were easily deemed unfit. In their recollections of the adoption, neither Betty nor Louisa mentioned contacting Betty's parents. Requiring the consent of the child's biological parents was one aspect of the Massachusetts adoption law that many other states copied, but still often ignored when it came to indigenous children. Not only did Louisa take Betty directly from a boarding school, Louisa's description of how she ended up the guardian of Esther and Fanny were similarly informal. The indigenous mother of Esther and Fanny begged Louisa to take her daughters. When it came to Betty, Louisa noticed her being mistreated by school officials, and stepped in to take over Betty's care. These means of adoption reflected the popular belief that Native American children were better off with White mothers, regardless of whether the parents wanted to give them up, like Esther and Fanny's mother, or they had no actual choice, like Betty's.¹⁷⁷

Having already removed many children from their biological families to attend boarding schools, reformers then often took children directly from school to their homes. The Wetherills adopted Betty from a boarding school. After seeing the girl once on a visit, Louisa Wetherill stated she agreed to adopt Betty. According to Betty, however, Louisa stepped in after noticing the school mistreated its students. While the details differ, both Betty's and Louisa's recollections stated that the Wetherills adopted Betty directly from the boarding school. This mirrored a common practice created by indigenous child removal. Reformers that contributed to taking indigenous children from

¹⁷⁷ Wetherill, *Traders to the Navajos*, 230-232.

their homes and biological families to place them in boarding schools created a space where the separation of children from their parents was common and natural. Because of this, boarding schools and adoption became closely linked.¹⁷⁸

Several states quickly followed the Massachusetts act regulating adoption within their respective boundaries. Laws regarding the adoption of children from a state other than the one the adoptive parents lived in, however, developed much more slowly. While the Colbys legally adopted Zintka Lanuni through the legal system in January 1891, the decision to do so was made after bartering between two men. Instead of keeping the child with a Native American family that was ready and willing to take the child in and raise her as one of their own children, Colby and Buffalo Bill both immediately believed they had more claim to the child. Because General Colby feared other Lakotas would argue to keep and care for the child, he fled back to Nebraska and adopted Zintka through a court in his hometown.¹⁷⁹ Nebraska did not pass laws regarding the “importation” of dependent children from other states until almost fifteen years after Zintka was taken from South Dakota and adopted in Nebraska. These laws were mainly created to ensure that any dependent children brought into Nebraska were not likely to become public charges. The laws required adoptions to go through child-placement agencies that would screen children for mental and physical disabilities, as well as ensure adoptive parents provided ideal conditions.¹⁸⁰ Because the Colbys adopted before many states in the West passed these laws, they were able to easily bring Zintka to their home through legal means.

¹⁷⁸ Jacobs, “Breaking and Remaking Families,” 26-29.

¹⁷⁹ Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 79.

¹⁸⁰ Emelyn Foster Peck, *Laws Relating Interstate Placement of Dependent Children* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 1-3, 23.

The trend of adopting directly from boarding schools, like the Wetherills, and the trend of going through legal proceedings far away from the child's birthplace or biological family's home, like the Colbys, were often both present in adoptions of indigenous children. Because adoption laws required the consent of children's biological parents, judges assumed parents agreed to give their child up for adoption if they did not show up to court. Because reformers supported the idea that many indigenous mothers did not know how to care for their children, many believed that White adoptive parents were the better fit for the child. If indigenous parents never showed up to express that they were not willing to place their child up for adoption, judges used the absence to further support the idea that the biological parents were unfit to keep their children. Prospective adopters often applied for guardianship in courts far away from Native American reservations in order to ensure they looked like the better guardians. Because many indigenous parents would not be able to reach the court easily, or possibly not hear about the court date in time, White adoptive parents would easily be granted their petitions to adopt.¹⁸¹ A court system that largely ignored the desires of the biological parents and heavily favored the adoptive ones reflected the rhetoric that idealized White motherhood and argued indigenous mothers were unfit to parent.

The idea that indigenous children were better off in White families regardless of the biological parents' wishes also supported the idea that adoption was a way to intimately assimilate Native Americans. If White mothers, responsible for moral instruction and education of citizens, raised indigenous children, they would be more likely to assimilate to White culture. Even though many reformers argued that women

¹⁸¹ Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 27.

raised future citizens, many did not expect the adopted indigenous children to ever have the full rights associated with the idea of an American “citizen.” Instead, the U.S. government wanted to erase indigenous culture and any claims of sovereignty. If they could then be considered American citizens, their land would come under U.S. laws and regulations and could be more easily sold to White settlers.¹⁸² The boarding school system was one way the BIA attempted to assimilate indigenous children, which was taken one step further with the outing system. Informal adoptions sometimes followed the outing system of boarding schools. The system placed indigenous children with White families in order to directly teach students what a “civilized” family looked like. In addition, indigenous girls placed in White homes took on housekeeping duties in an attempt to teach them gender roles while providing cheap labor.¹⁸³ Adoption eventually became an advanced form of this.

Often times, White boarding school employees encouraged adoption. Many believed that if White parents raised indigenous children, the children would be able to eventually replicate the ideal family structure within which they had first-hand experience. A 1913 issue of *The Indian School Journal*, a monthly publication from the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma, published an article about the effects of the environment in which children grew up. The article written by Gertrude M. Golden, a schoolteacher, discussed the differences between White children raised among the Kiowas and Native American children raised among White families. Golden described settlers’ children being carried off from their families by violent Native Americans who would then raise them as their own. She believed these children grew up fully

¹⁸² Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, xviii-xix.

¹⁸³ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 189-191.

incorporated into the indigenous culture and were more resistant to “civilization” than the rest of their adoptive family. “They invariably were more opposed to education and progress, were lazier and dirtier...than the full-blood Indians.”¹⁸⁴ In contrast, indigenous children raised by White families would be transformed “not only into good, useful American citizens, but into *refined*, cultivated people.”¹⁸⁵ Golden reflected reformers’ maternalist views that White women were the ideal mothers and that traditional forms of indigenous parenting would harm the child, as well as assimilation efforts.

Reformers saw adoption as a way to assimilate children in a more intimate way than could Native American schools alone.¹⁸⁶ Although day schools, boarding schools, and the outing system encouraged White women—whether as teachers, supervisors, agents, or those needing domestic labor—to become mother-like figures to indigenous girls, these bonds were sometimes made more formal in an attempt to solidify women’s positions as mothers.¹⁸⁷ The compulsory attendance laws implemented in the late nineteenth century made it easy for school officials to take children from their biological families and place them into boarding schools.¹⁸⁸ From boarding schools, the assimilation rhetoric used to place children in the schools allowed White families to argue that indigenous children were better off away from their parents. Although field matrons and female industrial teachers attempted to teach indigenous mothers how to raise their children the way White women believed they should, it was still easy for reformers to remove indigenous children from their families.¹⁸⁹ Through this practice, White women

¹⁸⁴ Gertrude M. Golden, “Home, School and Community Effect on the Child’s Education,” *The Indian School Journal* 14 no. 4 (December 1913): 145.

¹⁸⁵ Golden, “Home, School and Community Effect on the Child’s Education,” 146.

¹⁸⁶ Jacobs, “Breaking and Remaking Families, 19-22.

¹⁸⁷ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 189-191.

¹⁸⁸ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 13-24.

¹⁸⁹ Jacobs, “Breaking and Remaking Families,” 19-27.

reformers who had no children of their own gained the ability to become an actual mother to an indigenous child. Like many argued and demonstrated in boarding and day schools, White women who adopted children exhibited their belief that it was not imperative for women to biologically have children in order to become an ideal mother. For these reasons, women like Hope Ghiselin and Mary Dissette ended up adopting children. Reformers used adoption as a way to prove their maternal knowledge, as well as contribute even more directly to assimilation efforts.

Alice Fletcher was a prominent reformer involved closely in policy and the school system who ended up adopting an indigenous child with whom she worked closely. Fletcher, an important ethnologist and land allotment agent for the BIA, was an advocate for indigenous child removal, as well as the incorporation of indigenous children into White homes.¹⁹⁰ Using metaphors that referred to Native Americans as child-like, Fletcher saw herself as a mother to indigenous people. She believed that educating men to become breadwinners for their families and women to care for the home was the best way to protect the people she saw as her responsibility.¹⁹¹ In 1891, Fletcher formally adopted Francis La Flesche, a member of the Omaha family Fletcher came into contact with during her study of indigenous communities, and an ethnologist himself. La Flesche served as Fletcher's interpreter during her time as an allotment agent, and they later began ethnological studies of the Omahas' culture together. They published their work, titled *The Omaha Tribe*, two decades after Fletcher's adoption of La Flesche. He then went on to work for the Bureau of American Ethnology within the Smithsonian

¹⁹⁰ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 195-196.

¹⁹¹ Janiewski, "Giving Women a Future," 325-331.

Institution and publish his own ethnographical work, *The Osage Tribe*, in the 1920s.¹⁹²

Fletcher was a field matron and strong advocate for individual allotment and educating indigenous girls and women in motherhood. In addition to working as an allotment agent, Fletcher also recruited indigenous children to send them to boarding schools. Through her work and policy support, Fletcher, who never had biological children of her own, represented the many ways White women involved in indigenous child removal made a space to take on a maternal role themselves.¹⁹³

Estelle Reel, who incorporated the outing system into the curriculum she created for the Indian School System, adopted an Aleut girl during her time as superintendent of the school system. The girl attended boarding schools in Washington and Oregon, but stayed with Reel during the summer.¹⁹⁴ Reel worked closely with indigenous children, and eventually adopted as part of her efforts at assimilating Native Americans. Her adopting an indigenous child directly reflected her maternalist viewpoint. Throughout the curriculum she created to standardize all classes in the Indian School Service, Reel advocated for the education of female students in scientific domesticity in the hopes it turned them into what she considered a good mother. In addition, Reel saw motherhood as girls' only option. While classes prepared the male students to become farmers, blacksmiths, and carpenters, they prepared girls to be housekeepers and wives. The curriculum argued against letting students use skills and knowledge learned from their mothers, grandmothers, and other older female relatives. Instead, Reel instructed female schoolteachers to remind her students that they did not want to follow their

¹⁹² Joan Mark, "Francis La Flesche: The American Indian as Anthropologist," *Isis* 73 no. 4 (December 1982): 504-507.

¹⁹³ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 98-101.

¹⁹⁴ Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families, 25.

grandmothers' ways of doing things.¹⁹⁵ Reel's curriculum reflected her ideas that women did not have an inherent knowledge of how to take care of the home and their children, but instead needed to be taught. In addition, Reel herself had no children and was unmarried while she served as superintendent of the Indian School Service. She did not base her ideas of motherhood and housekeeping on any personal experience, but instead on the maternalist rhetoric created by reformers.¹⁹⁶ After several years of implementing her curriculum into the Indian School Service, Reel decided to formalize the bonds created by the motherly role she took on through the outing system, as well as to assimilate an indigenous child more intimately.

Louisa Wetherill and her adoption of three indigenous girls also reflected multiple aspects of reformers' maternalism. Before she even adopted any children, Louisa took on a motherly role towards all indigenous people. Eventually stating they named her "Little Mother of the Navajos," Louisa saw all Native Americans, even adults, as children in need of help and guidance, which she attempted to give them. Later, Louisa involved herself with the Native American boarding schools, and viewed them as the best place for indigenous children to be educated. While the Wetherills did have children of their own, their adoption of Esther, Fanny, and Betty occurred after their biological children were grown. Like Ghiselin, Dissette, Fletcher, and Reel, Louisa ended up adopting after interacting with indigenous women and children and advocating for their education. Although Louisa did have children of her own, her adoption of Betty, Fanny, and Esther reflected the idea that White motherhood was the ideal. School officials called Louisa rather than an indigenous woman to take care of Betty. In addition, Louisa viewed several

¹⁹⁵ Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools*, 3, 148.

¹⁹⁶ Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 25.

aspects of Utes' and Navajos' marriages and societies as abusive and savage, and stepped in to take care of the women and children involved.¹⁹⁷ The maternalist rhetoric that implemented strict gender roles within Native American societies and saw White womanhood and motherhood as the ideal led many reformers to see adoption as an extension of their involvement with indigenous women and children.

Because Clara Colby was not a reformer of issues involving Native Americans, the Colbys' adoption of Zintka Lanuni exhibited the differences between the maternalism used by those reformers and other White female activists. General Colby believed that his wife, who had never expressed an interest in becoming a mother, would be the best guardian for the indigenous child he encountered. After taking the baby away from the Lakotas already caring for her, the general quickly adopted Zintka through a court a state away and turned her over to his wife's care. Clara attempted to care for the child the best she could, but a wide chasm between Clara and Zintka always remained. Clara's peers, working for White women's right to vote, saw motherhood as something for other women but not themselves. They repeatedly berated Clara for being distracted by a child and did not see the adoption as a positive act.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

The adoption of indigenous children by White reformers reflected the unique maternalism they advocated. The court system favored White parents and gave them custody over indigenous children based on the idea that they would be better than the child's biological parents no matter what. Judges often ignored new adoption laws and

¹⁹⁷ Wetherill, *Traders to the Navajos*, 220, 230-232.

¹⁹⁸ Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 129, 184.

regulations and made it easy for indigenous children to be placed with nontraditional adopters. This helped single women avoid the stigma that they deviated from the sexual norm by not marrying, or that they were unable to biologically have children. Several reformers themselves would fall under the “nontraditional adopter” category and their actions proved that women could learn how to be mothers and that their nurturing was not based on a biological instinct.

Lenient court proceedings and the belief that indigenous children were better off with White parents continued beyond the 1930s. The closure of the majority of BIA-run schools during the 1940s and 1950s forced many indigenous children into the foster care system when their parents at home could not afford to take care of them if they returned. As a result, the BIA would create programs designed specifically to place Native American children within the foster care system with White families. The U.S. government and public again saw adoption as a way to fully assimilate indigenous children while taking care of dependent children.¹⁹⁹ It was not until 1978, over a century after this practice gained popularity among reformers, that the government passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (hereafter, ICWA). Although the exact numbers of indigenous children adopted between 1880 and 1930 is unknown, later reports give a sense of the large scale of children removed from their families. In 1969, a report by the Association of American Indian Affairs found that 25-35% of all indigenous children were in orphanages, foster or adoptive homes, or boarding schools.²⁰⁰ The ICWA acknowledged the large numbers of indigenous children removed without parental consent as well as the subsequent adoptions that occurred because of it. The ICWA created federal regulations

¹⁹⁹ Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*, 5-7.

²⁰⁰ Jacobs, “Breaking and Remaking Families,” 20.

relating specifically to the adoption of indigenous children, including strict requirements on how and when biological parents relinquish their rights, and giving preference to an extended family member before allowing the child to be placed with any other guardian.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Indian Child Welfare Act, Public Law 95-608, 95th Congress (November 8, 1978), 3069-3070.

IV. EXPANDING THE ARCHIVES AND PUBLIC MEMORY OF MATERNALISTS' ADOPTIONS

Introduction

Between 1880 and 1930, the adoption of indigenous children was closely linked to female reformers and their involvement with Native American families. The White families and judicial systems completed the adoptions oftentimes informally, which left very little of a paper trail. Various reformers adopted indigenous children because of the ease with which they could complete the process. In many cases the children's biological parents did not have the chance to give their consent for their child to be adopted, and many states in the West did not even have laws concerning adoption in the late nineteenth century. Because adopting indigenous children was often easier than adopting White children, potential parents took advantage of the situation. This resulted in a lack of concrete sources relating back to the actual adoption, as well as information about the adopted children.

The sources available to research the adoption of indigenous children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century mainly consist of sources other than the papers of the women themselves, despite many reformers having their own archival manuscript collections. Articles from several monthly publications written about women's adoptions comprise the bulk of primary sources used for this thesis, as well as an autobiography and an oral history. Although the majority of the women discussed have their own manuscript collections, very few actually contain mention of the indigenous children they adopted. While their papers provide insight into their reform efforts, they have very little to do

with their adoptions. These archival manuscript collections from female reformers preserve their activism and actions taken to help advance U.S. policies relating to Native Americans, as well as their work in various organizations, including the WNIA. Estelle Reel, Alice Fletcher, the Wetherills, and the WNIA all have their own manuscript collections. The collections are focused only on reform efforts: Reel's promotion to superintendent of Wyoming schools as well as the Indian School Service; Fletcher's anthropological work and advocacy for land allotment among Native Americans; Wetherill's trading post and connection to the Navajos. None of these, however, contain documents directly relating to their involvement with adopting indigenous children.²⁰²

Mentions of indigenous child adoption are mainly found in journal articles from the WNIA's publication, *The Indian's Friend*, as well as the journal published by Clara Colby, *The Women's Tribune*. Copies of *The Indian's Friend* and *The Women's Tribune* have been digitized by various institutions for researchers. Both of these journals provide important insight into specific adoptions from reformers. Women informed the WNIA of their adoptions and the organization wrote about the women in their journal to promote their reform efforts. Many saw adoptions as benevolent acts that supported assimilation and education, which were important aspects of reformers' maternalism.²⁰³ Colby, somewhat similarly, continuously wrote about her adopted daughter so her readers could

²⁰² Archival collections discussed: Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche Papers, MS 4558, Smithsonian Institution Archives; Clara Bewick Colby Papers, MSS379, Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives, and Museum Collections; Estelle Reel Meyer Collection, H60-110, Wyoming State Archives; Wetherill Family Collection, MS-001, Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona.

²⁰³ Articles discussing member's adoptions include: "From San Carlos, Arizona," *The Indian's Friend* 3 no. 2 (November 1890): 1; Mary Dissette, "A Retrospective," *The Indian's Friend* 10 no. 2 (August 1898): 9-11; "News and Notes," *The Indian's Friend* 16 no. 6 (February 1904): 5; "The Soldiers and the Children," *The Indian's Friend* 3 no. 9 (May 1891): 2

keep track of Zintka's development with her adoptive White family.²⁰⁴ These publications are some of the few sources that provide researchers with information about indigenous children adopted by White reformers. The lack of sources within reformers' archival collections, I argue, contributes to a void in the public memory around the adoption of indigenous children.

Power and Silences Within Sources

The preservation of these sources and the archival collections of reformers reveal the power imbalances that are often inherent within the recording of historical events. Reformers' themselves are the main authors of the sources available to study their actions. These documents, therefore, reflect the unequal power that existed between White reformers and Native Americans.²⁰⁵ Female reformers put their maternalism into practice through adoption, and saw it as a way to further assimilate indigenous children, as well as formalize the "motherly" role they perceived themselves in through their work. They then spoke about their adoptions to other colleagues and reformers through journal articles and letters, which preserve the maternalist rhetoric that underlies their actions of adopting. White parents' power to easily and oftentimes informally adopt indigenous children away from their biological families is exhibited by the fact that the majority of the sources regarding those adoptions come from reformers themselves.

²⁰⁴ Colby, "Zintka Lanuni: The Waif of Wounded Knee," *The Women's Tribune*, February 21, 1891, 2; Colby, "Zintka Lanuni's Corner," *The Woman's Tribune*, August 17, 1895, 4.

²⁰⁵ For analysis of similar inequalities in another context, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 48-50.

The creators of the sources, however, made active choices in the information they included in their records. They left information out of their records, or did not deem various facts necessary to include, and these choices were a product of the ideals shaping these adoptions. Race played a large part in the adoptions of indigenous children. Many reformers adopted native children in order to assimilate them into White society. Not only was it believed to be safer option to adopt an indigenous child to keep them long term than adopting a White child, but many also argued that White parents would be better for the child than their biological family. It is therefore likely that any record of the child's indigenous parents or background was not as important to reformers as a discussion of the adoption itself as an act that reflected and promoted the reformers' ideals. The continual neglect of discussions of various aspects of a historical process or event is known as "silencing." People document what is important to them while leaving out what is not, which makes silencing inherent in historical sources where a power imbalance is always present. In the case of reformers, they wrote about their adoptions and the ways in which the action supported assimilation efforts. They often did not, however, write about the reaction of the biological parents and whether or not they gave consent, or the children's backgrounds and experiences. These silences within preserved documents were active choices made by the reformers that reflect their ideals of White motherhood and assimilation.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48-51.

Adopted Children's Experiences from Letters

To better understand how the absence of information about adopted indigenous children affects the historical narrative, one can look at how first-hand sources from Native American students at boarding schools are used to gain a better understanding of the education for which reformers advocated. Several works about specific boarding schools use letters between indigenous students, their parents, and school officials to describe the experiences of the children removed from their families. *Voices from Haskell* by Myriam Vučković, examines the early years of the Haskell Institute, a Native American boarding school in Kansas. Vučković uses letters to help give a voice to the indigenous students and describe the experiences of not only the students themselves, whom the school forced to be a part of a new culture, but also family members who remained on the reservation.²⁰⁷ Similarly, Brenda J. Child's *Boarding School Seasons* discusses indigenous families and the children BIA officials took to both the Haskell Institute and the Flandreau boarding school in South Dakota. The letters used in Child's work showcase the devastation families felt after BIA employees took their children from them, as well as the false promises many officials gave to indigenous families to persuade them to let their children go. *Boarding School Seasons* discusses the conditions surrounding indigenous children being taken from or sent by their families to attend schools. Letters from parents begging school officials to let their children come home, as well as letters asking for information about their children reveal the difficulty all indigenous people felt when the BIA forced children to attend schools far away. Child's expands on boarding school experiences to include those of the families left behind of

²⁰⁷ Myriam Vučković, *Voices from Haskell: Indian Students Between Two Worlds, 1884-1928* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 5-9.

reservations.²⁰⁸ These works exhibit the important information that can be learned from preserved sources, especially correspondence.

Although the separation boarding schools caused resulted in letters going back and forth between students and their parents, reformers and their adopted children often faced different circumstances. Reformers justified removing indigenous children to boarding schools by arguing that the parents were unfit to care for and educate their children. When White women adopted indigenous children, however, they did not face the same kind of scrutiny and risk of separation.

Reformers wrote many of the letters preserved, therefore, when their jobs and activism took them away from their adopted child, like in the case of Clara Colby. Colby and her adopted daughter Zintka Lanuni spent frequent time apart. In the early years after the Colbys adopted Zintka, Clara was often gone to speak at suffrage rallies. Later, Clara sent Zintka to boarding school and continued her work in Washington, D.C. During this time apart, Clara and Zintka wrote many letters, which continued after Zintka moved away from Clara in adulthood.²⁰⁹ These letters reveal the often tumultuous feelings that Zintka had towards her adoptive parents, as well as her experiences after being ripped away from her indigenous family and community. In one letter from Zintka while at boarding school in South Dakota she wrote, “I am so lonesome here without any mother or father. [Y]ou think you have got me away from you now so you are going to keep me away. I am your loving daughter Zintka Colby.”²¹⁰ Letters from Zintka, held in Clara

²⁰⁸ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 1-2, 22-23, 46-49.

²⁰⁹ Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 226-236.

²¹⁰ Letter from Lost Bird to Clara B. Colby, March 24, 1904, Wisconsin Historical Society, quoted in Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee*, 230. 226-236.

Colby's archival manuscript collection by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, documented Zintka's life and connection to her adoptive parents.

Alice Fletcher also frequently traveled and kept in contact with her adopted son, Francis La Flesche. Fletcher and Francis, whom she adopted later in his life, wrote multiple letters back and forth when their respective anthropological work forced them to spend time apart. After Fletcher informally adopted Francis as her son in 1891, she spent many years continuing to work as an allotment agent. Almost two decades after the adoption, Fletcher and Francis published multiple works on the various Native American groups they studied. In 1911 Francis spent time in Oklahoma to study traditional forms of music among indigenous communities. Throughout his work he stayed in contact with Fletcher, informing her of his progress. "The work will be done wither today or tomorrow... Whatever days are left over I wish to keep so that I can come home Christmas. I want to see as much of you as I can."²¹¹ Many of the letters between Fletcher and Francis contain detailed descriptions of their work, but also often included words of affection when they separated for long periods of time.²¹²

The letters revolving around Fletcher and Francis's shared interest reveal a large part of Francis's experience as Fletcher's adopted son. She came into contact with the La Flesche family when she was an allotment agent for the Omahas, and connected with Francis through her work. Fletcher had taken on a motherly role towards the indigenous people she interacted with through her reform efforts and became especially close to the

²¹¹ La Flesche, Francis, *Francis la Flesche to Alice Fletcher, April 23, 1911*, Letter, From Manuscript 4558 Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²¹² La Flesche, Francis, *Francis la Flesche to Alice Fletcher, April 23, 1911*, Letter, From Manuscript 4558 Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

La Flesche family. Fletcher's anthropological work interested Francis, who accepted assimilation efforts but wanted to preserve his tribe's traditions. After several years of working together to study the traditions of the Omahas, Fletcher increasingly considered and referred to Fletcher as her adopted son. In 1891, Fletcher signed a written statement that many considered confirmation of her adoption.²¹³ The origin of Fletcher and Francis's relationship was Fletcher's work among Native American communities, and their letters in the following decades reveal that their connection continued to revolve around the topic. For both Zintka and Francis, archival collections preserved their experiences as adopted indigenous children through letters.

Sources Beyond Archival Collections

Multiple reformers' archival collections do not contain any mention of the Native American children they adopted. In order to find information about the reformers, children, and adoptions, other sources must be looked at, including those in the archives of organizations, the women's writings, and in the case of Betty Wetherill, her oral history discussing Navajo trading. None of the archival collections discussed, with the exception of Colby's and Fletcher's, mention that the women had adopted children, nor do the collections highlight that they contain information about indigenous child removal and adoption.²¹⁴

²¹³ Mark, "The American Indian as Anthropologist," 496-504.

²¹⁴ Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche Papers, MS 4558, Smithsonian Institution Archives; Clara Bewick Colby Papers, MSS379, Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives, and Museum Collections; Estelle Reel Meyer Collection, H60-110, Wyoming State Archives; Wetherill Family Collection, MS-001, Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona.

Multiple articles in *The Indian's Friend* reported women's adoptions and revolved around the White women themselves, which reflected their maternalist rhetoric. Oftentimes reformers easily adopted indigenous children because many judges and child welfare officials believed the children were better off with a White family than their biological one. In addition, reformers believed that adoption would help in the efforts to assimilate Native Americans. Assimilation was a key aspect of reform efforts, so other women believed adoptions were simply another part of a woman's activism. The letters written to inform the WNIA of members' adoptions often referred to the action as a benevolent deed for caring for indigenous children and giving them a new home. These articles made the focus fully on White women, instead of the adopted children. Mary Dissette's adoptions of multiple indigenous girls are an important example of this. The WNIA printed multiple articles about Dissette and her adopted children. Both articles, printed six years apart, include excerpts from letters written by Dissette herself. She informed the organization of her adoptions, and assured them that the indigenous children were grateful and learning how to be "civilized." While Dissette discusses her own actions and feelings in her articles, the adopted children are only named and referred to briefly. Through the articles, Dissette is painted as a reformer committed to the maternalism supported by the WNIA, while the indigenous girls are only remembered by their quick mention among Dissette's letters back to the organization. The articles published in *The Indian's Friend* are important documents providing evidence of reformers' adoptions, as well as their maternalist rhetoric and practices. Despite this, these sources leave the indigenous children out of public memory. Any mentions of the indigenous children, in fact, often painted them as helpless and lost, and gave no

background information.²¹⁵ Because of this, the articles saved in archives can still only tell readers very little about the children themselves. What kind of biological family they had and their history before being adopted is in many cases completely lost.

Other journals provide similar sources. The Chilocco Indian School had a monthly publication titled *The Indian School Journal*, which focused on reform efforts among Native American communities, especially in education. Similar to *The Indian's Friend*, the journal published several articles that informed readers of White families adopting indigenous children. In November of 1913, the journal included a short article about General Colby. The article reported that a woman claimed she was Colby's adopted daughter when attempting to obtain a marriage license. The article only mentions the woman by her husband's name, and discusses her marriage status and her biological parents. The woman told the clerk that she was the daughter of Sitting Bull, but General Colby, who confirmed the woman was in fact his adopted daughter, told officials that her biological father's name was Black Fox. Although the short article is buried among quick reports of new school buildings and a change of address for an Indian Agency, it reflects Zintka's struggles later in her adulthood and her confusion over her biological family.²¹⁶

The Indian School Journal also reinforced maternalist rhetoric that argued White families adopting indigenous children would accelerate assimilation and be a better environment for the children than their biological family. When discussing the work of a female BIA employees, Elsie Newton, the field matron's supervisor reminded

²¹⁵ Dissette, "A Retrospective," *The Indian's Friend* 10 no. 2 (August 1898): 9-11; "News and Notes," *The Indian's Friend* 16 no. 6 (February 1904): 5. This absence of information about the indigenous children themselves is also why it is difficult to find the children in any official records. The children's given names were never stated by their adoptive parents, making the children difficult to trace through tribal census records, and informal adoptions often left the children out of any U.S. federal census records.

²¹⁶ "General Colby's Adopted Daughter," *The Indian School Journal* 14 no. 3 (November 1913): 118-119.

prospective applicants that if officials had not taught indigenous women while their daughters attended boarding school, the girls may lose some of their learned skills after leaving the school. “The missionary spirit will supply the patience and charity needed when a girl who has had all the advantages of going away to school, goes wrong upon her return home.”²¹⁷ In addition to reminding readers that both indigenous girls and mothers needed education, the journal also printed an article that argued the environment that parents raised children was a major factor in their education. The school official who wrote the article, Gertrude M. Golden, compared White children raised among the Kiowas to indigenous children who left their biological families raised among White families. Golden stated that the White children who grew up with the Kiowas would resist education and remain lazy. In contrast, she argued that indigenous children adopted into White families had the chance to become “useful American citizens.”²¹⁸ These articles reflected the maternalism of contributors to *The Indian School Journal* that supported the adoption of indigenous children.

Clara Colby wrote several articles in her journal *The Women's Tribune* that focused on her adopted daughter Zintka. Clara's articles dedicated to Zintka revealed the girl's tragic background, her husband's involvement in her adoption, and her life with the Colbys. By Zintka's fifth birthday, Clara wrote in “Zintka Lanuni's Corner” that the girl struggled with finding where she fit in among the other children in Washington, D.C. While letters from Susan B. Anthony to Clara documented the suffragists' frustration with her new responsibilities, Clara's own words explained the helplessness Zintka felt

²¹⁷ Newton, “The Work of a Field Matron,” *The Indian School Journal* 14 no. 3 (November 1913): 107.

²¹⁸ Golden, “Home, School and Community Effect on the Child's Education,” *The Indian School Journal* 14 no. 4 (December 1913): 145-147.

among White children who made fun of her appearance and background.²¹⁹ These journal articles and later a column dedicated to telling readers about Zintka make her adoption an exception for the lack of preserved sources. Colby's prominent position within the women's suffrage movement and publication of *The Women's Tribune* left multiple sources that, along with letters between Colby and Zintka, documented not only her own experiences as an activist and adoptive mother, but Zintka's experiences as a child taken away from her culture and community to live with a White family.

Various sources beyond archival collections also expand on the Wetherill's adoption of Betty Rogers. Although not as numerous as the sources preserving the adoption of Zintka, the story of the Wetherill's adoption of Betty Rogers is documented through her oral history, kept in Northern Arizona University's archives, as well as in Louisa Wetherill's autobiography. Even these sources, however, have their limits as any information included about the Wetherill's adoption of Betty is vague about her years outside of the Wetherill family, as well as her experiences with them. Much like *The Indian's Friend* articles, Louisa Wetherill's manuscript collection focuses on the information she collected about the Navajos, including their prayers, language, and traditions. Additionally, the Wetherill family collection also focuses on their work among the Navajos while running a trading post, as well as the archaeological work John Wetherill and his sons completed.²²⁰ While the archival collections do not include information about Betty at all, Louisa's biography about the family is almost as ambiguous. She combined all three instances the family adopted an indigenous child into

²¹⁹ Colby, "Zintka Lanuni: The Waif of Wounded Knee," *The Women's Tribune*, February 21, 1891, 2; Colby, "Zintka Lanuni's Corner," *The Woman's Tribune*, August 17, 1895, 4.

²²⁰ Wetherill Family collection, MS-001, Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona.

a few pages, without going into much detail. The book, like the collections, focused on Louisa's interactions with Navajos while adjusting to life in Arizona and her husband's work exploring and giving tours of various sites around northern Arizona and Colorado. In Louisa's book, Betty's age, life with the Wetherills, and background with her biological family are unclear. Instead, Louisa discussed only her as the third girl the Wetherills adopted. Rather than focusing on Betty, Louisa focused on the family's benevolent actions and praise among the Navajos and boarding school for their involvement.²²¹

The three journals discussed, *The Indian's Friend*, *The Indian School Journal*, and *The Women's Tribune* mainly focused on various reform efforts during their publication, and not specifically adoption or maternalism. Despite this, multiple articles within the journals are important sources for how reformers discussed their maternalist rhetoric and put their arguments into practice. In addition, some of the articles are the only records available that document adoptions of Native American children, like Mary Dissette's multiple adoptions.²²²

Betty's oral history interview provided much more information about her life with the Wetherills than Louisa's autobiography. Betty described her involvement with the family trading post, her interactions with the Wetherills' older biological children, and Louisa and John's treatment of their adopted children. While she was never sure of her exact birthday, she recalled seeing Louisa for the first time and going to live with the family.²²³ The difference between Betty's description of Louisa coming to the boarding

²²¹ Wetherill, *Traders to the Navajos*, 230-232.

²²² Dissette, "A Retrospective," *The Indian's Friend* 10 no. 2 (August 1898): 9-11; "News and Notes," *The Indian's Friend* 16 no. 6 (February 1904): 5

²²³ Interview with Betty Rodgers.

school and choosing Betty and Louisa's story of the principal calling her to take another indigenous girl home reflects the difficulty with limited sources. The boarding school asked the Wetherills to adopt Betty, and an indigenous woman asked them to adopt her child. The process left no records from an official adoption case that legally connected the Wetherills with Betty. Informal adoptions, common among the reformers who adopted indigenous children, left almost no paper trail and documents created by the people involved were the only source of information about the adoptions. Despite their conflicting recollections, Louisa's discussion of her adoptions was brief and focused on her role among the Navajos, making Betty's oral history the only source available that discusses her own experiences being adopted.

Public Memory

Archival institutions collect what they believe will be important to the future. As historians within archival repositories make decisions regarding what to keep in manuscript collections, research and historical values are weighed. These values include whether or not documents may be used in the future as evidence, for example, of legal land claims, or simply as important information for researchers. Ultimately, manuscript collections are created and kept based on what archivists believe will expand knowledge of a time period.²²⁴ The materials that are preserved, therefore, are the materials available to future generations to learn from and interact with. What a society believes and understands about their past is heavily determined by the information preserved and frequently discussed. An understanding of a collective history is reached through the

²²⁴ Thomas Cauvin, "Collection Management: Archives, Manuscripts, and Museums," in *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 32, 37-38.

interactions with historical information. A collective history helps a society define itself. When something is determined to not be important enough to preserve, therefore, it contributes a lack of public memory on the subject.²²⁵ This public memory of a collective history can be greatly influenced by archival institutions and their decisions regarding what documents are important to preserve.

Because the sources created at the time of the adoptions reflect the power imbalance, the archival institutions that preserve those sources also contribute to an unequal narrative in the public memory. Archival institutions often act as the middleman between historical events and the narrative of those events. The analysis of available sources helps construct a historical narrative, which gives the institutions that preserve and collect those documents influence over the creation of the public memory. While the creators of the sources made active choices in what to record and document for the future, archives make similar choices when deciding what will be important and valuable to researchers in the future. Although researchers make decisions about how they analyze and interpret historical sources, archival institutions determine what sources are available for that research. In this way, archives and the sources' authors are in similar positions of power to influence how history is remembered and understood. The absence of mentions of indigenous children and their background before White families adopted them is mirrored in public memory because these are the only sources available.²²⁶

Archival collections can reflect an inequality in the power of historical actors just like the creation of the sources themselves. Collections may undergo an organic process of appraisal while still in the possession of the documents' creator before making a

²²⁵ Britton, "Public History and Public Memory," 19-20.

²²⁶ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 49-53.

transition to an archival institution. The collection's creator may decide which of their papers and records they believe are important to keep, which naturally makes the decision of what is available to be included in the archives. Despite this, silences regarding adoptions of indigenous children also point to a broader issue than the records just not being available, or adoptive parents simply not writing anything down. These absences of discussion point to the inequality present at the time of the sources being created, which is then preserved in the archives.²²⁷ Not only were sources created by White reformers—who excluded information about native children and their adoption process—but the institutions holding reformers' manuscript collections also chose to focus on the White women and their involvement in Native American reforms. The assimilation policies of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sought to destroy and replace indigenous culture. When archives choose to exclude or ignore information about a certain group, whether consciously or unconsciously, it serves as a reflection of the actual attempt to diminish the group itself. When determining why it is important to collect a person's or group's papers, archival institutions make decisions regarding the function and narrative of the collection. In the case of the manuscript collections of reformers and their organizations, their archives function to provide researchers information on reform policies and actions, as well as individuals' interactions with and involvement among various Native American groups. The narratives told include multiple stories of middle-class White women expanding their authority in politics and society. In this way, the archives provide an important look at the maternalist rhetoric used by reformers. The women are remembered for their actions that sought to gain White women's equality

²²⁷ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 51-53.

with men, as well as help the U.S. government bring reform to Native Americans. The context of what various reforms involved, including indigenous child removal, is often not included. When something is excluded from the archives, institutions created to preserve and make available for research documents of historical importance, it is often excluded from historical memory.²²⁸

The decisions on what to add to manuscript collections mainly appear during the appraisal period in archival practice. Appraisal is weighing the value factors to determine whether something belongs in the collection, or has no lasting importance. Within this process are various ethical, political, and social factors that determine how people today assign value to things to be preserved for the future. These functions then contribute to the context and historical narrative presented by the collections created. If a document is kept for a collection, it adds to the historical narrative the institution hopes to preserve. Appraisal for collections, therefore, is the main way archival institutions contribute to public memory.²²⁹ The political and social nature of archival appraisal can result in the exclusion of certain historical narratives that are not deemed important at the time. In the case of maternalist reformers and the adoption of indigenous children, the reformers are remembered for their activism while the children are largely missing from archival memory.

The appraisal of documents involves decisions often based on society and culture. As those two concepts shift, so do the archives. In early archival practice, trained academic historians completed appraisal based on their knowledge of the trends of

²²⁸ Terry Cook, “‘We Are What We Keep: We Keep What We Are’: Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32 no. 2 (October 2011): 174.

²²⁹ Cook, “‘We Are What We Keep: We Keep What We Are,’” 174.

historical research. Focuses of historical scholarship began to shift after the 1950s, however, and demanded a change in archival practice. The archival institutions holding the papers of Clara Colby, Estelle Reel, Alice Fletcher, and Louisa Wetherill all received the collections between the late 1950s and late 1970s, during the changes in historical research and archives.²³⁰ Before this shift, the majority of historians focused on a top-down approach for their work. Areas such as political, economic, and military history, with an emphasis on the specific leaders in those fields made up a lot of scholarship prior to the second-half of the twentieth century. Historians began to flip this approach and instead look at communities and cultures and all of the people within them, not only those with power. The bottom-up way of researching and writing about history changed the way archival institutions built their collections. Where before archives collected documents relating only to a few historical topics and prominent White men, they began to expand their holdings.²³¹

Preserving as much documentation as possible of aspects of society that are often *not* well-documented is known as a “total” archive. By building collections that document diverse perspectives and not only those who hold the power in historical moments, institutions can help to expand narratives that will be a part of the future public memory.²³² Although the change in historical research around the 1950s began a trend of

²³⁰ Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche Papers, MS 4558, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C; Clara Bewick Colby Papers, MSS379, Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives, and Museum Collections, Madison, Wisconsin; Estelle Reel Meyer Collection, H60-110, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, Wyoming; Wetherill Family Collection, MS-001, Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona.

²³¹ Cook, “We Are What We Keep: We Keep What We Are,” 178.

²³² Cook, “We Are What We Keep: We Keep What We Are,” 181-182.

expanding archives to include perspectives not yet told, including those of women reformers, there are still other narratives that are able to be found within their papers.

Expanding the Archives

While appraisal determines what is important and valuable to collect, description helps researchers understand what is contained in a manuscript collection and the context of the documents. Description of collections also facilitates the arrangement and organization of collections.²³³ Describing the materials found in a collection helps the public find and understand an institution's archives. Most archival institutions present the description to the public through a collection's finding aid. A finding aid contains various pieces of information pertaining to the collection, depending on the standards and formats used by an institution. Common information included in a finding aid is an abstract of the collection, biographical note about the person or people who created the original documents, scope and content notes, and an itemized list of the containers holding the collection. Finding aids assist researchers in finding collections and sources that are useful to their work. Researchers interact and use finding aids differently, but the main goal of the description is to provide an overview of the collection and its context.²³⁴

These women and their records remain important sources within the study of adoptions of indigenous children, but are not contextualized as such through their finding aids. The collections of Reel, Wetherill, Colby, and Fletcher all exist as separate and unrelated archives, despite the women's common actions. While the finding aids for the

²³³ Cauvin, "Collection Management," 33.

²³⁴ Christopher J. Prom, "User Interactions with Electronic Finding Aids in a Controlled Setting," *The American Archivist* 67 no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2004): 235-237.

various collections reflect the context of reform efforts, only two, Colby's and Fletcher's, contain any mention at all of their adoptions. All of the collections are related to reform efforts, which reflected the maternalist rhetoric that was eventually put into practice through adoption. The information included within the collections' finding aids, however, mainly point to the women's accomplishments, such as Reel's time as superintendent of the Indian School Service and Wetherill's anthropological work. If finding aids included information relating to White reformers' maternalism and adoptions, collections could be more easily connected to expand the narrative of indigenous child removal.²³⁵ While some collections do not include documents relating to the children they adopted, the action is often not referenced as part of the woman's biographical note. Although the biography may focus instead on the information found within the collection, it still continues to leave out important context for the women themselves.

The finding aid also includes administrative information that explains when the archival institution received and processed the collections to include descriptions, revealing when and how archivists contextualized the collections. Although the papers of Colby, Fletcher, Reel, and Wetherill became part of their institutions' holdings in the mid-20th century, many did not process the collections until decades later. While the institution holding Colby's papers processed the collection originally in 1976, the other collections were processed between 1990-2009. Some of the collections, including Colby's, Fletcher's, and Reel's, have been updated within the last decade. Because Colby's and Fletcher's papers include letters between the women and their adopted indigenous children, their finding aids include a brief mention of their adoptions. Reel's

²³⁵ Prom, "User Interactions with Electronic Finding Aids in a Controlled Setting," 235-237.

and Wetherill's, however, continue to leave out any information about their adoptions. Despite being recontextualized since appraisal, any narrative of adoption remains brief, and even invisible in some collections.²³⁶

If the contexts of the archival collections are expanded, the narrative of indigenous adoption is broadened. For example, Betty Rodgers's oral history is part of an archive dedicated to traders among the Navajos. The information provided by the finding aid and descriptions discusses the importance of traders and their experiences on the Navajos' reservation. The creator of the collection interviewed Betty Rodgers because of her trading post and connection to the trading post established by the Wetherills. Although the collection is not meant to preserve documents about indigenous child removal and adoption, Betty's interview is an important source.²³⁷

One way archival institutions could add to the finding aid in order to direct researchers towards elements that discuss adoption is through metadata. Metadata is data that describes individual materials. This data gives documents context and helps organize collections through common descriptors among materials. Creating metadata for archival collections is an important aspect within the practice of description. Examples of metadata include information such as titles and authors of documents, which are used in the bibliographic contents of a collection. Structural metadata such as a table of contents, tags, and an index help with navigation through collections. Metadata is a fundamental tool to help provide access to the public. This importance led to archival institutions

²³⁶ Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche Papers, MS 4558, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C; Clara Bewick Colby Papers, MSS379, Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives, and Museum Collections, Madison, Wisconsin; Estelle Reel Meyer Collection, H60-110, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, Wyoming; Wetherill Family Collection, MS-001, Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona.

²³⁷ Interview with Betty Rodgers.

creating standards of practice relating to metadata and description. Because the descriptors give context to the materials preserved by the institution, the metadata allows the public to easily discover and research the collections.²³⁸ By adding discussions and tags about adoption to the biographical note and metadata of reformers' manuscript collections, they can be better linked to form a bigger picture of adoption. The White women preserved in these archives remain our only source for the adoptions of multiple indigenous children. Additionally, the connection between the White women and indigenous people is only described in one way. Their collections may describe them as working for or with Native Americans in various reforms, but their decision, whether informal or formal, of adopting an indigenous child and removing them from their biological family and community is not included as part of their connection or efforts. By leaving mentions of adoption out of the biographies of the adoptive mothers and families, the indigenous children continue to remain as separate from White women's narratives as reformers.

Betty Rodgers's interview again acts as an important example of how metadata could be used with existing collections. Increased metadata for the oral history and collection would help direct researchers to the interview, and allow for an expanded narrative about the adoptions of indigenous children. The personal experiences that Betty describes as an adopted daughter of the Wetherill give important insight into the actions of reformers and history of indigenous child removal. If archivists added metadata to the oral history, it would direct researchers to the collection and interview as a source of information pertaining to the adoption of indigenous children. In addition, Betty

²³⁸ Cauvin, "Collection Management," 33-34.

described how officials removed her from her biological family in order to take her to attend boarding school.²³⁹ Although the collection and its notes only focus on the Navajos' trading system, Betty's oral history provides personal information about various aspects relating to indigenous child removal.

Another way finding aids can be used in order to connect different archival collections and highlight specific documents to showcase maternalism and adoption is by allowing researchers to interact and manipulate the finding aid. A participatory finding aid could be created for established collections by allowing user annotations. Although finding aids were originally paper records held at the archive in order to guide in-person researchers, the guides are becoming increasingly digitized. Because of the electronic availability of the finding aid, researchers can interact with the finding aid, and sometimes even digitized manuscript collections themselves, all online. If researchers can add comments that can be added to the finding aid, their work can be a valuable tool for future users. The annotations make archives more accessible and allow for extra information to be included in the researcher's first view of the collections. User comments include anything from questions about the materials to connect researchers, to specific quotes or areas of the documents deemed important by users to point out to others. User annotations allow researchers to have a more detailed view of the materials, as well as shift the authority of the collections from that of the archivist alone to the entirety of the researchers using the documents. When archivists create finding aids for a collection, it often describes the materials at container-, folder-, or document-level. Regardless of the level of detail in the finding aid, it is the property of the archivist, who

²³⁹ Interview with Betty Rodgers.

most likely sorted and studied the material in order to organize the collection. When the finding aid can be commented on by users, those researchers then share in developing the record. User annotations are an important tool to allow researchers to interact with collections and documents in order to expand the description found in the finding aid. In addition, comments can provide increased context and perspectives on the collection to further assist and guide researchers.²⁴⁰

User annotations also help archival institutions expand and shift their role in public memory. Traditional standards of creating and distributing finding aids led to the institution deciding on a collection's scope and context, thus deciding what is preserved for the future. When researchers can add comments and bring in other perspectives and information, it expands what the collection contributes to the public memory.²⁴¹ User annotations are one way the finding aid can be used to increase mentions of indigenous child removal and adoptions. More broadly, it represents a way to recontextualize and connect different archival collections to broaden the narrative of reformers' maternalism and adoptions.

Metadata and participatory finding aids are various ways established manuscript collections can be recontextualized in order to broaden the narrative of indigenous child removal and adoption. In addition, these practices help researchers connect various collections to help understand reformers' maternalist rhetoric that led to their adoptions of indigenous children. While a lot of information about the indigenous children may be lost, expanding the archives will acknowledge that various reformers' took multiple

²⁴⁰ Laura Farley, "The Participatory Finding Aid and the Archivist: How User Annotations are Changing Everyone's Role," *Archival Issues* 35 no. 2 (2014): 79-82.

²⁴¹ Farley, "The Participatory Finding Aid and the Archivist," 82.

indigenous children from their biological families in order to accelerate assimilation and fulfill women's motherly roles towards the children they interacted with. These archival practices help ensure that important historical moments are not forgotten in society's collective memory.²⁴²

Conclusion

A lack of preservation of information pertaining to the indigenous children adopted between 1880 and 1930 can be seen within attempts to stop indigenous child removal almost 50 years later. When the government passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978, multiple tribes supported the act with testimonies referring to the large numbers of children taken from their biological families to be placed in boarding schools and foster homes during the post-WWII era. A witness during the Congressional proceedings, Calvin Isaac, a tribal chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaws, called legislator's attentions back to the years of enforcing education among indigenous communities. "If Indian communities continue to lose their children...for adoptive and foster care placement at the alarming rates of the recent past, if Indian families continue to be disrespected and their parental capacities challenged...then education, the tribe, Indian culture have little meaning or value for the future."²⁴³ The Congressional testimonies focused on the large numbers of children adopted in the between the 1950s and 1970s, but not those that took place between 1880 and 1930.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Britton, "Public History and Public Memory," 19-20.

²⁴³ *Hearing before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs*, S. 1214, Indian Child Welfare Act of 1977, 95th Congress, 1st sess., August 4, 1977.

²⁴⁴ *Hearing before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs*, S. 1214, Indian Child Welfare Act of 1977, 95th Congress, 1st sess., August 4, 1977.

The later years of indigenous adoption are more documented than those that occurred over a century before, due in large part to the Indian Adoption Projects. The projects were an effort between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League during the 1950s that attempted to place indigenous children with White foster or adoptive families. The main idea behind the project was assimilating indigenous children into White culture, a practice with decades-old origins. Reformers began to remove Native American children from their biological families in order to force the children to attend boarding school. The maternalist reformers used their rhetoric that argued women and children needed guidance and lessons in how to be wives and mothers to later justify removing indigenous children in order to adopt them. Again, maternalists argued that adopting indigenous children would not only help White women fulfill their perceived “motherly” role, but also help to assimilate the child in a much more intimate setting than a boarding school or reservation. The Indian Adoption Projects replicated this practice when the boarding schools closed. The era of the Indian Adoption Projects had high numbers of adopted children taken from their homes and biological families and is preserved through works from the children themselves. Because of the project’s sponsors, officials documented the numbers of children adopted and names of those involved.²⁴⁵ Because of this, researchers know how dramatically the number of indigenous children adopted increased before the ICWA passed in 1978.

Numbers of children adopted between 1880 and 1930, however, are more difficult to determine because of the often informal processes and lack of preserved documents discussing the adoptions. Most of the available sources exist within separate digitized

²⁴⁵ Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*, 5-7.

collections and archival manuscript collections focused on White reformers' efforts. By leaving out the context of maternalism and adoption, these narratives are also left out of public memory. Increased description within archival finding aids could recontextualize collections and provide researchers easier access to sources that discuss reformers' maternalism and adoptions of indigenous children. Metadata that includes tags to direct researchers to documents that include references to adoption or maternalism, as well as participatory finding aids would provide additional context for various collections. In addition, this added description and recontextualization would connect these collections across common themes and narratives, including maternalism and adoption.²⁴⁶ Increasing the discoverability and connections between different archival collections and preserved journals could help expand the narratives of indigenous children adopted by reformers and other White families within public memory.

²⁴⁶ Cauvin, "Collection Management," 33-34; Farley, "The Participatory Finding Aid and the Archivist," 79-82.

V. CONCLUSION

The reformers involved with U.S. policies regarding Native Americans focused much of their attention on the indigenous women and children as the best targets for assimilation. White, female reformers created their own unique variant of maternalism, which implied that motherhood was not an inherent, biological trait within all women. In addition, they supported and carried out the education of indigenous women and children in the Progressive Era ideals of scientific motherhood while undermining their traditions of childbirth and childrearing. These efforts to force the assimilation of Native American children into White, U.S. culture led several reformers to believe that even with education, indigenous mothers would never be as ideal as White mothers, a role they saw themselves as already filling within their jobs. This maternalist rhetoric that they created led to reformers putting the ideals into practice by adopting indigenous children. While many of these reformers are preserved in public memory through archival collections and organizational publications, the indigenous children themselves, taken from their biological parents, community, and culture, are less well-known.

The focus on women and motherhood had multiple effects among indigenous families and communities between 1880 and 1930, and had various repercussions past the 50 year period. Studies concluded that between 1970 and 1976 the Indian Health Service sterilized over 25 percent of indigenous women. One physician found that surgeons completed at least one-fourth of the sterilizations on women under the age of 44, some as young as 15 years-old. After reviewing the Indian Health Service and their sterilization procedures, the Government Accounting Office found that multiple facilities ignored Department of Health, Education, and Welfare regulations, specifically the rule requiring

physicians to obtain informed consent, a three-day waiting period between consent and the procedure, and a minimum age of 21 years-old.²⁴⁷

These sterilizations and ideas of intervening in Native American women's reproductive health had origins during reform efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Field matrons attempted to persuade women to give birth in hospitals with physicians, promoted scientific motherhood and childcare, and taught children in boarding schools that traditional forms of childbirth were dangerous. The fact that boarding school attendance meant a separation between parents and their children only worked to reformers' advantages. Parents could no longer pass on customs and traditions to their children, while teachers and field matrons taught both mothers and children that medical professionals were important to their children's health.²⁴⁸

Not only did BIA officials remove children to attend boarding schools hundreds of miles away from their families, but reformers then used this separation to their advantage when adopting indigenous children. The distance between parents and their children allowed adoptive mothers to find ways around obtaining the biological parent's consent. Reformers' arguments that indigenous women could not be proper mothers until female BIA employees educated them in scientific motherhood and practices common among middle-class White women, often made judges agree to grant the adoptive parents custody.²⁴⁹ After working as field matrons, schoolteachers, and missionaries, reformers often saw themselves in a "motherly" role towards the indigenous children with whom they interacted. Female reformers never faced the same scrutiny that they subjected

²⁴⁷ Jane Lawrence, "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women," *American Indian Quarterly* 24 no. 3 (Summer 2000): 406-410.

²⁴⁸ Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 66-67.

²⁴⁹ Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 29.

indigenous women to, and could easily adopt indigenous children in order to fulfill their motherly role, and put their maternalist rhetoric into practice.

Much like the ideas behind sterilization came from earlier reform efforts, the ideas that led to adoptions of indigenous children had ramifications in later decades. Because reformers used adoption as a way to quickly and intimately assimilate indigenous children into White, U.S. culture by forming a “familial” bond, many officials saw the practice as an acceptable solution when many boarding schools began to close in the 1950s. At the same time the Children’s Bureau and BIA began the Indian Adoption Projects, which resulted in hundreds of children being placed in foster care from the boarding schools they attended, various tribes fought to have their children returned. The Devil’s Lake Sioux argued that they had jurisdiction over the children from their reservation in the North Dakota Supreme Court. After winning the case in 1963, however, the welfare workers continued to declare indigenous mothers unfit and remove their children. In one custody case, the Sioux and Association on Indian Affairs hired a lawyer to argue for the return of a Native American child from a White foster family. The lawyer discovered that one in four children from the reservation resided with White foster or adoptive families. These high numbers of children in foster care and adoptive homes were not unique to the Devil’s Lake Sioux in North Dakota, and eventually led to the passing of the Indian Child Welfare Act.²⁵⁰

These statistics from the 1960s and 1970s concerning coerced sterilizations and large numbers of Native American children in the custody of someone other than their biological parents had roots in the actions of reformers decades earlier. The precedent to

²⁵⁰ Laura Briggs, *Taking Children: A History of American Terror* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 62-63.

believe that White officials knew best when it came to indigenous women and their children was set in the 1880s through the 1930s with White, female reformers' actions. Field matrons entered homes on reservations to teach women how to clean their homes. Schoolteachers taught indigenous girls how to sanitize their kitchens and make meals for their husbands.²⁵¹ Medical professionals convinced women it was in their best interest to give up their centuries-old childbirth practices and instead have a White doctor deliver their baby in a hospital.²⁵² BIA officials forcibly removed children from their families to attend boarding schools, and some of those same officials adopted indigenous children without the consent of the biological parents.

Several reformers adopted indigenous children. Some adopted after working closely with indigenous children in reformers' roles as teachers, field matrons, and BIA officials. Others adopted after being involved with the institutions that supported reform efforts, like in the case of the Colbys and the Wetherills. Mary Dissette, who adopted three girls in New Mexico, and Hope Ghiselin, who adopted a girl in Arizona, were schoolteachers. Alice Fletcher, an allotment agent, adopted Francis La Flesche in Nebraska. Superintendent of the Indian School System Estelle Reel adopted a girl in Wyoming. Clara Colby, suffragist, and her husband, a U.S. military general, adopted Zintka Lanuni in Nebraska. The Wetherills, owners of a trading post near the Navajos' reservation, adopted Fanny, Esther, and Betty in Arizona. These ten are likely only a fraction of the indigenous children adopted by white families between 1880 and 1930,

²⁵¹ Reel, *Course of Study for Indian Schools*, 3-6, 148-149; Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian Schools Service*, 20.

²⁵² Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 31-36.

and for historians looking to expand the research in this topic, I recommend a closer look at the experiences of the children themselves.²⁵³

All of the above women and families who supported indigenous child removal and later adopted children have their lives preserved in archival collections, while the children themselves are less known. Several adopted children cannot even be named, despite their adoptive parents' preserved collections. Even more have no record of their life before these reformers adopted them. These archival silences then influence the historical narrative in the public memory. The information that reformers chose to document reflect their maternalist rhetoric and support for the adoption of indigenous children as a benevolent action that accelerated assimilation efforts. It is for this reason that examining adoption within the context of maternalism is important. Reformers adopted native children in order to put their unique maternalist rhetoric into practice, and the available sources document the actions within that context. In order to make adopted indigenous children more visible in the public memory, the narratives told within archival collections must be expanded while more sources outside of the archives are looked to for information regarding adoptions of indigenous children.

²⁵³ Colby, "Zintka Lanuni: The Waif of Wounded Knee" *The Women's Tribune*, February 21, 1891, 2; Disette, "A Retrospective" *The Indian's Friend* 10 no. 2 (August 1898): 9-11; "From San Carlos, Arizona" *The Indian's Friend* 3 no. 2 (November 1890); Jacobs, "Breaking and Remaking Families," 25; Mark, "The American Indian as Anthropologist," 496-504; "News and Notes" *The Indian's Friend* 16 no. 6 (February 1904): 5; "The Soldiers and the Children" *The Indian's Friend* 3 no. 9 (May 1891): 2; Wetherill, *Traders to the Navajos*, 230-232.

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