

**Jacqueline Emery, editor. *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. 348 pp. ISBN 9780803276758.**

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In an 1880 editorial, Carlisle Indian Industrial School student Samuel Townsend, a citizen of the Pawnee nation, confronted white Americans who denigrated the intelligence of Native children enrolled in federally-managed boarding schools in the United States. Writing in the *School News* student newspaper, Townsend declared, “Some white folks say that the Indians do not know anything and can’t learn anything, but the Indians are learning something. . . . Maybe those white folks don’t know anything” (Emery 56). Townsend’s words underscore his emphasis on the intellectual capabilities of Native students as well as his willingness to challenge and dismantle white supremacist narratives. That he made these comments while a student at Carlisle, established as the first off-reservation Indian boarding school in 1879 with a mandate to assimilate and “civilize” Native children, also displays a resilience that, according to author Jacqueline Emery, was more common among boarding school students than one might think.

In her edited volume *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, Jacqueline Emery shares many such accounts that were written between the 1880s and the first two decades of the twentieth century, the period during which the Indian boarding school system in the United States was at its peak. In her introduction, Emery argues that this collection of student writings is important for a number of reasons. First, they provide crucial insights into Native students’ lives as they document their boarding school experiences and interests during an era of intense assimilation in which Native children were often kidnapped from their families and pressured to reshape their lives according to the dictates of white, middle-class society. Second, she characterizes student writings as critical means of communication that were utilized in sophisticated ways by boarding school pupils. Emery asserts, for example, that student authors used school newspapers “to shape representations of Indianness” in these publications, to create communities of Indigenous readers and editors, and to reach out both to their home communities and other Native boarding school students across the United States (2). Student writings were also a means of preserving aspects of Native culture as they allowed students to write about their tribal histories, stories, and cultures in specific and nuanced ways.

Further, Emery also argues persuasively that these student writings, while almost certainly subjected to oversight and censorship by school officials, should be considered as important works of Native literature, and not solely as propaganda used by school administrators to illustrate their success in educating Native children. She points out the complicated negotiations between students and non-Native school officials that likely accompanied the publication of articles, such as that written by Samuel Townshend, and also addresses the subtler ways Native authors confronted white supremacist narratives. Emery cites a letter written by Arizona Jackson, for example, who, after graduating from the Seneca Indian School in 1880, enrolled in college where she was forced to contend with the preconceived notions of the predominately non-Native study body. Jackson wrote that her fellow students were shocked to learn she was “the Indian girl” at school, as they presumed Native peoples to be “savages, uncivilized, and anything but the right thing” (39-40).

The volume is organized into two distinct sections. The first half focuses on the letters, editorials, essays, and short stories written by students while they attended boarding school. The majority of works in this section are culled from boarding school newspapers published by five different schools across the country: the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, the Chilocco Indian Industrial and Agricultural School and the Seneca Indian School in Oklahoma, the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia, and the Santee Normal Training School in Nebraska. The second half consists of essays, articles, and addresses written by Native intellectuals after their departure from the boarding school system. Emery suggests that the writing skills of many within this network of Native public intellectuals, such as Gertrude Bonin (Yankton Sioux), Angel De Cora (Winnebago), Francis La Flesche (Omaha), and Laura Cornelius Kellog (Oneida), among others, were honed by their time working on student publications as boarding school students. Throughout, Emery is careful to showcase writings that contain a variety of different perspectives and that both critique and praise different aspects of Native peoples' boarding school experiences.

Emery's arguments about the importance of boarding school writings, combined with the detailed accounts of daily life and the assortment of viewpoints included in this book, suggest a range of ways in which this work will be utilized by readers. As a course textbook, *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press* will allow instructors to explore both the history of the Native American boarding school system in the United States and the ways students navigated these oppressive environments. The writings Emery includes in this volume also encompass an impressive selection of previously unpublished primary source documents that students, researchers, and educators can mine for details about student experiences and Native American activism. In terms of their literary value, readers will find much to analyze in the numerous and compelling accounts of boarding school life, such as Gertrude Bonin's description of her first days at boarding school:

The first day in the land of apples was a bitter cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless. (254-255)

Emery's work should also inspire the publication of additional collections of Native American boarding school writings. Generations of Native children were subjected to these schools, each of which featured opportunities for students to showcase their literary talents and share their views about their educational experiences. The absorbing nature of these writings and reflections, combined with the insights they provide into an often-ignored chapter in U.S. history, illustrate their value and significance and underscore the importance of publishing additional volumes of Native students' writings.

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