

True Women, New Women, and Civilizers in the American West:
White women teachers and matrons in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, 1880-1930

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The mountain of northern California remained largely unsettled wilderness in 1908 when Mary Arnold and Mabel Reed first arrived with their government appointments as Bureau of Indian Affairs matrons. Scattered mining towns peppered the landscape, populated mainly by rough-hewn white men who had come to the West seeking their fortunes in the gold mines. American Indians inhabited the backcountry hills, still maintaining much of their native culture despite the increasing incursions of white people. Mountain trails were unmarked and could turn treacherous after a spring thaw; perilous rivers cut through deep valleys, spanned only by equally perilous bridges; panthers lurked in the forests, ready to pounce on the unsuspecting traveler. As Arnold and Reed put it in their joint memoir of their two years as matrons in the Hoopa Valley, this was “really rough country.”¹ It would certainly seem no place for two proper young ladies who, according to the Victorian gender norms that had come to dominate American society over the course of the nineteenth century, were expected to stay ensconced in the private sphere of the home as wives and mothers, cultivating the four cardinal virtues of a True Woman: purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity.² Yet the turn of the twentieth century was also a time of extensive change for women in the United States: the ideal of the True Woman now had to share the scene with the emergent New Woman. Great variety existed among the experiences of women of various classes, geographic locations, and ethnicities, but on the whole, women increasingly sought out new opportunities outside the home in education, occupations, politics, and especially Progressive reform movements.³ As BIA teachers, who worked mainly with Indian children in the classroom, and matrons, who took on some teaching responsibilities as

¹ Mary Ellicott Arnold and Mabel Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song: Two Women in the Klamath River Indian Country in 1908-09* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), 1, 12, 13-37.

² Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860. *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, Part 1 (Summer 1966): 151-174, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711179>. (accessed October 1, 2008), 152.

³ Dorothy Schneider, and Carl J. Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 4, 11-19; see also Lois W. Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History*, 2nd ed., (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1984).

well as overseeing children's activities outside the classroom and instructing the greater Indian community in a variety of Anglo-American domestic practices, hundreds of women like Arnold and Reed played a critical role in carrying out the policies of one of the prominent reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: the effort to assimilate and "civilize" American Indians through a reformed system of Indian education.⁴

However, despite these women's unique position at the intersection of the history of American women in the West, changing gender roles, Progressive reform movements, and American Indian education, they remain little studied. Since the 1970's women's history as a field has expanded enormously, with many scholars employing the methods of new social history across a wide variety of time periods as well as subject areas to uncover the stories of women long excluded for the conventional historical narrative. In addition to looking broadly at the evolution of American gender roles and the growth of women's participation in Progressive reform during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many scholars have specifically focused on the history of women in the American West during this time period.⁵ A host of scholars have undertaken studies of western history from women's perspectives by examining diaries, letters, and memoirs written by western women. In doing so they offered an explicit challenge to conventional stereotypes of western women as long-suffering pioneer wives, demure schoolmarms, gun-toting female bandits, and decadent prostitutes by illuminating the

⁴ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 5-27; Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) 2: 609.

⁵ For general histories of women in America see: Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America From Colonial Times to the Present*, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975); Sheila A. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978); Glenda Riley, *Inventing the American Woman: A Perspective on Women's History, 1607-1877*. (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1986); for changing gender roles and Progressive reform movements, see Schneider; Banner; Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, editors, *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*. (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1991); Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

lives of real western women both as a group and as individuals.⁶ Many of these studies have also accorded special attention to western women of various races and ethnicities.⁷ However, the Indian school teacher's voice is virtually absent, and at times consciously excluded, from all these analyses.⁸

A similar silence reigns in studies of American Indian education. There are many excellent studies that trace the overarching history of Indian education, typically concentrating on the perspective of white reformers and policymakers who oversaw the system from above.⁹ A number of studies also narrow their concentration to BIA reforms and the formulation of "civilizing" and assimilating policies in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰ Recently, several scholars have also produced case studies of individual Indian schools that focus on the students' perspective by employing student letters, autobiographies, and oral histories.¹¹ These studies illustrate the agency of Indian children in both accommodating and resisting the Indian school

⁶ A selection of readings on women in the West include: John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 2nd ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979); Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Susan Arimtage and Elizabeth Jameson, editors, *The Women's West*. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987);

⁷ For essays on gender and race in the West see Mary Ann Irwin and James F. Brooks, editors. *Women and Gender in the American West*. (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); for discussion of pioneer women's interactions with American Indians in particular see Glenda Riley, *Confronting Race: Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1815-1915*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

⁸ Riley, for example, explicitly excludes sources from women teachers and missionaries in *Confronting Race* because she feels they are unrepresentative of the "typical" pioneer woman due to their more intimate and prolonged interactions with the Indians. See Riley, *Confronting Race*, 3.

⁹ In addition to Prucha's *The Great Father* and Adams' *Education for Extinction* see Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

¹⁰ See Tom Holm. *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans and Whites in the Progressive Era*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Christine Bolt, *American Indian Policy and American Reform: Case Studies of the Campaign to Assimilate the American Indians*. (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987); and Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900*. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976).

¹¹ See Brenda J. Child. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); K. Tsianina Lomawaima. *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School*. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Clyde Ellis. *To Change Them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding school, 1893-1920*. (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Scott Riney. *The Rapid City Indian School, 1898-1933*. (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press 1999); Michael Coleman. *American Indian Children at School, 1850-1930*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993).

system imposed upon them by whites, and they add a crucial dimension to the literature on American Indian education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although teachers and matrons are often mentioned in both general histories of American Indian education and case studies of specific Indian schools, they typically appear in either statistical data, student reminiscences, or brief excerpts from teacher autobiographies, and are seldom the direct focus of scholarship. Patricia Carter is unique among scholars for her study of women teachers through an examination of their memoirs. Although her study gives a voice to these women's previously unexamined perspectives, Carter does not sufficiently contextualize their experiences in terms of either shifting gender norms or the BIA's policies of civilization and assimilation.¹² Thus, the literature lacks an exploration of the relationship between evolving gender roles and women teachers and matron's own perceptions of the BIA's civilizing mission.

Yet considering of the experiences of women teachers and matrons who went West under the auspices of the BIA during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is critical to a more complete understanding of American Indian education during the crucial period of reform from the 1880s to 1930. Moreover, it also illuminates the broader history of women in America, especially in relation to changing gender roles at the turn of the twentieth century and how women alternatively conformed to or modified socially prescribed ideologies according to their own experiences. Scholars examining the widespread involvement of women in Progressive era reform movements have shown that shifting women's roles at the turn of the twentieth century appeared to defy pre-existing gender norms as women moved out of the private sphere into the

¹² Patricia Carter, "'Completely Discouraged': Women Teachers' Resistance in the Bureau of Indian Education Schools, 1900-1910," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 15, no. 3 (1955): 53-86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346785>. (accessed October 1, 2008); See also Susan Peterson, "'Holy Women' and Housekeepers; Women Teachers on South Dakota Reservations, 1885-1910," *South Dakota History* 14, no. 3 (1983): 245-260. Peterson employs archival sources from the Sisters of St. Francis and official BIA reports, but does not include women's own writings in her study of teachers and matrons South Dakota Indian schools.

public domain and developed identities as New Women. At the same time, others have argued that the activities of women reformers were frequently justified by appealing to ideas of “female moral superiority,” “female moral authority,” or “maternalism,” all of which were fundamentally based on the cult of domesticity that the New Woman strove to leave behind.¹³ As women’s work as teachers and matrons carrying out the BIA’s civilizing mission was justified in similar terms, an investigation of BIA teachers’ and matrons’ experiences offers a valuable opportunity to explore the extent to which women accepted and contested ideological constructs deriving from the cult of domesticity given their experiences living, working, and interacting with American Indian children and communities in the West.

In order to investigate these questions, it is critical to examine not only the broader context of Victorian era gender roles, women’s involvement in reform movements, and American Indian education, but also how women perceived themselves as both women and as purportedly ideal civilizers. Letters, diaries, memoirs and oral reminiscences can provide a wealth of information on women’s lives, but are often difficult to come by. Such is the case regarding accounts left by women who served in the BIA. However, seven memoirs written by eight BIA teachers and matrons can provide a sound basis for an initial exploration into the question of how these women contended with socially prescribed ideologies working for the BIA in the West around the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴ There are, of course, certain limitations to such a

¹³ For studies of women reformers in the West, see Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search of Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Margaret D. Jacobs, “Maternal Colonialism: White Women and Indigenous Child Removal in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no.4 (Winter 2005). <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/whq/36.4/jacobs.html>. (accessed October 1 2008).

¹⁴ In addition to Arnold and Reed’s joint memoir, the six other memoirs include: Estelle Aubrey Brown, *Stubborn Fool: A Narrative* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1952); Elaine Goodale Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux: The Memoirs of Elaine Goodale Eastman, 1885-91*, ed. Day Graber (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Lincoln Press, 1978); Gertrude Golden, *Red Moon Called Me: Memoirs of a Schoolteacher in the Government Service* (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1954); Flora Gregg Iliff, *People of the Blue Water: A Record of Life Among the Walapai and Havasupai Indians* (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1954); Minnie

study. The experiences recorded by only eight women cannot necessarily be generalized to speak for all women employed by the BIA during this time period. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that building a study around memoirs, as opposed to letters or diaries, carries certain complications as these accounts were written after the fact, sometimes several decades after the women had left the BIA, and, as is the case with all published works, were written with a particular audience and purpose in mind. Moreover, as personal memoirs, these sources illuminate white women's perceptions; however they do not necessarily reflect the realities of American Indian life and culture, and at times they even obscure or misrepresent the American Indian perspective. Furthermore, due to constraints of time and space, this study necessarily focuses on white American women who worked in BIA schools to the exclusion of American Indian women who held similar positions. The story of Indian women teachers and matrons are similarly absent in existing literature and a serious scholarly study of their experiences is also much needed, albeit beyond the scope of this paper.

Yet while it is necessary to remain cognizant of these sources' limitations, there are certain advantages to approaching such a study through this selection of individual memoirs. As Kaufman finds in her work on women teachers in the West, "any study of women who chose to go west must acknowledge the tremendous diversity among them and the differences in their perceptions and conditions."¹⁵ Indeed, the eight women in this study differ in many respects. They were originally from locations across the United States: Arnold and Reed came from New Jersey, Estelle Aubrey Brown from upstate New York, Elaine Goodale Eastman from Massachusetts, Gertrude Golden from Michigan, Flora Gregg Iliff from the Oklahoma frontier, Jenkins from Williamsburg, Virginia, and Janette Woodruff from Wisconsin and the Dakotas.

Braithwaite Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg* (Richmond Virginia: The Dietz Press, Incorporated, 1952) Janette Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, ed. Cecil Dryden (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1939)

¹⁵ Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier*, xix.

They served across the West and worked with a diverse variety of American Indian tribes. Some, such as Golden, encountered over a dozen different groups at posts throughout the entire West: she worked with Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla in Oregon; Yuma Indians in Arizona; Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, and Wichita in Oklahoma; Gross Ventre and Assiniboine in Montana; Sioux in South Dakota; Navajo in New Mexico; and Chippewa in Wisconsin. Others encountered only one tribe and remained in a single location, such as Arnold and Reed who spent their entire two years of service with the Karok Indians in California's Hoopa Valley. The women all served for a varying amounts of time: Golden, Iliff, Brown, and Woodruff had careers that spanned over ten years, while Arnold and Reed as well as Jenkins spent from one to two years in the field. Even the positions they held varied slightly: the majority of the women worked as BIA teachers on reservation boarding schools and day schools. However, Woodruff, Arnold, and Reed were field matrons, and Brown, in addition to working as teacher and matron, eventually attained an appointment as financial clerk.¹⁶ Finally, each woman expressed a different reason for writing her memoir. For instance, Woodruff wrote to vindicate her "civilizing" work as a matron; Arnold and Reed intended to provide a window into Karok life; and Brown used her memoir as a means to advocate for Indian reform and to critique of the BIA.¹⁷ Thus, although these eight women constituted only a minute fraction of all BIA teachers and matrons, their memoirs provide a diverse and representative sample in many respects.

Despite their diversity, all eight of the women included in this study did share the common experience of working in the BIA around the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, their careers spanned the entire length of the period under discussion: Eastman began her service in

¹⁶ Carter, "Completely Discouraged," 58-65; Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 13; Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 1.

¹⁷ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 320; Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 5; Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 309.

the early 1880s, while Woodruff did not leave the service until 1929.¹⁸ For all these reasons, the seven memoirs included in this study provide a valuable opportunity to explore the experiences of BIA teachers and matrons as individuals and as a group through their own words. The following investigation finds that, like their contemporaries involved in reform movements throughout the country, BIA teachers and matrons who went West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century confronted the ideal of the True Woman as they moved outside the home. They sought to increase their independence as New Women by joining the BIA, while at the same time reinforcing the tenets of the cult of domesticity by accepting their role as the supposed purveyors of culture and moral values as part of the BIA's civilizing mission. Their experiences in the West, however, led them to challenge the cult of domesticity both by affirming their identities as New Women and questioning the virtue of the civilizing mission. In the end, however, there were limits to how far these women could question the civilizing mission because their power and influence as New Women was intimately linked to their ascribed role as civilizers of the Indians.

Unconventional womanhood: Defying the True Woman and identifying with the New Woman

Given the prevailing conceptions of gender in America during the nineteenth century, it may seem strange that any women would choose to make the journey into the “wilds of the West” to teach the Indians. As the nineteenth century progressed, a system increasingly characterized by rigidly divided gender roles developed. According to this ideological construct, variously referred to as the “cult of domesticity,” “cult of True Womanhood,” and “separate spheres ideology,” the public world of business, politics, and industry was reserved for men,

¹⁸ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 17; Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 319

while women were restricted to the private world of the home.¹⁹ In addition, the cult of domesticity maintained that True Womanhood was defined by “four cardinal virtues” that were believed to be inherent in women’s nature: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Accordingly, as an ideal the True Woman was pious, devoting herself to God and charitable religious pursuits. She was pure and took great pains to maintain her virtue until she invariably married.²⁰ While men were held to be superior in strength and intellect, women had a delicate constitution and remained “ever timid, doubtful, and clingingly dependent,” consigned to “a perpetual childhood.”²¹ Thus, the proper woman was to be passive and docile, and she must submit to the authority of her husband and other men. Finally, the True Woman was content to inhabit the domestic sphere and cheerfully occupy her time with the duties of wife and mother and other “morally uplifting” tasks, such as needlework and flower arranging, in order to make her home a haven for her husband and children in the midst of the depravities of the public world.²² Such conceptions of women’s roles pertained mainly to white, upper and middle class women of the Northeast and the South and did not necessarily correspond to the reality of most women’s lives, especially women who were poor or racial minorities. However, the tenets of the cult of domesticity were widely disseminated by women’s magazines, journals, newspapers, printed sermons, and even schoolbooks, and they “proved elastic enough to flourish in different regional settings and appealing enough for many women to take them to heart despite the awkward fit.”²³ Thus, the True Woman, as defined by the cult of domesticity, became the ideal to which women across nineteenth century America aspired.

¹⁹ Nancy Bonvillian, *Women and Men: Cultural Constructs of Gender*. 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), 162; Kathleen Weiler, “Women’s History and the History of Women Teachers,” *Journal of Education* 171, no. 3 (1989): 9-30. (accessed October 1, 2008),10; Welter,151.

²⁰ Welter, *The Cult of True Womanhood*,152-165.

²¹ Letter “To an Unrecognized Poetess, June, 1846,” (Sarah Jane Clarke), *Greenwood Leaves* (2nd ed., Boston, 1850) qtd. in Welter, *The Cult of True Womanhood*,160.

²² Welter, *The Cult of True Womanhood*,152-165.

²³ Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 15.

As the pious, pure, submissive, and domestic woman was held up as the ideal in turn of the twentieth century American society, it is perhaps unsurprising that women who recorded their experiences as BIA teachers and matrons recalled that their decision to leave home for the western frontier was vehemently opposed by friends and family members. Woodruff's family and friends were particularly vocal in their protests when she informed them of her appointment as matron at the Crow reservation in Montana. They disparaged such work as "drudgery for a mere pittance" in addition to warning her about the dangers of isolation, the Indian massacres, and rampant disease. Woodruff's sister was especially dismayed that her sister was going "away off in the wilds of the West."²⁴ In her conception, the West was no place for a True Woman. Jenkins' mother reacted with similar distress when her daughter informed her that she intended to leave home and teach the Navajo in Arizona. Attempting to thwart this potentially dangerous and decidedly unladylike ambition, Mrs. Braithwaite went so far as to appeal to a congressman neighbor, hoping that he could use his influence in Washington DC "to keep her daughter from gallivanting off to the far West."²⁵ Eastman's family and friends also "strongly disapproved" of her plan to start a new school for the Sioux at White River in the Dakotas: "dire consequences were freely predicted in case we persisted, ranging from attacks by the savages to the cut direct from 'Society' on our return to civilization." Eastman perceptively attributed such disapproval to the fact that "young ladies in that era rarely ventured far from the beaten track."²⁶ Friends and relatives skeptically questioned whether single women, assumed to be weak and inferior by nature, would be able to withstand the strains and hazards of frontier life. Brown's father echoed these criticisms, doubting that as a "green country girl traveling alone" his daughter would

²⁴ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 17-18.

²⁵ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 4.

²⁶ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 31.

“have the guts to stick it.”²⁷ However, despite the manifold reservations and protestations of family and friends, these women refused to be deterred by such socially-influenced prejudice against their gender: they all accepted their BIA appointments in the West even though, as Jenkins put in, “dutiful daughters weren’t ever supposed to be so independent.”²⁸

Indeed, in writing their memoirs, these women presented themselves as anything but the ideal daughter by commonly accepted turn of the century standards. On the contrary, they tended to depict themselves as markedly unconventional women who opposed and even resented the fixed gender roles prescribed by the cult of domesticity. Their memoirs made it clear that they conceived of themselves not in terms of the Victorian ideal of the True Woman, but rather in terms of the New Woman who began to emerge in the late 1890s. As a female type that stood in distinct contrast of the True Woman, the New Woman was “young, well educated, probably a college graduate, independent of spirit, highly competent, and physically strong and fearless.”²⁹ She left the confines of the home and family to pursue her own personal ambitions; she associated freely with men in public; she wore bloomers and rode a bicycle; she “insisted centrally on the right to live and breath as a separate human being.”³⁰ At the turn of the twentieth century, the idea of New Woman defied the conventional ideal of the True Woman in almost every respect.

Although they may not have employed the term itself, these BIA teachers and matrons clearly saw themselves as possessing the attributes of the New Woman. Eastman, for example, explained that her parents allowed her considerable freedom as a child and always encouraged her precocious ambitions as a young poetess. Her liberal upbringing translated into a certain

²⁷ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 21-22.

²⁸ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 4.

²⁹ Jean V. Matthews, *The Rise of the New Woman: The Women’s Movement in America, 1875-1930*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 13.

³⁰ Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 16-18.

dissatisfaction with and disregard for the feminine roles she was expected to assume as a young lady. For instance, she flouted contemporary fashion norms, asserting that she “had grown up a nonconformist indifferent to fashion and disliking the prescribed figure, firmly molded of steel and whalebone upon which along the costume of the period could successfully be created.”

Instead, Eastman opted for comfort in her dress. Also unable to master the social graces expected of a properly pious, pure, and submissive lady, Eastman characterized herself as “socially abrupt and awkward.” Furthermore, marriage was clearly not included in her ambitions: she “had no small talk, no particular desire to please, and resented the advances of an occasional ‘admirer.’” In Eastman’s own assessment, “it seems that I was educated in line with certain ultra-modern theories, which stress individual self-expression at a considerable risk of faulty adjustment to society.”³¹ If judged according to the precepts of the cult of domesticity, Eastman was decidedly lacking in womanly virtues.

Similarly, Brown depicted herself as ill fitted for the life prescribed for her as a woman according to contemporary gender norms. As a self-proclaimed “tomboy” growing up in the mountains of upstate New York, Brown realized that she was a source of disappointment and shame for her Scottish father because she was a “mere lass.” Her father’s perspective embodied the cult of domesticity’s assertion of women’s inferiority: as Brown explained, “a virile Scot believes it merely his due that his progeny shall be sons. Condemned to beget only females, his head is bowed and he walks softly before men and intransigently before women.” Further reflecting this philosophy, the whole village maintained a “smug assumption that women were not really members of the human race but merely appendages to it, to be wagged by men.” Brown, however, was infuriated that no one ever dreamed of asking a young girl like herself what she sought in life because, as Brown put it, “the sum of the answers was one word—

³¹ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 1-15.

‘husband.’” Just as the idealized True Woman, a woman in Brown’s community was expected to marry or “be a burden” to her family. Brown wholeheartedly resented this idea and rejected society’s insistence that she be content to marry and give up the little independence she enjoyed in exchange for a husband.³² Apparently, the cult of domesticity penetrated even into the backcountry of New York, and, like Eastman, Brown conceived of herself as incompatible with its principles.

Jenkins also described sentiments that contradicted the ideal of womanhood defined by the cult of domesticity. When her application to the College of William and Mary in her hometown of Williamsburg, Virginia was rejected, Jenkins was shattered. She especially resented that she was denied admittance simply “because I was a girl,” and indignantly pointed out in her memoir that this inequitable policy would not be remedied until an act of the state legislature provided for women’s admittance eighteen years later.³³ Having defied gender norms by the very act of applying to the college, Jenkins was clearly infuriated by this gender-based affront. She, like many young middle class women of her day, ambitiously strove for the freedom and independence epitomized by the New Woman, despite the obstacles she faced.

This New Woman with whom these BIA teachers and matrons identified was, of course, an essentialized type that did not necessarily correspond any more closely to the reality of women’s lives than the True Woman. Although gender norms were beginning to shift, conservative male and female detractors filled the press with condemnations of women dared step out of the domestic sphere; poor and minority women were frequently denied the opportunities to seek independence and influence that white middle class women enjoyed; progress toward the vote and other social causes proved slow and fraught with obstacles.

³² Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 14-16.

³³ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 4.

Nevertheless, as an idea, the “New Woman both reflected and created new modes of conduct in the society at large.”³⁴ Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing as the new century dawned, growing numbers of American women pursued a college education; they increasingly worked outside the home, even breaking into male-dominated professions like law and medicine; they liberated themselves from the constricting corset of Victorian women’s fashion; they continued to tenaciously campaign for the vote; and they joined an array of social reform movements.³⁵ Therefore, in depicting themselves in terms that reflected the notion of a New Womanhood, these BIA teachers and matrons situated themselves among those women who were increasingly taking on public roles and acquiring a level of autonomy outside the home in defiance of traditional gender norms. It is perhaps, then, not so surprising that these women defied the expectations of their families and society in going west under the employ of the BIA.

A Conventional Mission: Teaching, reforming, and “civilizing” as “women’s work”

Paradoxically, although these women defined their identity in language that recalled the emergent New Woman, their chosen occupations as teachers or matrons in the BIA were in fact in accordance with and even justified by the very cult of domesticity they claimed to oppose. A joint examination the feminization of the teaching profession in the United States, the growth of women’s reform movements in the latter half of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century, and the civilizing mission as conceived by the BIA beginning in the 1880s reveals an intimate connection between the cult of domesticity and the work of Indian school teachers and matrons.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, teaching gradually transformed from a male

³⁴ Banner, *Women in Modern America*, 87-127; Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 18.

³⁵ Schneider *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 18, 102, 243.

dominated profession into socially acceptable “women’s work.” Part of the reason for this shift was economic: it simply cost less to hire young single women with limited job options in the place of men who had much broader career opportunities and demanded higher pay. However, the cult of domesticity was also called upon to justify teaching as an extension of women’s private sphere. Although the emergence of women as teachers in the public sphere seemed to contradict the ideology of separate spheres that lay at the heart of the cult of domesticity, the “belief that women had particular nurturing and maternal qualities was an essential part of the separate spheres ideology and was commonly presented as a major justification for hiring women teachers.” Educational reformers such as Catherine Beecher and Horace Mann endeavored to show that teaching was “not really work in the public sphere. Instead, the private sphere was expanded to include teaching.”³⁶ For example, Beecher argued that “the great purpose of a woman’s life—the happy superintendence of a family—is accomplished all the better and easier by preliminary teaching in school.”³⁷ The combined impetus of economics and a suitable justification based in conventional gender norms resulted in a marked reversal in the demographics of the teaching profession in the United States: by 1860, women teachers outnumbered men in the majority of northeastern states, and this trend soon spread to other regions as well.³⁸ Teaching developed into “women’s true profession” in large part because it could be construed as “mothering work” consistent with the prevailing ideal of the True Woman.

While some women stepped out of the home to work as teachers, thousands of others founded and joined clubs and organizations that promoted a wide variety of social reform

³⁶ Weiler, “Women’s History and the History of Women Teachers,” 16-18.

³⁷ Catherine Beecher quoted in Weiler, “Women’s History and the History of Women Teachers,” 17.

³⁸ Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier*, xxii; Weiler, “Women’s History and the History of Women Teachers,” 16.

causes.³⁹ As involvement in reform work of the Progressive era took women into the public, women reformers, often called “social feminists,” typically followed those who promoted the feminization of teaching by appealing to the precepts of the cult of domesticity to justify their work. Drawing on the notion that the True Woman was the guardian of moral virtue and culture and emphasizing their natural qualities as actual or potential mothers, middle class women insisted on “the right, even the duty, to move out into society and clean it up.” Hence women’s involvement in everything from temperance to juvenile justice could be considered a logical extension of their maternal obligations according to the cult of domesticity.⁴⁰ The “language of the family,” which reflected the precepts of the cult of domesticity was even used in the women’s suffrage movement, with many women arguing “that women needed the vote to protect the home,” both as mothers in the private sphere and as the “housekeepers” of American society as a whole.⁴¹ Thus, even as they increasingly assumed public roles as reformers that appeared to stretch the bonds of True Womanhood, women appealed to the cult of domesticity by “insisting that it was motherhood that made women’s activity in the public sphere necessary, and indeed a duty, to protect not only their own children but all children.”⁴²

Women reformers in the West followed the pattern set by their eastern counterparts. When individual women moved to the western frontier with their families, they carried with them the ideas central to the cult of domesticity.⁴³ As increasing numbers of pioneer men and women settled in the West during the second half of the nineteenth century, many reformers began to argue that it was “women’s ‘high calling’ to protestantize, republicanize, and generally

³⁹ Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 102 and 243; Banner, *Women in Modern America*, 87; Matthew, *The Rise of the New Woman*, 52.

⁴⁰ Banner, *Women in Modern America*, 110-115; Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*, 93, 103.

⁴¹ Matthew, *The Rise of the New Woman*, 55; Banner, *Women in Modern America*, 113-115.

⁴² Matthew, *The Rise of the New Woman*, 55, 56.

⁴³ Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 12, 18.

educate the progeny of rough-hewn settlers who had crossed the boundaries of civilization into lands, until recently, peopled by savages.”⁴⁴ Like eastern women, western women working across the West as religious organizers, teachers, and reformers appealed to the characteristics of True Womanhood to justify this calling. For example, Protestant women who set up “rescue homes” for prostitutes, unwed mothers, American Indian women, and Mormon wives in the West appealed to traditional “women’s values” of purity and piety, and endeavored to establish “female moral authority” or “female moral superiority” in the West.⁴⁵ Rather than dismiss the cult of domesticity and the ideal of True Womanhood, Progressive women reformers in both the East and the West followed the pattern set by educational reformers and attempted to employ this ideology to support their own causes and to obtain influence and power outside the home.

Concurrent with the feminization of teaching and expansion of women’s reform organizations ran the development of a policy of assimilation and Americanization in the BIA, particularly from 1880-1930. Efforts to “civilize” American Indians had a long history, beginning soon after the first contacts between Europeans and Indians. However, it was only after decades of costly and brutal Indian wars that white policymakers and reformers in the post-Civil War period came to the conclusion that the “Indian question” could only be answered with a concerted policy of assimilation and Americanization.⁴⁶ This notion was underscored by contemporary theories of civilization, one of the most influential of which was found in Lewis Henry Morgan’s book, *Ancient Society*. According to Morgan, all cultures could be placed on an evolutionary scale that progressed from savagery to barbarism to civilization. Operating on an ethnocentric definition of civilization that favored European and Anglo-American societies, Morgan claimed that most Indian tribes had only reached the stage of upper savagery or lower

⁴⁴ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 82.

⁴⁵ Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, xiii-xxiii.

⁴⁶ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 624, 687.

barbarism. Even among those who had not read Morgan's book it was widely assumed that Indian were savages and culturally inferior to whites. Yet most reformers believed that, if placed in the right environment, the Indian could progress from savagery to civilization. Additionally, as whites increasingly encroached on Indian land, reformers asserted that the Indian savage faced certain extinction as the tide of civilization moved inexorably onward. Predicating their reform efforts on these assumptions of Indian savagery and inferiority, policymakers and so-called friends of the Indian insisted that the Indian had no choice but to assimilate into white society.⁴⁷ In other words, American Indians had to be "civilized" according to white definitions of civilization, and it was the duty of white men and women to see that this was accomplished.

Many reformers advocated for the allotment of land in severalty and equality for Indians under the law as means of achieving this "civilizing mission," but "education of the Indians was the ultimate reform" upon which all other efforts depended.⁴⁸ The intention of Indian education was, in the words of the famed reformer Richard Henry Pratt, to "kill the Indian...and save the man," to strip the Indian of all attachment to his supposedly primitive native culture and transform him into a "civilized" white person.⁴⁹ Toward this ultimate end, Indian education adopted the following strategy. Firstly, academic instruction would equip Indians with a rudimentary knowledge of various subjects, with particular focus on reading, writing, and speaking English. Secondly, industrial and vocational training would teach Indians the skills necessary to support oneself in the white economy as well as inculcate values of individualism that reformers believed were lacking in Indian tribal society. Thirdly, children would be taught the "civilized" religion of Christianity. Finally, schooling would expose Indians to the basic tenets of American democracy in an effort to prepare them for citizenship. It was believed that

⁴⁷ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 12-16; Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 8, 16.

⁴⁸ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 687.

⁴⁹ Richard Henry Pratt qtd. in Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 52.

Indian children would readily accept and absorb these elements of white civilization, disavow their own culture, and assimilate into white American society. Within a few generations the American Indian would disappear and the civilizing mission would be complete.⁵⁰

To achieve these aims, the United States government began to expand and restructure the Indian school system beginning in the 1880s. In 1879, Pratt had opened the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, an off-reservation boarding school in Pennsylvania. One of the most outspoken voice in late nineteenth century Indian reform, Pratt was dedicated to the civilizing mission as he saw it. A staunch proponent of assimilation, his method was to “remove children from the isolating, tribalizing influence of the reservation and immerse them in a totally civilized environment,” with the ultimate goal of stripping the Indian of his ostensibly inferior culture and assimilating him into the allegedly superior culture of white America.⁵¹ As its enrollment grew and fame spread, Carlisle became the prototype for the off-reservation boarding school and ushered in an unprecedented expansion of the Indian school system. By 1900 there were twenty-five off-reservation boarding schools, eighteen of which were built after 1890. These were located mainly in the West and enrolled a total of 7,430 students. Similar growth occurred in regards to reservation boarding schools, reservation day schools, and mission schools.⁵² In addition to establishing individual schools, by the mid-1890s the BIA had taken significant steps toward establishing “a true ‘system’ of education” by “standardizing the curriculum, systematizing procedures for enrolling and sorting students, and extending civil service to the Indian service” as well as establishing “a more centralized, hierarchical, and self-monitoring bureaucratic structure” to manage the expanding system more effectively.⁵³

⁵⁰ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 21-24.

⁵¹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 48-55.

⁵² Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 56-57; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 815.

⁵³ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 70.

Female BIA employees, especially those who served as teachers or matrons, were central to the workings of this system. In terms of numbers, women came to dominate the ranks of BIA teachers by the turn of the twentieth century: their majority was slight in the 1890s, but by 1900, 286 out of the 347 teachers employed by the Indian Office were women, most of them white. According to social convention as expressed through the cult of domesticity, these white women were the “natural purveyors of culture and moral virtue”. It followed that they were therefore the ideal force to spearhead the BIA’s civilizing and assimilating mission.⁵⁴ Women reformers who formed the Women’s National Indian Association (WNIA), for example, justified women’s involvement in Indian affairs “by invoking their traditional roles or potential capabilities as mothers.” They consistently drew on the cult of domesticity and the ideal of True Womanhood to garner support for women’s public work with the Indians as educators and reformers.⁵⁵ Women employed by the BIA found their work as civilizers couched in similar terms. For example, Mr. Kyselka, Arnold and Reed’s supervisor at Hoopa Valley, made special mention of the centrality of their supposed womanly virtues to their work in the BIA: “about your duties...I think the Government’s idea in appointing field matrons is that women will have a civilizing influence. Of course, that is what we want to do—civilize the Indians. As much as possible you want to elevate them and introduce white standards.”⁵⁶ Thus, Arnold and Reed and their fellow teachers and matrons were not only charged with the civilizing mission as white people: they were singled out as the ideal civilizers because they were white *women*.

Such justifications for women’s involvement in Indian education hearkened back to the arguments that had been employed to support women’s work outside the home in other areas of American society. Female teachers were maternal figures who conveyed virtue and morality to

⁵⁴ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 18-24, 55-59, 82.

⁵⁵ Jacobs, “Maternal Colonialism,” 461.

⁵⁶ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 24.

their students as a mother would to her own child; western women were “mothers of civilization,” charged with implementing “the civilizing mission implicit in the concept of domesticity” in the wilds of the West; reformers were the nation’s housekeepers who used their moral influence to remedy society’s ills.⁵⁷ The civilizing mission with which BIA teachers and matrons were charged as they moved West to work among the Indians sat at the intersection of these ideas about acceptable “women’s work” according to conventional gender norms: because the cult of domesticity could be drawn upon to locate the civilizing mission as extensions of the women’s sphere, BIA teachers and matrons were in fact operating within the acceptable bounds of True Womanhood, no matter how much they might declare the contrary.

Women on a mission: Accepting and implementing the civilizing mission in the West

Yet, as these memoirs show, the extent to which the women who went west under the employ of the BIA actually believed that they, as women, were uniquely suited purveyors of civilization varied at the individual level. Some women appear to have initially accepted their civilizing mission wholeheartedly in both word and deed. Of the eight women who wrote the memoirs studied here, Woodruff’s feelings were most reflective of this mindset. Even before leaving to take up her first post at the Crow reservation in Montana, Woodruff enthusiastically endorsed the United States government’s efforts to civilize the Indians. She recognized that the salary was not particularly impressive, but she gave that minor detail barely a second thought. She was far too eager to “[guide] these primitive ones along the tedious trail toward the new civilization which fate decreed should be theirs.” Upon arriving at Crow Creek, she recalled how the BIA agent, Mr. Watson, further clarified her mission: all the employees at the Indian school, from the cook to the farmer, the nurse to the teacher, were working toward the common goal of

⁵⁷ Weiler, “Women’s History and the History of Women Teachers,” 16-18; Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 98, 109-115, 117-128; Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 93.

training Indian children in “the ways of the white man,” which, to Woodruff, implied “the *better* ways of the white man.” [emphasis added]⁵⁸ Mr. Watson’s instructions affirmed Woodruff’s conviction that it was her duty to carry out the civilizing mission, a conviction that was further enhanced as she began her work at the school.

Echoes of Woodruff’s early confidence in the civilizing mission appeared in Eastman’s writings as well. Eastman entered the service infused with “the zeal of a recent convert” in support to the assimilationist stance adopted by white reformers and “friends of the Indian” such as Herbert Walsh and Henry Dawes. When she initiated her own proposal to start a day school at White River reservation, Eastman felt certain that she could create “a little corner of ‘sweetness and light’ ...in a squalid camp of savages,” apparently viewing herself as the bearer of the “light” of “civilization” to less civilized peoples.⁵⁹ She earnestly believed that assimilation and acceptance of white ways through education was the only way that the Indians could survive in the modern world:

“a handful of primitives whose own way of life had been made impossible by our countrymen’s advance could survive and prosper only through adaptation to the modern world. They must walk steadily forward to economic and political independence...for them to remain small, subject groups, isolated in remote areas under the arbitrary rule of bureaucracy, could only lead to weakness and ultimate degradation.”⁶⁰

With these words Eastman clearly supported the civilizing mission both in asserting the Indians’ supposed primitiveness and insisting that that Indian culture and lifeways had no choice but to give way to white civilization. The Indians’ only alternative to assimilation was, in her view, certain decline and eventual extinction.

Iliff also saw herself as “a young woman who had traveled little, setting out to civilize the Indians.” Like Eastman, she was convinced that her work was critical to the survival of the

⁵⁸ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 17, 26, 166.

⁵⁹ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 22, 30.

⁶⁰ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 22.

Indians: as a teacher, she believed she would be “helping a bewildered people find its place in the social and business world encroaching upon it from all sides.”⁶¹ While perhaps more empathetic than some, Iliff still felt that the coming of civilization was inevitable and that the Indians had to change accordingly. Thus, these women expressed a common conviction in their civilizing mission as matrons and teachers as they began their work in the BIA.

Not only did these women accept the civilizing mission, but they also tended to accept the notion that they possessed distinctive female qualities that particularly fitted them to carry it out. It is notable that Woodruff drew on the basis of the civilizing mission in the ideal of True Womanhood when she posited her womanly virtues as the vital credentials needed to teach the Indians: “I felt, also that I was endowed with enough patience, sympathy, and understanding to enable me to get along with almost any of God’s people.” Her convictions were confirmed when Mr. Watson explained that as matron to the Indian students, Woodruff ““must reach the heart,”” and provide comfort to the children as they began the “struggle” toward “civilization.” Woodruff took on this task with enthusiasm. Whether directing the schoolboys in their daily chores, teaching Indian wives “proper” housekeeping, or advising young girls about appropriate marriage partners, Woodruff was convinced that she “was the mother, they the helpless children.”⁶² It seems, then, that Woodruff not only accepted the civilizing mission, but also conceived of herself as particularly suited to reach out to the Indians and lead them to civilization by virtue of her inherent womanly qualities as defined by the cult of domesticity.

Other women followed Woodruff in this respect. Eastman’s motivations were also colored by the benevolent and charitable inspiration that was expected of a True Woman: when

⁶¹ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 4, 6.

⁶² Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 18, 26, 209.

she first entered the service it was the “altruistic motive” that most appealed to her.⁶³ Her endorsement of assimilation and her charitable motives were very much consistent with both the civilizing mission itself and women’s distinctive role as motherly civilizers. Jenkins’ acceptance of this role was evident to her answer to a question about her motivations for teaching in the BIA: “I am not working for fifty dollars a month.” She was driven not by money but by a desire to teach the Indian children whom she had come to love.⁶⁴ Iliff echoed Jenkins when she recalled her first impressions of the school at Truxton, Arizona:

“the shabby unpainted buildings made me feel I had traded my pleasant classroom back home for a very questionable future...then in the dry wash nearby I caught sight of a group of little brown children playing with stones. My discouragement vanished. They, not the buildings, had brought me here.”⁶⁵

Jenkins’ and Iliff’s focus on the children they had come to teach reflected the assumption that women’s supposed maternal qualities fitted them for the civilizing mission. Despite their descriptions of themselves in the terms of the New Women, some teachers and matrons clearly traveled west with a sense of mission undergirded by a wholly conventional sense of themselves as women imbued with the feminine virtues and maternal qualities requisite for the position of “civilizer to the Indians.”

Although these women generally seemed to perceive themselves as motherly and benevolent figures who were duty-bound to bring civilization to the “backward” Indians, a devotion to the civilizing mission was not the only factor that drew women into the BIA. On the contrary, the civilizing mission was recognized by most, but other less conventional concerns sometimes took priority, indicating a nascent ambivalence toward the role these women were expected to play as virtuous maternal civilizers. For example, while a certain conviction in the

⁶³ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 21.

⁶⁴ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 286.

⁶⁵ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 10.

civilizing mission and compassion for Indian children played into Iliff's decision to join the BIA, the real attraction for her was not the chance to exercising her feminine prerogative as a civilizer but rather the opportunity to embark upon a grand adventure. As she explained, "I was born with a thirst for adventure; this teaching position would be an adventure in a new field of service." She easily dismissed any anxiety about the isolated and dangerous canyon to which she had been assigned, proclaiming that because she was "born of pioneers who had pushed westward in search of space and freedom, the lure of the untried, made more exciting by the thought of life in an Indian village on the floor of an isolated canyon, was a challenge I could not lightly cast aside."⁶⁶ Taking on dangerous challenges and seeking out exciting adventures was not part of the maternal civilizer's job description.

Arnold and Reed also shared Iliff's craving for adventure. They joined the BIA rather spontaneously while visiting a cousin in Chico, California, where they were introduced to an Indian agent by the name of Mr. Kelsey. The two women "told him we should like to see what a really rough country was like," and he hesitantly offered to find a place for them as matrons in "the roughest field in the United States." Apparently, Mr. Kelsey assumed that because these two individuals wore "pleated skirts," they would be obliged to refuse an appointment to the treacherous mountain wilderness of northern California, as any proper woman ought. However, Arnold and Reed defied his expectations: they were thrilled with the appointment and lauded it as "the chance we had been hoping for."⁶⁷ The audacious thirst for adventure expressed by Iliff, Arnold and Reed was hardly consonant with the civilizing mission, and, as Mr. Kelsey's error illustrated, certainly not aligned with the concept of the True Woman who was ideally suited to perform such work.

⁶⁶ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 4, 6.

⁶⁷ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 12-13.

In fact, Arnold and Reed were essentially unaware of what their service as matrons was to entail until they reached their assigned field.⁶⁸ They were not alone in this respect. In the beginning of her memoir, Jenkins noted her strong wish to “go West to teach the Indians,” but this desire was not explicitly driven by an adherence to any doctrine of civilization or assimilation. Rather, Jenkins’ decision to enter the Indian Service was prompted mainly by her exclusion from William and Mary College. Her desire to assert her independence in the wake of this injustice combined with economic necessity: she characterized herself as “‘just a Saturday’s child who has to work for her living,’” and explained that the applicant pool for teaching positions in Virginia was already swollen past capacity.⁶⁹ Golden shared a similar impetus: not only did she feel her opportunities for advancement were constrained as a teacher in rural Michigan, but she was also attracted by the BIA salary, which was twice what she received at home.⁷⁰ As women seeking economic independence, Jenkins and Golden had few career options outside teaching: the BIA offered a promising opportunity to make a living as well as a chance to escape the constrictions of Victorian society.

Brown also followed this pattern of privileging economic concerns, but in recounting her motivations for joining the BIA she offered an even starker contrast to wholehearted civilizers such as Woodruff. Like Golden and Jenkins, Brown sought economic autonomy and found her career options limited to teaching. Refusing to kowtow to societal expectation that she find a husband, she began teaching in local schools at age fifteen. However, after happening upon an advertisement calling for civil service clerks, Brown resolved to take the clerkship examination. Unfortunately, she soon discovered that “women were permitted to take the test but were rarely appointed. Males were preferred...[women] would not be appointed so long as there was one

⁶⁸ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 24.

⁶⁹ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 4, 17.

⁷⁰ Gertrude Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, xi.

eligible male remained on the list.” Forced to reevaluate, Brown instead took the exam for the position of kindergartner in the Indian Service as it offered her a better chance gaining entrance into the civil service. However, she felt exceedingly unqualified for this position, and resented that kindergartener was the occupation “to which my skirts limited me.” From Brown’s perspective, “teaching, like my long skirts, had been forced upon me. I hated them both.”⁷¹

While she accepted her appointment as kindergartner in the absence of other career opportunities available to her as a woman who desired economic independence, Brown was not particularly inclined to accept the BIA’s civilizing mission at face value. When her father caustically informed her that she would be teaching the Sioux who “‘butchered Custer and his men,’” Brown was “startled.” She skeptically mulled over this revelation that “it was to the torturing fiends I was to go as kindergartner!” and she “couldn’t help but wonder why.” This uncertainty as to the propriety of the civilizing mission was apparent in the very language Brown chose to recount her supervisor’s explanation of the purpose of the BIA: they were attempting to “*arbitrarily* educate these young Indians with the hope that in time they will want their own children educated.” [emphasis added]⁷² This phrasing of the civilizing mission hardly exuded the same enthusiasm that was evident in the similar scene between Woodruff and her supervisor. Brown’s overriding desire for economic independence and her ambivalent feelings about civilizing the Indians were quite the opposite of Woodruff’s sincere acceptance of the civilizing mission and her belief that she was cut out for the role of civilizer by grace of her feminine virtues. Brown instead saw herself mainly in terms of the New Woman, seeking independence and self-sufficiency through employment in the BIA.

These women’s motivations in joining the BIA and their feelings regarding the civilizing

⁷¹ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 15, 17-18, 20, 21, 25.

⁷² Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 21, 36.

mission spanned a broad spectrum from heartfelt conviction to marked indifference toward their role as maternal civilizers. However, even Brown, perhaps the most ambivalent of all the women, expressed some positive inclination toward the BIA's civilizing mission in the beginning. In one of the later chapters of her memoir, she explained that "I entered the Service believing implicitly in the Bureau's wise and honorable aims."⁷³ Thus, despite a diversity of motivations, these women were all linked together not only by their decision to go west to teach the Indians, but also their initial acceptance of the civilizing mission, whether explicit or implicit.

Blizzards and Lizards: Affirming identity as New Women in the West

Despite joining the BIA with an entirely conventional mission in terms of Victorian gender norms, teachers and matrons entered an entirely unconventional world. Living in the West brought these women into contact with discomforts and dangers that no delicate, chaste, demure True Woman would ever have had to face. Their ability to confront a multitude of difficulties affirmed their sense of independence and capability, which often contributed to their pursuit of new career opportunities. However, at the same time as they rose in the ranks of the BIA and overcame demanding physical and intellectual challenges, these women became acutely aware of the incongruity between their own achievements and the discrimination they observed in the attitudes and actions of male employees as well as in BIA policies. However, rather than submitting to the injustices they suffered, these women emerged from their experiences with a heightened sense of themselves as strong, capable, proudly unconventional women who identified more with the idea of the New Woman than with the True Woman.

The West was certainly an unfamiliar place for any woman who had grown up in a society that had insisted she maintain her purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity. One of

⁷³ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 257.

the first differences these women noted upon entering this “strange new world” was the condition of their living quarters.⁷⁴ These women would have been well aware of what was expected of them as women in the space she called “home.” The home was supposed to be the center of a True Woman’s world; she was to decorate and furnish the home with paintings, parlor organs, intricate textiles, and a wide variety of other niceties in order to cultivate an environment that provided her husband and children with “repose and moral uplift.”⁷⁵ However, as these women pointed out in their memoirs, a teacher or matron’s quarters on an Indian reservation bore little resemblance to this idealized domestic space. Iliff found herself rooming in a converted pantry with a canvas ceiling that sagged menacingly under the weight of encroaching desert sand.⁷⁶ Golden slept on an “embarrassingly public” screened porch during the Arizona summers.⁷⁷ Jenkins had to share a narrow cot with the school cook in her “cave of a room.”⁷⁸ Brown lamented that “a tepee would have been more cozy” than her tiny room at Crow Creek. She made a point of calling attention to the hard iron bed, rusted potbelly stove, flaking mirror, rickety rocking chair, and especially the “old galvanized slop bucket.”⁷⁹ Sparsely furnished with only the most basic necessities, this austere room was hardly a suitable habitation for a refined and fragile True Woman. Such accommodations were not only uncomfortable; they were also remotely located. According to Woodruff, the life of a BIA teacher or matron was, in its essence, “one apart from the outside world of white people.”⁸⁰ Eastman recalled that there was “no white person nearer than eight miles” of her post at White River, South Dakota.⁸¹ In addition to lacking

⁷⁴ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux* 33.

⁷⁵ Harvey Green. *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America*. (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 93-111.

⁷⁶ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 11.

⁷⁷ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 72.

⁷⁸ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 193.

⁷⁹ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 30.

⁸⁰ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 31.

⁸¹ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 37

material luxuries, these women were also decidedly isolated from white society and the social milieu of the conventional True Woman.

However, after some initial shock, these women found their living arrangements quite satisfactory. Golden, for example, “became accustomed” to sleeping out of doors, and Brown noted at one of her later posts that she “did not mind the desolate room” despite the lack of amenities.⁸² Arnold and Reed insisted that “we slept like ladies” in their little house at Hoopa Valley.⁸³ Woodruff even came to enjoy the “appealing loneliness” of the Indian reservations, insisting that she “was accustomed to almost anything.”⁸⁴ Although the womanly virtue of domesticity could hardly flourish in such conditions, these women made the best of their new homes and even grew to like them.

From the moment they arrived in the West, these women were also confronted with the dangers of the natural world. Woodruff, for example, recalled that her first night at Crow Creek was rent by the sound of “a lone coyote [that] yapped with the voice of forty demons.”⁸⁵ These wild animals could often pose a very real threat. Papa Frame, the storeowner at a town near the Hoopa Valley reservation, wasted no time in introducing Arnold and Reed to the perils of California mountain wildlife by enlightening them on the subject of panther attacks: “Anderson go pretty mad about a month ago when a panther dropped off a limb onto his back and he had a kinda scuffle before he throwed him off and ended up by losing his hat.” The two women were quite taken aback by this rather alarming prospect.⁸⁶ While Arnold and Reed never actually encountered a panther, other women had quite intimate contacts with wild creatures. In the desert at Fort Yuma, Golden was initially distressed as she watched as “lizards by the score ran all over

⁸² Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 72; Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 165.

⁸³ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 47.

⁸⁴ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis* 97, 157.

⁸⁵ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 25.

⁸⁶ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 32-33.

the screened sides of our sleeping house, and sometimes were able to squeeze themselves inside.” However, just as Arnold and Reed resolved after a bit of time living in the Hoopa Valley that “it was time we quit being so afraid of things like panthers and rattlesnakes,” Golden too acclimated to the situation. While she admitted that she “never learned to like [the lizards]”, she “soon became accustomed to them.”⁸⁷ These women not only grew used to hard cots and seclusion from white society, but they also learned to live with western wildlife, even when animals invaded their very bedrooms.

More formidable than these relatively “harmless creatures,” however, were the radical extremes of climate the women endured. Weather varied radically according to the season: on the South Dakota prairie summer temperatures could reach 114 degrees in the shade, while winter temperatures could dip to 40 below zero.⁸⁸ During the winters in Montana, “winter swept in from the north like ten thousand conquering horsemen,” with roaring blizzards that “inclosed our little world in a prison of ice and snow.”⁸⁹ These blizzards could be deadly: Eastman reported that in the “famous blizzard of January 1888” two hundred Dakotans died.⁹⁰ Warmer climates and seasons were no safer. Jenkins recalled a “violent sandstorm [that] shrieked and howled” as it struck an Arizona canyon like a veritable hurricane. If she so much as stepped outside sand filled her nose and mouth.⁹¹ On Dakota prairie, Eastman was trapped in a wildfire during the summer drought season, and was “saved barely in time by one of the violent thunderstorms characteristic of that country.”⁹²

Yet even water was not always so benign. Caught in a cloudburst at Blue Canyon,

⁸⁷ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 103; Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 72.

⁸⁸ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 131.

⁸⁹ Woodruff *Indian Oasis*, 46.

⁹⁰ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 47.

⁹¹ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 214.

⁹² Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 135.

Jenkins watched in horror as a “wall of water twenty feet in height came storming down the lower level of the canyon. Soon water began to fall where we were—not rain, but literally sheets of water from the sky. Its force shut off our breath.” However, it was just such crises that provided these women with opportunities to exercise their ingenuity and strengthen their confidence in their own capability. In the midst of a flood that reached all the way up to her knees, Jenkins heaved three-hundred fifty-pound sacks of flour to the dry side of the storage room, thereby saving the school’s entire year supply of flour from the flood.⁹³ Eastman found herself in the midst of a situation that called for similar resourcefulness and bravery during a South Dakota blizzard. As the deadly snowstorm raged outside, “heroic teachers held their flocks at night, perhaps burning desks and benches to keep from freezing, while others tied the children together with ropes and set out for the nearest homestead.” Eastman counted herself among these courageous teachers, recounting how she “dared not let any of our [students] out into the impenetrable wall of white, but fed and entertained them until toward nightfall the parents appeared, amused and grateful.”⁹⁴ As they continued to live in the West, these women discovered they could meet any emergency created by the lack of luxury or the fickle climates they encountered in the West with daring and resourcefulness, which increasingly instilled in them a sense of personal competence and independence characteristic of a New Woman.

This sense of confidence was further enhanced as many of women successfully sought out opportunities for career advancement within the BIA. Bolstered by the confidence she had gained in over a year of experience in the West, Iliff accepted a new post as superintendent at Havasupai Canyon. This canyon was a place of “frightening vastness and silence” where “there were rattlers in abundances, wildcats and mountain lions” lurking around every corner. The

⁹³ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 133-134.

⁹⁴ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 47.

canyon trails were so treacherous that only a time-hardened mule's knowledge of "exactly where a misstep would be fatal" prevented inexperienced tenderfoots from plunging into the gorge below.⁹⁵ More than the physical dangers of the natural environment, Iliff also had to contend with the fact it was as uncommon for a woman to hold a position of such authority in the BIA as it was elsewhere in American society. She made a point of noting that "no white woman had ever held this position," and of mentioning the disturbing rumor that "on one occasion, the Havasupai men had terrorized the man in charge with knives and guns until he reversed his previous decisions." This concerned Iliff greatly: "How, I wondered, could I hope to control grown men?" Yet when offered the position, Iliff recalled that "my incurable thirst for adventure permitted just one answer "'when do you want me to go?'"⁹⁶ Despite the dangers she knew she would encounter, Iliff, was confident enough to take the risk.

Nor was Iliff the only one of these women to attain positions of responsibility and leadership in the BIA. Sometimes these positions were somewhat more conventional: before her appointment superintendent of Havasupai Canyon, Iliff had been principal teacher at the Hackberry Day School and she would later return to this position when the school became Truxton Canyon Training School.⁹⁷ Golden also served as head teacher Fort Belknap and Chilocco, and Woodruff held a supervisory position as head matron at the Agency Boarding School on the Crow reservation.⁹⁸ Other women held less traditional positions. Having already defied convention in establishing a brand new day school at White River and administering it for three years, Eastman was appointed Supervisor of Education in the two Dakotas. This was an entirely new post, created as a result of her efforts lobbying for Indian reform, and Eastman

⁹⁵ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 94-100.

⁹⁶ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 90-91.

⁹⁷ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 47-49, 200.

⁹⁸ Golden *Red Moon Called Me*, 125; Carter, "Completely Discouraged," 62, Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 132.

noted with pride that “I became the first incumbent.” In this capacity, she was responsible directly to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and oversaw sixty schools in North and South Dakota.⁹⁹ Brown’s career path was even more unusual. She was continually warned that “it is not easy for a woman to get a clerkship,” but refused to be deterred. She insisted upon taking the clerkship examination, and, after several years teaching and working as a matron, eventually obtained an appointment as a clerk to the Leupp Indian School. At her subsequent appointments Brown was nearly always the first woman to serve as a clerk.¹⁰⁰ A True Woman may have been able to countenance becoming a teacher and even a head teacher, but holding a position of power as a superintendent or working in a “man’s job” as a clerk would have been unfathomable. The New Woman, on the other hand, had already started breaking down occupational barriers, attending college and even becoming a doctor, lawyer, or reporter.¹⁰¹ Thus, as they progressed in their own careers, BIA teachers and matrons reinforced their identity as New Women

However, at the same time as they advanced in their careers these women also confronted concerted opposition and discrimination. When she first arrived at White River to set up her day school, Eastman discovered that the attitude of the men who worked at the agency toward her fellow female teacher and herself “sometimes suggested the kind of smiling tolerance one displays toward a pair of precocious—and occasionally troublesome—children.”¹⁰² No matter how much skill or ability these women exhibited, they were still expected by men to behave as the childlike, innocent ladies defined by the cult of domesticity. Arnold and Reed realized that, to the white men in the Hoopa Valley, “we are not only white women, we are ladies—the kind who have Sunday schools, never say a bad word, and rustle around in silk petticoats.” As the two

⁹⁹ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 117, 119.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 102, 132, 164, 180.

¹⁰¹ Banner, *Women in Modern America*, 32-39.

¹⁰² Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 34.

women pointed out, this was a rather ludicrous assumption: “we wear divided skirts and Stetson hats, and never rustle, but [the men] make nothing of that and cling to what we ought to be as womankind.”¹⁰³ Even on an Indian reservation in the wilderness of the California mountains, it was still assumed that women ought to conform to the cult of domesticity and uphold the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.

These attitudes translated into a decided male prejudice against the women who sought to improve their position in the BIA hierarchy. Even the process of obtaining these higher-ranking, higher paid jobs could be a trial. Although Brown “passed the clerical test with a general grade high enough to assure me a clerkship had I worn trousers,” she was denied an appointment as a clerk until over five years later.¹⁰⁴ Once on the job, discrimination continued. Disparities in salaries were one marker of the subordinated position of women. Brown’s friend, Miss Swinton acidly ruminated upon how men were “better paid than we are.” The craven school disciplinarian, the lazy farmer, and the shirking engineer all received at least sixty dollars a month, while she earned a mere forty-five as the school’s diligent and overworked seamstress. The male superintendent made over twice her salary.¹⁰⁵ Even in her fairly prestigious position as superintendent of the Dakotas, Eastman’s salary was “a very small one for so responsible a post.” Eastman also made a point of noting, with a bitter touch of irony, that the superintendent’s salary was “increased by fifty percent for the benefit of my male successor and has since been more than doubled.”¹⁰⁶ These women felt this wage discrimination was an affront to their professionalism and their dignity.

Unequal pay was merely one manifestation of the deep-seated resentment many men

¹⁰³ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 181.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 105.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 118.

harbored against women who held unconventional positions in the BIA. Eastman, for one, faced considerable opposition both in the press and in the field following her appointment as superintendent of the Dakotas. A newspaper clipping from the *New York Evening Post*, which Eastman included in her memoir, reported that “considerable criticism was provoked by the choice of a young unmarried woman for the work in this wild Dakota country.” Male employees under her supervision also displayed a certain hostility to her authority: “one man particularly seemed resentful of my unsupervised conversations with the Sioux. He evidently preferred to see all women in properly subordinate positions.”¹⁰⁷ Brown experienced similar skepticism about her capabilities as a woman clerk. Upon arriving at Sacaton, Arizona as the agency’s first woman clerk, the superintendent skeptically inquired, “think you can stick it?” implying that the rigors of the job would prove more than she, as a woman, could handle. Brown was indignant: “I resented that question,” she wrote. “I could stick it if he could.”¹⁰⁸

Despite such demeaning discrimination, all of these women proved more than able to “stick it”: they continued to pursue their personal ambitions and to strengthen their sense of self-sufficiency through their BIA careers. For Brown, it was at her initial swearing in as an Indian Service employee that she “came of age in awareness, in the realization that I was an entity in my own right, no longer merely an appendage to someone else’s life.”¹⁰⁹ This sense of independence combined with the feelings of capability gained in facing the dangers and hardships of western life to translate into a conviction that they were better at their unconventional jobs than men would be. For example, when Iliff was promoted to principal teacher at Hackberry Day School, her superintendent explained that, although she was a woman, he had selected her for the position over a “tenderfooted” Easterner. Iliff shared his doubts about

¹⁰⁷ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 119, 126.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 180.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 28.

the capability of Eastern men:

“I wondered how an Easterner would react to my little room with its inverted sand dunes like the sword of Damocles hanging over his head; how he would like the little stove that insisted on having its occasional smoke. Could his brains take the baking the corrugated roof on the schoolhouse would give them? And would his nerves stand up under the eerie, clattering noise the metal made when the wind got under its edges and gave it a vigorous shaking. I agreed with Mr. Ewing that a man who had grown accustomed to life in an Eastern city might not like it here.”¹¹⁰

Disregarding conventional notions of men’s and women’s roles, Iliff clearly believed that, given her experience living in the West, she was far more qualified for the leadership position of principle teacher at an Indian school than an unseasoned Eastern man.

Arnold and Reed similarly discounted men’s ability to cope with the rigors of life on a western Indian reservation. They looked condescendingly upon a young prospector they met in Hoopa, declaring that “the Klamath was no place for innocent-looking young men with black suits and high, white collars, who didn’t know what they were getting into.” Their skepticism proved well warranted when the prospector joined them at the Klamath river crossing, where “the river was above its customary level and seemed to whirl along in one great solid sheet of furiously moving water.” While the prospector’s face turned white at the sight of the ominous rapids, Arnold and Reed, long accustomed to dangerous river crossings, merely shook their heads pityingly at the cowardly man and stepped easily into the wobbling dugout canoe. They contrasted the young man’s anxious fretting with the nonchalant jokes they exchanged with the ferryman as they cheerfully indulged in a bit of dark humor about the possibility of drowning. These two women clearly considered themselves far more capable of meeting the dangers of Indian country and fulfilling their jobs than this “poor lamb” of a man.¹¹¹ Facing western hardships and hazards strengthened these women’s conviction that they were qualified to take on

¹¹⁰ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 48.

¹¹¹ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 216-217.

leadership roles and to perform their assigned task as well as if not better than a man. Brown spoke for all the women when she adamantly affirmed her identity as a New Woman, maintaining that she “did not ask favors for my skirts,” despite male assumptions to the contrary.¹¹²

Skirts, however, often proved an unavoidable liability. Not only did women teachers and matrons face dangers in nature and discrimination in their careers, but they were also forced to deal with the unwanted sexual attentions of male employees. Jenkins was constantly plagued by the suggestive jokes of Mr. Vickers, the school farmer at Blue Canyon.¹¹³ There was little recourse against such harassment, which often manifested itself in more than words alone. At Red Moon, Golden and the other female employees were disturbed by Mr. Blimber, a former army officer of “at least sixty-five years...with a weather-beaten, wrinkled face, false teeth, bald head and small, brown eyes.” This old widower was apparently “still susceptible to feminine charms and very attentive and polite to the ladies, especially the younger ones.” However, despite his friendly baring, “he never looked at a woman without a peculiar leer which we came to suspect; he even “attempted to embrace us while helping us alight from the carriage.”¹¹⁴ Neither Mr. Vickers nor Mr. Blimber was ever held accountable for their offenses.

In fact, the women found that they were more often the victims in a dual sense. While driving to church Brown offered a ride to a certain “Inspector X.” Seating himself next to her on the carriage seat, the inspector “began at once to tell me in great detail of his current love affair with a friend of his wife.” Not content to stop with verbally flaunting his sexual prowess, Brown indignantly recounted that “he found me worthy of the bestowal of his attention and his roving hands began exploring the situation.” Quickly discovering that “one defensive feminine hand is

¹¹² Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 170.

¹¹³ Jenkins *Girl From Williamsburg*, 70.

¹¹⁴ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 31.

inadequate against two offensive male paws,” she evicted him from the carriage as quickly as she could. Brown reported the incident to her superintendent although she “knew the risk I incurred in making that report.” Indeed, Inspector X later fabricated a rumor that Brown had been the hospital for an abortion. Although Brown’s extended hospital stay had actually been due to leg surgery, the rumor alone was grounds enough for her dismissal from the BIA.¹¹⁵

Nor was this an uncommon occurrence. In accordance with the cult of domesticity, BIA teachers and matrons were expected to set an example of purity and piety for their Indian students. Thus, their lives were circumscribed by a variety of moralistic rules and regulations. Golden, for example, recalled that “our social activities were narrowly restricted. Cards and dancing were both taboo.” Interactions with male students and employees were also highly limited: one superintended decreed that female employees were “not to have any male company or even speak to a man outside of necessary business matters, except on Saturday or Sunday nights.”¹¹⁶ The slightest deviation from these rules could be grounds for investigation and dismissal. A friend of Brown’s who taught at Carlisle Indian Industrial School did nothing more than make friends with the school football team and was quickly accused of “immoral conduct” despite the absence of evidence to confirm the charge.

These BIA teachers and matrons were quick to identify the glaring contradiction between the idealized moral standard to which they were held as women and the actual behavior of male employees. Investigations, as Brown noted, upheld a blatant double standard: a woman could be investigated simply because “her skirt placket gaped in back at times,” or because “she finds some people not to her liking,” but “nobody reported [a man] for lack of neatness or for inability to get along with people.” Nor were they reported for harassing the women with whom they

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 250-254.

¹¹⁶ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 118.

worked.¹¹⁷ By contrast, women, held to a higher moral standard dictated by the cult of domesticity, frequently found that both their reputations and their positions were at stake.¹¹⁸

Yet rather than driving these women into submission, witnessing this double standard fortified their sense of themselves as independent women and even led them protest against injustices in both word and deed. Jenkins was once so infuriated by Mr. Vicker's obscene jokes that she pondered the glorious vengeance she could wreak on the perverse offender "if only I had a Virginia buggy whip!"¹¹⁹ Other women translated such thoughts into action. Golden was enraged at the imposing moralistic restrictions and protested that they were "positively insulting" to the women of the BIA. She even went so far as to deliberately disregard the prohibition on interacting with men by going out to watch the stars with a young male friend. When she was reprimanded for her disobedience, Golden "flared up and [her] defense was every whit as spirited and vehement as his accusations." She declared that "I consider these orders which you have crammed down my throat an insult to a decent, free-born American woman." She punctuated her protest by resigning from her post and seeking reinstatement elsewhere.¹²⁰ Brown, too, offered particularly vehement condemnations of gender-biased policies in her memoir. Criticizing BIA investigations, she angrily asserted that

"in no other area of American life are women so brazenly deprived of the right to privacy. A bit of malicious gossip directed against one of them brings an inspector to put her under oath to answer questions which completely ignore the right to personal privacy which is granted all other citizens. Refusal to answer means dismissal for insubordination; compliance frequently serves the same end."¹²¹

This resolve to speak out and defy unfair policies mirrored the responses of women across the country whose drive to speak for social reforms, from temperance to the vote, was

¹¹⁷ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 207, 215.

¹¹⁸ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 27.

¹¹⁹ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 70.

¹²⁰ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 118-119.

¹²¹ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 215.

frequently due to their own experiences as workers, reformers, and simply as women in the public arena.¹²² Thus, even sexual harassment and discrimination raised BIA teachers' and matrons' consciousness as New Women.

Like the thousands of American women who broke into the public sphere around the turn of the twentieth century, BIA teachers and matrons attained new levels of self-confidence and self-awareness in their new roles outside the home.¹²³ Whether learning to live with lizards, braving a prairie blizzard, defying male expectations by rising in her career, or taking a stand against discrimination, each woman continued to climb "the ladder leading to independence" and to reinforce her identity as a capable, self-sufficient New Woman throughout her time in the BIA.¹²⁴ These women's ability to overcome any obstacle that crossed their path in the West consequently posed a serious challenge to the cult of domesticity's assumptions about what women could and could not do.

From empathy to critique: Questioning the civilizing mission and women's roles as civilizers

These eight women went west not only as women: they, and hundreds of other women like them, were also BIA teachers and matrons who were charged with a mission to civilize the Indians as the supposed guardians of morality and culture according to the cult of domesticity. However, just as they challenged the cult of domesticity by affirming their identity as New Women, so too did these women come to question the civilizing mission and their prescribed role as civilizers. Although they generally accepted the civilizing mission as they began their work, both their interactions with Indians students and community members unsettled their former certainty. Every woman came to share what Brown called "sense of incongruity in the

¹²² Banner, *Women in Modern America*, 94.

¹²³ Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 110.

¹²⁴ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 32.

routine and purpose” of the BIA’s civilizing mission.¹²⁵ Consequently, as a group, they all questioned the virtue of that mission in their memoirs by empathizing with the Indians’ perspective, expressing reservations as to the efficacy of their civilizing efforts, and passionately critiquing specific BIA policies, fellow employees, as well as their own role as purported feminine purveyors of civilization.

Whether teaching Indian children in the classroom, visiting Indian families in nearby villages, or watching Indian ceremonies as spectators, these women interacted with the Indians on a daily basis. Sometimes this interaction was, at least from the women’s perspectives, quite genuine: Eastman, for example, spent her summer holidays traveling across the prairie with a Sioux band, sleeping in a tepee, conversing with her guides in their own language, sharing in their meals, and even wearing Sioux dress.¹²⁶ At other times, their encounters were highly superficial, and even invasive. Jenkins described how she and several of her colleagues unabashedly “put down a blanket to sit on, pulled another over our laps and leaned back against a pile of brush” to watch an Indian burial ceremony as if it were a sporting event.¹²⁷ Yet while the level familiarity achieved in these interactions, especially from the Indians’ perspective, is debatable, it is evident that such contacts helped these women to see the Indians not as barbaric savages, but as fellow human beings.

On one level, the women often accorded value to Indian arts and even cultural practices: Pima baskets were “beautifully woven” and second to none; Crow ceremonial dance was gracefully preformed with “deliberation and reverence...shot through by a fine harmonizing

¹²⁵ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 42.

¹²⁶ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 64-67; 94-113.

¹²⁷ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 310.

thread”; and Karok songs were “lovely and really moving.”¹²⁸ However, these women went far deeper than simply admiring the outer trappings of Indian culture. As she wrote letters for Papago parents whose sons were serving in World War I, Woodruff realized that “brown fathers and mothers...were just as anxious as if they had been white, educated, and well dressed, although most of them did not give loud expression to their emotions.”¹²⁹ Arnold and Reed discovered that the Karok Indians who attended their school possessed a remarkable intellect: the adult women they taught to read and write “displayed a capacity to learn and an application and mental discipline not only far beyond the pioneer women we knew, but beyond our own friends and acquaintances of the same age back east.”¹³⁰ At the sewing circle Eastman ran for the “dear, lovable, intensely feminine Sioux women” at White River, “the talk was flowing about as freely as in similar groups at home.”¹³¹ The fact that these women were able to favorably compare Indians to white people indicated their growing recognition that the Indians were not, in fact, savage heathens.

Many of the women also developed special relationships with individual Indians. Jenkins had a special place in her heart for Little Blind Fanny, one of her Navajo students. She recalled how the little girl “nestled my hand under her chin and patted it, saying, ‘Fanny—loves—Chitasie.’” Overcome with emotion, Jenkins barely managed to reply that she loved Fanny too before she “hastened to our room, stumbling because my eyes were so full of tears.”¹³² At Hoopa Valley, Arnold and Reed became particularly close to Essie. This self-assured Karok woman proved a constant source of advice and insight into Karok life, teaching them Indian customs,

¹²⁸ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 195; Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 153; Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 58.

¹²⁹ Woodruff, 257.

¹³⁰ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 2.

¹³¹ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 34.

¹³² Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 57.

manners, and even a love song.¹³³ In the end, Golden expressed sentiments with which each of these women could agree: “the longer I associated with Uncle Sam’s stepchildren, the more beauty I saw and the less I found to condemn.”¹³⁴ Interacting with Indian students showed Golden that Indians were not in fact detestable, infantile heathens who survived only due to benevolence of “Uncle Sam” and the BIA; on the contrary, as human beings, they were as worthy of respect as any other people. Thus, through such interactions, BIA teachers and matrons developed a new perspective that allowed them to see the Indians as more than savages in need of civilization.

Furthermore, in their positions as BIA teachers and matrons, these women were immediate witnesses to the impact of the BIA’s civilizing policies on Indian communities and individuals. Largely as a consequence of their close interactions and personal relationships with the Indians, these women frequently recognized the Indians’ viewpoint when they observed the adverse effects of the civilizing mission. Although their empathetic feelings did not always translate into direct criticism of the civilizing mission, sympathizing with the Indians was nevertheless one means of expressing the increasing uncertainty these women felt regarding that mission’s merits. Woodruff, for example, discovered that recruiting children for BIA schools was often more difficult than she had expected: “the superintendent had to send out repeated requests to have the children brought in, and he even found it necessary to go out ‘into the highways and byways’ and bring in many who would have remained deaf to the invitation.” Although Woodruff was complicit in forcibly taking these Indian children from their parents, she also recognized that there was another side to the story: the Indians had heard that children were whipped in white schools, and, as they abhorred corporeal punishment, “the Indians in this

¹³³ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 54-55, 62.

¹³⁴ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 7-8.

region entertained a considerable degree of fear and suspicion of this system that the white man was inaugurating. They mistrusted anything that took the papooses away from the tepee.”¹³⁵ In the classroom, Golden also encountered resistance: many of her students refused to speak English. Although Golden was obligated to follow the rules set by the superintendent and punish children for speaking their native languages, she, like Woodruff, also sympathized with her students: she felt that “one of my most disagreeable tasks was to report and to punish children for speaking the Navajo tongue instead of English. It was only natural for the poor desert children to express themselves in the only language they understood.”¹³⁶ While Golden’s characterization of her students as “poor desert children” bordered on patronizing, it was nevertheless an expression of a developing empathy for the difficulties the Indians encountered under the demands of the civilizing mission.

Outside of the classroom, the women also witnessed how the government’s land policies, which joined education as another element of the overall civilizing mission, nearly always favored white interests at the Indians’ expense.¹³⁷ In such situations, these women frequently empathized with the Indians. In the Havasupai’s canyon, Iliff watched in dismay as “engineers, surveyors and workmen swarmed into the canyon where so few men had ever ventured” after the government had granted them the authority to set up an electrical plant at Mooney Falls without so much as consulting the Havasupai people. Having lived with the Havasupai, Iliff saw the “invasion” from their perspective: “this trail, these falls, everything had belonged to the Havasupai since the day the gods had led them into the canyon...the foreign men were desecrating the ‘Mother of the Waters.’” In the end, she shared in the Havasupai’s elation when a flood finally drove the white men out, “leaving the canyon to the people to whom it rightfully

¹³⁵ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 63.

¹³⁶ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 143.

¹³⁷ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 16-17.

belonged.”¹³⁸ However, the typical land conflict was seldom settled in favor of the Indians. In Arnold and Reed’s field of service, an Indian named Ruffy lived on rich, fertile land. Attracted by this highly valuable property, white men laid claim to his field, his orchard, and even his house. As an Indian, Ruffy had no legal standing on non-government land, and there was little Arnold and Reed could do to help him besides suggest that he relocate to substandard land on the government reservation. Here, Arnold and Reed wrote, “the problem of the Indian in white man’s country stared us in the face. What could Ruffy do under the circumstances? What could we do for him?” Knowing that even a report to the BIA would accomplish nothing they were at a loss. The whole situation left them feeling utterly helpless and “sick at heart” in the face of such injustice.¹³⁹ Like Iliff, Arnold and Reed’s sympathies clearly lay with the Indians rather than the government and its civilizing mission.

Not only did the civilizing mission divest the Indians of their lands; it also deprived them of their children. Golden recognized the sorrow felt by Indian parents who sent their children off to boarding schools such as Carlisle. When children returned, parents found that “they had sent an Indian to Carlisle and he returned a white man.” Consequently, Golden perceived, “this five-year separation from their sons would separate them, not for that stated period only, but forever, through a complete changed in thinking, in ideals and in outlook.” Frequently, the returned student would leave his family and the reservation to seek his fortune elsewhere, rendering the spiritual and physical separation permanent. Golden sympathized with the pain Indian parents experienced in these circumstances, noting that the civilizing mission served as a catalyst for transitions that were intensely “hard on all concerned.”¹⁴⁰ Golden refrained from criticizing the civilizing mission itself, but she clearly saw a disconnect between the intent and reality of the

¹³⁸ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 191-192; 194.

¹³⁹ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 268-270.

¹⁴⁰ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 86-88.

BIA's assimilationist policies in education.

In addition to empathizing with the Indians, many of the women realized that the results of the civilizing mission were often ambiguous at best, and consequently came to actively question the efficacy of their efforts. Woodruff, for example, always wondered about actual the impact of religious instruction:

“it was always a puzzle to me just what the Christian religion meant to the Indian. He learned Bible stories, and enjoyed singing hymns. He confessed his faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, and was baptized in His name. He worshiped in the white man's church, intelligently and with deep sincerity. But how did this religion actually affect the inmost being of the red man born of ages of nature worship, and schooled in the strict traditions of his tribe?”

Woodruff's experience showed her that rather than abandoning their native religion, the Indians seemed to have “two faiths.” This apparent failure of the civilizing mission's commitment to converting the Indians to Christianity was, in Woodruff's view, quite troubling.¹⁴¹

Brown also encountered the contrary effects of trying to impress an entirely foreign religion upon the Indians. Teaching the story of King David to a group of Sioux boys, she found the children, who hardly spoke English, completely unresponsive until she started talking about the weapons David used to defeat his enemies. Inspired by the glimmers of understanding she saw on their faces, Brown “expounded” on “saws, axes, and harrows.” Pleased with the children's seemingly enthusiastic response, she felt sure that that “my efforts had not been in vain,” and that she had fulfilled the civilizing mission's mandate to bring the messages of Christianity to the Indians. The next day, however, she realized she was mistaken in this assumption: the boys, drawing inspiration from had Brown's rendering of King David's story, had stolen a saw and were chopping rabbits in two behind the warehouse. This was not at all the “Christian” response she had expected to her efforts, and it gave her “cause to ponder the hard

¹⁴¹ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 208-209.

road good intentions have to travel.”¹⁴² Her evident failure to successfully impart good Christian values through the story of King David led Brown to the realization that attempting to impose her own views on the Indians could often do more harm than good.

Even when the teachers and matrons’ efforts appeared successful they found that students often cleaved to the “old ways.” For instance, Iliff was shocked to discover one of her model students taking part in a traditional healing ceremony conducted by a Havasupai medicine man. She watched the boy intently and was disturbed by what she saw:

“his eyes were those of an Indian, a fanatical Indian, straining with all that was in him to lay hands on that magical power. He would support with the last breath of life that thin, mummified zealot that sucked and gurgled and screamed in a wild frenzy. And I wondered. Tomorrow will he stand in front of his company at school and give his commands to his boys? Will he sit at the head of his table in the dining room and help serve the young children? Tonight he is steeped in Indian tradition. Can he change by the time the breakfast bell rings in the morning?”¹⁴³

If even the most promising and seemingly assimilated students had not given up their native traditions, what, wondered Iliff, did that mean for the civilizing mission’s ultimate chance of success?

Some of the women came to wonder if it was even correct to assume that Indian students and communities *should* change and accept white ways. To begin with, many of the women recognized that, as Woodruff explained, “the coming of civilization was not without its bitter drawbacks.” Deadly illness, devastating poverty, and increasing problems with alcohol plagued the Piute and Papago Indians with whom Woodruff worked. In her assessment, whites were to blame: far from changing Indian life for the better, contact with white people was in fact “the secret of many of their sorrows.”¹⁴⁴ Witnessing a host of similar problems, Brown ruminated,

¹⁴² Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 40.

¹⁴³ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 241.

¹⁴⁴ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 163, 190-201, 227.

“the Indian would be better off if they never learned some of our ways.”¹⁴⁵ Additionally, the women felt that in some facets of life the Indians were perhaps more “civilized” than white people. Among the Walapai, Iliff saw evidence of strong “family solidarity...a companionship that the people of my race were on the verge of losing.”¹⁴⁶ Traveling with the Sioux and visiting white homesteads along the way, Eastman discovered that “the Dakotas [were] far more cleanly” than the pitiable white pioneers who lived in “wretched,” “primitive” sod houses.¹⁴⁷ Because Arnold and Reed acknowledged that they were government matrons obligated to upholding the government’s insistence on monogamy among the Indians, they wondered whether it was acceptable for them to travel around in the company of Essie, their Karok friend who had three husbands. But they also wondered,

“why exclude Essie, who sports two husbands, and include Sam [a white man], who regularly breaks the law by selling illicit whiskey to the Indians? Or Hilding [another white man], who kept a notorious saloon in Orleans Bar and, they say, had to be run out of town? Or Luther Hickox [a man of mixed race], who, according to everybody, is a desperate character and quietly does away with people when they annoy him?”

Given the rather dubious character of these white men in contrast to the friendly, upstanding Essie, the two matrons concluded that “maybe it is just as well to go ahead and not ask too many questions.”¹⁴⁸ Although such questions stopped short of outright criticism of the BIA and the civilizing mission, the fact that these women felt the need to pose them indicated that they had their doubts.

Most of the women, however, did not stop at empathizing and questioning alone: stirred by the contradictions they identified in the civilizing mission’s intentions as well as its practical results, these women openly criticized specific BIA policies. Their criticisms spanned the entire

¹⁴⁵ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 83.

¹⁴⁶ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 65.

¹⁴⁷ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 99-100.

¹⁴⁸ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 51-52.

breadth of the civilizing mission, from Christianization to land policies to the educational curriculum. Some women disapproved of the manner in which Christianization was carried out. Golden, for example, scorned the Baptist missionaries who invariably delivered “a pointless, uninspiring monologue” of a sermon and required the Indian children to sit through interminable services in the oppressive heat that could reach over one hundred degrees. In Golden’s caustic assessment, “it would not be surprising to anyone if these Indian pupils, in their later life, preferred the pagan customs of their ancestors to the practices of Christianity taught in such a stupid, unreasonable fashion.”¹⁴⁹ The activities of these missionaries were an integral part of the BIA’s efforts to inculcate the Indians with white values, but for Golden, their methods were not only ineffective, but also patently cruel.

The United States Government’s land policies also incurred significant criticism. For year the government had broken treaties with the Indians, seized their lands, and forced them onto reservations. With their traditional ways of life shattered by white incursions, many Indian tribes were all but forced to rely on government rations and annuity goods for survival.¹⁵⁰ Iliff and Eastman considered this state of dependency particularly deplorable, and they held the government accountable. Iliff critiqued the “agents of the government” who “had come, using rations as buying power, and had established controls that crushed initiative” of the formerly “self-supporting and self-sufficient” Walapai.¹⁵¹ Eastman argued that white society as a whole was to blame for reducing the Sioux to their current impoverished and dependent state: “we exterminated the buffalo which originally furnished them with a livelihood, confined them to a limited range of the least desirable part of their territory...and doled out just enough monotonous

¹⁴⁹ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 116-117.

¹⁵⁰ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Indians in America: From the Revolutionary War to the Present*. (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1985), 28, 33-37. 42-47.

¹⁵¹ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 112.

food and shoddy clothing to keep them alive.” She abhorred the “beef issue” and annual clothing distribution that denigrated the Sioux’s dignity and held them as perpetual “wards of the state.”¹⁵² Women also criticized the government policy of allotting the Indians land in severalty. This policy, made official by the Dawes Act of 1887, divided up reservation lands into allotments among individual Indians and conferred citizenship upon allottees. Allotment was intended to break up tribal structures and encouraged more “civilized” uses of the land. Additionally, any land left over after allotment could be declared surplus and sold to white settlers.¹⁵³ Brown condemned this policy as no more than a sham to transfer Indian lands into white hand. In her opinion it was tantamount to “raping the Indian,” and served to reduce the Indians to bitter poverty.¹⁵⁴ For a woman to equate government policy with rape was a blunt condemnation of the civilizing mission to say the least.

Another constant subject of criticism was the failure of the government’s Indian school curriculum to recognize the realities Indian students faced after they completed their education. For instance, industrial education, as part of the Indian school curriculum, was intended to equip Indians with skills that would allow them to become productive members of society.¹⁵⁵ However, at White River, Eastman observed that students who had learned blacksmithing, carpentry, or shoemaking in boarding schools and “attempted to practice...at home must starve for lack of custom.” She further asserted that “the limited number of salaried positions open to Indians in government employ was no real solution, although ability to secure one of these posts was, and still is, practically the only chance to earn a decent living on the reservation.”¹⁵⁶ Nor, as Brown and Golden also noted, could they obtain jobs in the mainstream economy in the face of

¹⁵² Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 58-63, 78-79, 85.

¹⁵³ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 17.

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 193-195.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 21-22.

¹⁵⁶ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 82.

concerted white prejudice.¹⁵⁷ These women saw that even the best educated Indian students were unable to put their “civilized” skills to work either in mainstream white society or on the reservation, which left the former student consigned to a life of poverty.

Furthermore, as many of the women observed, returned Indian students were caught between “two different worlds.”¹⁵⁸ The Indian school curriculum taught students to disdain traditional Indian lifeways and trained them for assimilation into white society.¹⁵⁹ However, as Golden observed, that integration was seldom achieved: in attempting to enter the white mainstream, former Indian students “face competition with the whites as well as race prejudice wherever they go.” They were consequently forced to return to the reservation where they confronted “the powerful influence of parents and friends who taunt the returning student with charges that he is aping the dress, manners, and customs of his white conquerors.” Thus, in Golden’s assessment, only “hardships and disillusionment [awaited] these youths upon leaving their boarding schools.”¹⁶⁰ According to these teachers, education in BIA schools left returned students trapped in a painful limbo between white and Indian society: on the one hand, their education had trained them to abhor the traditional world of their Indian parents, but, on the other hand, white society also refused to accept them. These pointed criticisms regarding the contrary results of the Indian school curriculum in addition to a variety of other BIA policies constituted significant challenges to the civilizing mission.

Yet many of the women saved their most vitriolic condemnations for the very BIA employees who were expected to carry out this mission. They found the BIA leadership ridden with tyranny and corruption. Many of the reservation agents and school superintendents who

¹⁵⁷ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 218; Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 88.

¹⁵⁸ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 45; Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 87-88; Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 218.

¹⁵⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 21-24.

¹⁶⁰ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 87-88

Brown encountered were “ignorant bullies,” characterized by “an arrogance of manner and features...a mean mind bloated with authority.”¹⁶¹ Jenkins fumed against the Blue Canyon superintendent, Mr. Hammer, and his domineering wife. The “cruel Hammers” refused to request an assistant teacher because it would have automatically made Jenkins principal teacher and Mrs. Hammer wanted the post for herself. This left Jenkins to teach 117 pupils on her own. Such petty abuse of power aggravated Jenkins to no end.¹⁶² Golden vilified Miss Goings, the principal teacher of Red Moon, as an “absolute monarch.” She was disillusioned to find that Miss Goings’ “tiny absolute monarchy contained all the elements that make authoritarian rule everywhere undesirable. Fear, hypocrisy, intrigue, and sycophancy held sway, while sincerity and straightforwardness were missing.” Particularly irksome was Miss Goings’ teaching style: rather than supporting effective and innovative pedagogy, Miss Goings insisted that Golden “adopt methods of two decades back.” Moreover, the principal felt that the annual “entertainments” she organized to “show off the school to the towns people...were more important...than the teaching of the three R’s.”¹⁶³ Golden therefore condemned Miss Goings’ despotism not only as an affront to her professionalism as a teacher, but also a stumbling block to the Indian children’s progress.

These women were exasperated to find that similarly hypocritical attitudes permeated government’s entire Indian bureaucracy, and their critiques consequently extended into the highest ranks of BIA leadership. For instance, Brown began to learn early in her BIA career “that the Indian Service was the unloved and unwanted stepchild of Congress. It wore the cast-off clothing, the patched shoes, the thin underwear of people who could not vote; it could safely be skimped in the interests of people who did.” These inklings of government neglect and lack of commitment were confirmed when the Commissioner of Indian Affairs himself paid a visit to the

¹⁶¹ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 109.

¹⁶² Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 65, 225.

¹⁶³ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 12-13, 18-19.

Leupp school where Brown was working. Rather than partaking in the dinner of “stringy mutton...potatoes boiled in their jackets...canned tomatoes with crackers broken in it...canned milk diluted to a bluish weakness...[and] soggy bread pudding,” which was standard fare in the employee mess, he excused himself from the table in apparent disgust. For Brown, this single action manifested the essential hypocrisy of the BIA leadership:

“with him he took in rags and tatters the illusions I had cherished about Indian Commissioners. For here was a commander who ordered the privates of his bureaucratic army to do what he himself could not or would not do. He could not drink the alkaline water he asked us to drink daily. He could not eat the food made necessary by the low salaries paid the industrial employees. He would not return thanks for unpalatable food but required me to do so. And tonight he would not sleep—or I hoped he wouldn’t—on one of his hard mattresses.”¹⁶⁴

As evidenced by her acid remarks, Brown found such hypocrisy condemnable to the highest degree.

Neither was the BIA rank and file exempt from these women’s contempt: they found the lack of compassion and dedication to the well-being of the Indians exhibited by their fellow employees most disconcerting. According to Brown’s bitter analysis, “no employee was here because of an interest in Indians and their welfare. We were here to make a living.”¹⁶⁵ Many BIA employees were guilty of “gross neglect of duty, to dishonesty, and even worse.” Upon arriving at a Montana school as the new principal teacher, Golden found “lazy employees...sitting around eating, drinking, and playing cards.” They “had even looted the commissary” of its government-owned supplies intended for school use. Meanwhile, the students were “entirely neglected—dirty, lousy heads, lousy clothing and even lousy beds—and many in poor health.” Adopting a tone full of caustic incredulity, Golden fumed that these indolent white employees were worse

¹⁶⁴ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 59, 142-144.

¹⁶⁵ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 153.

than “‘Indians going back to the blanket when left to themselves!’”¹⁶⁶ Despite resorting to a derogatory Indian stereotype in her criticism, Golden was clearly incensed at the hypocrisy inherent in such carelessness, negligence, and abuse at the expense of the Indian children who she believed the school was intended to serve. In the final analysis, she concluded that “in situations of this kind the pupils might just about as well have been left at home in the tepees with their parents.”¹⁶⁷ This was an unequivocal condemnation of BIA staff and the mission supposedly that guided them.

However, even more scandalous than their abandonment of duty was the typical employee’s utter contempt for the Indian. Eastman disparaged the agents at White River not only for the fact that they “accepted the jobs in default of better ones,” but because they “had no great love for the red man, who in fact ran up a distinct color prejudice.”¹⁶⁸ Golden saw evidence of this prejudice at Fort Yuma where she “was surprised to learn that segregation of the races was practiced” between white and Indian staff. Indian employees were relegated to a separate table in the employee mess hall and endured “open and constant adverse criticisms” from the white staff. Unable to tolerate such flagrant racism, Golden eventually “remonstrated with [the white staff] in private against such feelings toward another race.” These prejudices extended to Indian students as well. Golden noted with disgust that the matron at Mountain View School in Oklahoma “considered [the Indians] as she did the Negroes in her native state—just a little above the animals—and treated them accordingly.”¹⁶⁹ Even when employees were not so blatantly prejudiced, they were often shockingly ignorant of and insensitive toward Indian cultures and ways of life. Brown condemned the fact that “teachers were given little or no opportunity to

¹⁶⁶ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 127.

¹⁶⁷ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 10.

¹⁶⁸ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 34.

¹⁶⁹ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 70-71, 111.

become familiar with reservation conditions...a knowledge of their pupils' home environment was not considered necessary since their education aimed to make that environment suitable to them."¹⁷⁰ Passionately disagreeing with this viewpoint, Brown insisted that "the work in which I was engaged required for its success such knowledge."¹⁷¹ If one was to work with the Indians, she felt, one should have at least a basic understanding of and respect for Indian life and culture. These teachers and matrons found the combination of shameless ignorance, brazen racism, and blatant lack of compassion they observed among their fellow employees highly troubling. In criticizing the motives and actions of men and women who charged with bringing white civilization to the Indians, they effectively raised questions about the viability of the civilizing mission itself.

Having questioned and criticized everything from religious instruction to employee attitudes, BIA teachers and matrons proceeded to re-evaluate their own role in as civilizers. As was true of their critiques of the civilizing mission in general, these self-critiques were often implicit. For example, nearly every woman expressed doubts about her ability to perform her duties. In a self-critical reflection, Iliff wondered, "could I handle all the tasks that fell to the lot of the assistant teacher? I was inadequately prepared to teach the little folks who understood no English or those older pupils who had lived the free and easy life of the reservation for too many years and spoke only their native tongue."¹⁷² Jenkins also felt that she was "in no way prepared" for her teaching job among the Navajo.¹⁷³ Shortly after beginning their service, Arnold and Reed began "to think that we were not the right people for this country" because even their most

¹⁷⁰ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 204.

¹⁷¹ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 263.

¹⁷² Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 22.

¹⁷³ Jenkins, *Girl From Williamsburg*, 35

earnest efforts had failed to reach the Indians.¹⁷⁴ Some of the women went so far as to admit a patent lack of dedication to their civilizing work. Brown, for example, was quite clear that her reasons for agreeing to teach Sunday school at Crow Creek had nothing to do with any maternal desire to bring the “civilized” religion of Christianity to the Indians. On the contrary, she explained that “I knew [the missionary’s] cordial friendly welcome was due to their belief that I was zealous in piety and good works. They did not know that I was there because I had selfish designs on their tomcat.”¹⁷⁵ Putting one’s love of animals before one’s commitment to Christianity was hardly the attitude of an ardent civilizer of the Indians.

Although these instances of earnest self-doubt and ironic self-deprecation hinted at a certain discomfort with the role of civilizer, other women were more candid in their critical self-examination. Brown, for example, frankly admitted her deficiencies as a BIA kindergartener: “I knew that as a teacher of Indian children I was a failure.” Her reasons for thinking so were illuminating. To begin with, she

“instinctively felt that in teaching Indian children to like and want the things that we liked and wanted we were headed in the wrong direction....Could they make use of these things on the reservation? Were we doing anything to make it possible for them to live there as we were teaching them to want to live?”

In addition to harboring such doubts as to the methods and ultimate goals of the civilizing mission, Brown also felt that, in contrast to the general assumption that women were natural purveyors of civilization, she personally lacked “a belief in the necessity for recreating primitive children in my own image. In sixteen years I did not acquire that belief.”¹⁷⁶ Brown, therefore, explicitly criticized the civilizing mission on two counts: she expressed doubts about the civilizing mission itself and also pointed out the fact that although she was a woman she lacked

¹⁷⁴ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 40.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 38.

¹⁷⁶ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 42.

the convictions necessary to carry it out.

Other women provided a more concrete critique by evaluating their specific actions as teachers and matrons. Golden and Brown both recounted a remarkably similar story about an Indian girl named either Ada or Lucy, respectively. In both cases the girl went home over a vacation, became pregnant, returned to school, gave birth in secret, and killed her newborn infant.¹⁷⁷ The anonymous school matron emerged as the culprit in Brown's version, but Golden held herself culpable for Ada's actions. She reflected that "the more I pondered her case, the more I began to blame myself." Golden had taken over the missionary's lessons for one day, and she "had been very, very emphatic in stressing the wickedness of doing anything that would bring illegitimate children into the world." She was acutely troubled by the fact that "poor Ada had taken my admonitions to heart and, paradoxically enough, what I had intended for good turned out to be evil." Golden had happened upon what Woodruff called "the paradox of our well-meant training."¹⁷⁸ She believed her sincere, seemingly benevolent civilizing efforts were responsible for Ada's tragedy, and this made her question her own role as a female civilizer, and, by extension, the civilizing mission as a whole.

These BIA teachers and matrons' experiences in Indian schools and communities allowed them to see the contradictions inherent in the civilizing mission firsthand, from the devastating impact of boarding schools on Indian student and families to the hypocrisy of government agents. Rather than ignoring or accepting such incongruities, these women gave voice to their unease through empathizing with the Indians, questioning the effects of their actions, and criticizing BIA policies and personnel. Significantly, the women also had deep misgivings about their personal role as teachers and matrons. The fact that women, who were assumed to be the

¹⁷⁷ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 154-156; Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 224.

¹⁷⁸ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 156; Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 45-46.

ideal civilizers, the motherly upholders of Anglo-American culture and virtue, formulated such severely critical reservations and critiques of BIA policies and the individuals who carried them out constituted a particularly profound condemnation of the civilizing mission and women's roles therein.

The tenacity of ideology: Tensions between New Women and the civilizing mission

In affirming their identification with the New Woman and questioning the BIA's civilizing policies, BIA teacher and matrons as a group challenged the prevailing ideologies of the cult of domesticity and the civilizing mission. However, further examination reveals that although most of these women were able to successfully take on roles that reflected their identity as New Women, they, like female reformers elsewhere in the United States, were unable to completely shed the ideology of the cult of domesticity. A central reason for this seeming paradox is the fact that their identities as New Women were intimately bound up in their assumed roles as civilizers, which ultimately derived from the cult of domesticity itself. As Peggy Pascoe has argued in her study of white women reformers who established rescue homes in the West based on their claim to female moral authority according to the cult of domesticity, "strengthening 'women's values' empowered some Victorian women, but it had disadvantages as well. In the end, reliance on a particular formulation of women's roles...entrenched rather than challenged gender definitions."¹⁷⁹ Following a similar pattern, BIA teachers and matrons questioned the civilizing mission and the cult of domesticity, but, in the final analysis, they could reject neither. Their BIA careers and their work as writers and advocates for Indian reform provided them with the independence and self-sufficiency that characterized the New Woman, but it required support of the civilizing mission. To relinquish that mission would mean losing

¹⁷⁹ Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, xvi-xix.

what power they had gained as New Women. As they continued to uphold the civilizing mission, these women maintained their roles as female civilizers, thereby implicitly accepting and perpetuating the gender norms prescribed by the cult of domesticity rather than the new gender roles embodied by the New Woman.

Some teachers and matrons built lifelong careers in the BIA. Woodruff served from 1900 until age forced her retirement in 1929. Golden entered the BIA in 1901 and did not leave until 1918. Although Iliff left the BIA in 1904 after only four years of service to care for her mother and to marry, but she and her husband returned to the BIA to work together at Colony Industrial school in 1906, Chilocco Industrial Training School in 1915, and Salem Industrial School from 1920 to 1924.¹⁸⁰ All three women found deep personal fulfillment in their BIA careers. Golden always carried “pleasant memories” of her time in the BIA, even during times “that seemed dominated by disagreeable and difficult situations.” These fond memories derived largely from the independence she enjoyed as a single, unattached woman, free to indulge in card parties, dances, and horseback riding outside of her classroom duties.¹⁸¹ Even when her friends encouraged her to leave the BIA, Woodruff refused, noting that “my better judgment answered, ‘Stay with Uncle Same, and your future is secure,’” meaning that her job provided a consistent, reliable source of income.¹⁸² Living with the Indians and exploring desert caves and canyon trails, Iliff sated her “incurable thirst for adventure.”¹⁸³ She even managed to continue her BIA career after she married, something very uncommon for a woman the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁸⁴ As the BIA guaranteed careers characterized by personal liberty, financial independence, adventure, and even a level autonomy from one’s husband, it allowed these

¹⁸⁰ Carter, “Completely Discouraged,” 62, 64; Woodruff, *Indian Oasis* 21, 319

¹⁸¹ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 134-135.

¹⁸² Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 206.

¹⁸³ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 90.

¹⁸⁴ Banner, *Women in Modern America*, 45.

women to live their lives as New Women.

Yet at the same time, a career in the BIA required a conviction in the civilizing mission. As has been seen, Iliff, Golden, and Woodruff all questioned this mission to one extent or another. However, in the end, they all staunchly supported the perceived need to civilize the Indians. Working in boarding schools with her husband, Iliff became convinced of that Indian assimilation could be successfully accomplished through the civilizing mission. She asserted that these schools “offered the all-around education these students would need in competing with young people who had enjoyed the advantages of home, church, and public school training.”¹⁸⁵ These women also tended to express this support in maternal terms that echoed the cult of domesticity. Golden, for example, devoted an entire section of her memoir to letters written to her by former Indian students. Many of the letters contained such “bouquets for the teacher,” as “you are the best teacher we ever had,” “the schoolroom is lonesome without your smiles,” and “you seemed a mother to me at school, that which I’ve never known to this day.”¹⁸⁶ Golden’s inclusion of these letters was more than mere conceit: they show that she took pride in her role as a beloved teacher and a maternal civilizer. Woodruff saw her matron duties as multifaceted, making her “mother, physician, nurse, financial manager, spiritual adviser, chaperon, and arbiter in domestic disputes,” but she always put particular emphasis on the role of mother. In her work, she maintained that she was “a kind of mother of all,” and she even “called myself the up-to-date old woman who lived in a shoe, who had so many children she could not look after them properly.” The last line and eventual title of her memoir was a final affirmation of her motherly influence and conviction in the promise of the civilizing mission for improving the lives of the Indians: “it is something,” she wrote, “to have been an oasis in faraway Indian

¹⁸⁵ Iliff, *People of the Blue Water*, 266.

¹⁸⁶ Golden, *Red Moon Called Me*, 195-200; 189-205.

Land.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, those women who committed themselves to careers in the BIA may have seemed to reject the cult of domesticity by affirming their independence. However, because they depended upon the cult of domesticity’s assumption that they possessed certain uniquely feminine qualities to maintain these careers, they could not wholly condemn the civilizing mission or their roles as maternal civilizers.

While some teachers and matrons dedicated themselves to lifelong service in the BIA, others went on to work for Indian rights and reform as writers and advocates. In taking on these roles, women followed the pattern set by the thousands of American women who took part in reform movements around the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸⁸ Eastman, for one, was a vocal supporter of Indian rights. After three years of living with the Indians and running her own school at White River, Eastman returned to New England convinced “that I knew the Sioux and their needs.” Advocating a program of reservation day schools to replace boarding schools, Eastman “embarked upon a series of paid talks and newspaper articles upon my chosen theme.” Her engagements took her all over the eastern seaboard, and she spoke before numerous prominent reform groups, including the Indian Rights Association and the Women’s National Indian Association. Eastman recalled that she set about writing articles and giving speeches imbued with “ideas to spare and plenty of self-confidence,” and that she “spoke straight from the heart, without timidity or formal preparation.”¹⁸⁹ Thus Eastman boldly took on the role of a publically active New Woman who was fully committed to the cause of advocating what she believed was best for the Indians.

Brown also envisioned herself as an activist working for the Indians, but her advocacy took a slightly different form than Eastman’s speaking engagements and newspaper articles. In

¹⁸⁷ Woodruff, *Indian Oasis*, 152, 264, 289, 320.

¹⁸⁸ Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 7-10; Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 93-111.

¹⁸⁹ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 99, 114-115.

the years following her service, Brown took classes at Columbia University in creative writing, and began to write short stories for magazines. She earned a modest income from her writing and even went on to publish a novel. She took great pride in her persistence and subsequent accomplishments, remarking after her literary debut that “I felt that I had earned the degree of *Stubborn Fool*, which my father had given me so many years before.”¹⁹⁰ Through publishing her written work, Brown found an avenue by which she could actively assert her New Womanhood.

However, the ultimate “urge that drove [Brown]” to write was the pressing obligation she felt to expose the injustices she had witnessed in the BIA, and she directed her memoir toward this purpose. To these ends, Brown told the story of her own BIA service while simultaneously infusing her narrative with vehement critiques of BIA policies. The memoir served as Brown’s “own indictment of” the BIA. One whole chapter read as a veritable “*J’accuse*” of the BIA seemingly patterned after Emile Zola’s famous article: Brown listed a litany of abuses with which she “charged” the BIA, ranging from “crass ignorance” to “theft” to “wholesale kidnapping” to “being the accessory to the death of many Indian children.” In the end, Brown intended her condemnation of the BIA “to make for the Indians a few new friends who will join the small group of people who have long struggled to help and protect him.” Indian advocacy was therefore the central concern of Brown’s memoir. However, she also took the opportunity to criticize the conventional gender roles that she so detested: she critiqued occupational discrimination, men’s mistaken assumptions about female inferiority, and even women’s fashion.¹⁹¹ Both advocating for the Indians by exposing the BIA abuses and critiquing gender roles also allowed Brown to further establish herself as a New Woman writing for a public audience.

¹⁹⁰ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 262, 281, 282

¹⁹¹ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 163, 212, 248, 254-257, 262, 281-282, 284, 309.

Thus, it may appear that writing and speaking as a woman advocate for Indian rights and reform was the quintessential challenge to both the cult of domesticity and the civilizing mission. Eastman's feelings of self-confidence and Brown's pride in her writing as well as both women's willingness to step into public forums echoed the feelings and actions of countless other young women who joined reform movements and affirmed their identity as New Women through their participation therein.¹⁹² Moreover, in calling for reform and pointing out the flaws in BIA policy, both women seemed to discredit current manifestations of the civilizing mission. However, even these women never fully renounced the civilizing mission and its implications of Indian inferiority. Brown, in particular, maintained a highly stereotypical view of the Indians with racist undertones. For example, she asserted that one of the problems with Indian education was that the Indians' "ancestors had bequeathed them neither aptitude nor capacity for receiving enlightenment from a printed or written language. Their ability to profit from reading was strictly limited."¹⁹³ Such comments reflected the racist notion, held by growing numbers of early twentieth century reformers, that Indians were not only culturally, but also racially inferior to whites.¹⁹⁴ Even Eastman, who discounted racial distinctions, insisted that "Indians are people too," and even married a Sioux man, never relinquished her conviction that total assimilation of the Indians and elimination of native cultures was necessary at any cost.¹⁹⁵ For instance, although she became fluent in the Sioux language, she demanded English only in her school and insisted that "utility, and not sentiment, should guide us in the choice of a medium of communication." Even as she wrote her memoir years later, she commented that "much as I once enjoyed speaking

¹⁹² Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 110.

¹⁹³ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 227.

¹⁹⁴ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 310.

¹⁹⁵ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 68.

Dakota fluently, I am satisfied that teachers of today do not need it.”¹⁹⁶ Apparently, Eastman continued to believe that the “ways of the white man” must necessarily replace Indian ways of life. Thus, Brown and Eastman ultimately based their advocacy on conceptions of the Indians’ racial and cultural inferiority respectively, thereby upholding the civilizing mission.

Furthermore, although they did not consciously conceive of themselves as maternal civilizers like women who established lifelong careers in the BIA, both Eastman and Brown implicitly accepted this role by supporting the civilizing mission in their reform work. Consequently, even as reformers and advocates, Eastman and Brown not only accepted the civilizing mission, but they also validated the role of the maternal civilizer, and, by extension, the cult of domesticity.

An examination of Brown and Eastman’s married lives as depicted in their memoirs provides additional evidence as to their ultimate acceptance of the cult of domesticity. Unlike Iliff, who appears to have been able to balance being a wife and a New Woman, Brown and Eastman often found that marriage stifled their independence. Brown’s husband, for example, remained extremely skeptical of her forays into the literary world. According to Brown “he did not find it credible that I could put a sheet of paper in the typewriter and write something on it that editors would pay good money for. I knew he cherished private mental reservations concerning the sanity of those editors.” He also despaired at his wife’s lack of housekeeping skills: he was “genuinely astonished and worried” when Brown informed him that she had no idea how to cook, and had “never made hot biscuits” before. Brown also discovered that her outspokenness was not a welcome trait in a wife and attempted to temper her boldness: “my imp of derision was to receive a good many cuffs, all of them merited, before I learned not to laugh at things my husband considered seemly for himself.”¹⁹⁷ This submission to her husband’s will was

¹⁹⁶ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 36, 68.

¹⁹⁷ Brown, *Stubborn Fool*, 263, 265, 281.

far more consonant with the ideal of True Womanhood than the idea of the New Woman.

Similarly, when Eastman married Charles Eastman, a largely assimilated, Dartmouth-educated Sioux medical doctor, she “gave myself wholly...to the traditional duties of wife and mother, abruptly relinquishing all thought of an independent career for the making of a home.”¹⁹⁸ She often found conventional female roles constraining. While her husband “traveled widely, even to London, and met hosts of interesting people,” Eastman was “inevitably house-bound,” with “every dream and ambition...wholly subordinated to the business of helping my talented husband express himself and interpret his people.” She resented this loss of independence, as “every woman who has surrendered a congenial task and financial independence will understand.”¹⁹⁹ Marriage, Eastman found, forced her to abandon the public life she had once enjoyed and accept her place in the domestic sphere.

Although they remarked upon the trials of married life and even expressed discontent at times, neither Brown nor Eastman ever criticized her husband outright, at least in her memoir. On the contrary, they tried to accommodate their husbands’ conventional expectations, and, in doing so, ultimately accepted roles as True Women as opposed to New Women. Their inability or unwillingness to openly protest their subordination to their husbands may have derived from the fact that these two women essentially endorsed True Womanhood as an extension of the maternal civilizing role they took on as female Indian reformers who supported the civilizing mission. Their implicit acceptance of True Womanhood as reformers seemed to carry over into their married life. Thus, like their fellow BIA teachers and matrons who had established careers in the Indian Service, these two women fully challenged neither the civilizing mission nor the

¹⁹⁸ For an examination of issues of race and culture in the Eastman marriage see Margaret D. Jacobs. “The Eastmans and the Luhans: Interracial Marriage between White Women and Native American Men, 1875-1935.” *Frontiers* 23, no. 3 (2002): 29-54. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub/13>. (accessed 21 November 2008)

¹⁹⁹ Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, 172-174.

cult of domesticity.

Affirming new identities, challenging old ideologies: A final exception to the rule

In the end, it may appear that these women's experiences in the West were all for naught. They may have empathized with the Indians and even questioned the wisdom of imposing white values and culture upon them. Yet at the same time many maintained their careers in the BIA, continuing to actively enforce the tenets of the civilizing mission and retaining a strong belief in its merits. Even those who professed to advocate for Indian rights and reform never gave up the civilizing mission's assumption of Indian inferiority. Neither did they fully realize the liberation from conventional gender roles that service in the BIA seemed to offer. All continued to uphold the traditional ideal of the female civilizer, and some even surrendered their economic, social, and even intellectual independence to fulfill the obligations of conventional marriages. However, the experience of Arnold and Reed seems to constitute a deviation from this general trend.

Arnold and Reed did not establish lasting careers in the BIA, nor did they fancy themselves advocates for Indian rights or policy reform. When they departed from the Hoopa Valley, they did not look back. They left behind their Karok friends and became once again "white people in the white people's country." However, they carried with them at least one lasting impression: living with the Karoks had revealed an alternative set of gender roles that contrasted greatly with those of contemporary white American society. In the Hoopa Valley, Arnold and Reed observed that "the business of life in an Indian rancheria is in the competent hands of women." Rather than remaining subservient to men, the women held the power in this society. As one Karok woman explained the distinction between white and Karok gender roles: "woman marry white man...stay home all day and cook. Woman marry Indian, take her baby on her back when she want to, and go along the trail." While a married white woman was confined

to her husband's home and domestic tasks, an Indian woman enjoyed the freedom to make her own decisions and could go where she pleased. Thus, Karok gender norms, at least according to Arnold and Reed's observations, were strikingly different from those determined by the cult of domesticity, and the thought that it might be possible for women possess such autonomy greatly appealed to these two matrons. They became increasingly opposed to the idea of marriage in white society, and Reed even declared, "if I lived the life of some married [white] women...I'd commit hara-kiri on our nice new hatchet."²⁰⁰ Arnold and Reed apparently held to this philosophy even after they left Hoopa Valley: eschewing marriage, they instead became life-long companions.²⁰¹

While life-long same-sex female relationships, both platonic and sensual, were not unheard of among women during the Victorian era, this unequivocal denunciation of marriage was nevertheless a pointed rejection of the cult of domesticity, which mandated that marriage was the pivotal event in every True Woman's life.²⁰² Furthermore, Arnold and Reed's decision seems to have been influenced by the alternative gender relationships they encountered among the Karoks, which they came to consider as a legitimate way of living. By shunning marriage in favor of same-sex companionship, Arnold and Reed sought the independence and power they observed that Karok women held, and, at the same time, affirmed their identity as autonomous New Women in white society. Thus, in contrast to their contemporaries, these two former BIA matrons, inspired by their interactions with the Indians, simultaneously shed the strictures of both the cult of domesticity and the civilizing mission.

²⁰⁰ Arnold and Reed, *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, 163, 172, 313.

²⁰¹ Carter, "Completely Discouraged," 60.

²⁰² For the importance of marriage in regards to True Womanhood, see Welter, 154-155; for an examination of female same-sex relationships in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs* 1 no. 1 (Autumn, 1975): 1-29. (accessed 25 April 2009); and Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

However, Arnold and Reed's experience aside, the majority of BIA teachers and matrons included in this study found themselves entangled in a paradox: to denounce the civilizing mission would have required relinquishing their cherished autonomy as New Women who had careers or engaged in public reform efforts. However, accepting the civilizing mission as maternal civilizers actually reinforced conventional notions of what a woman ought to be: a pious, pure, submissive, and domestic True Women. This appears to demonstrate the powerful influence these socially prescribed ideologies maintained in women's lives, even as women broke the bonds of the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, the fact that all these BIA teachers and matrons also challenged both ideologies, often quite passionately, should not be discounted. They did not merely submit to the constraints imposed upon their gender; nor did they unreservedly ascribe to the ethnocentric idea that American Indians ought to conform to white civilization and that they, as women, were naturally equipped for this civilizing work. While their prevailing desire to continue their work teaching and advocating for reform limited the extent of their protestations, each individual woman contested these ideologies as far as her circumstances would allow. Their memoirs therefore provide an important case study of how women contended with dominant ideologies when these social constructions clash with the realities of their personal experiences.

Continuing and expanding the study of BIA teachers and matrons offers abundant opportunities to further investigate these tensions between socially constructed ideologies and individual realities. More work needs to be done in order to generalize the finding of this study and to create a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of white women who worked as BIA teachers and matrons. Supplementing the memoirs included here with other primary sources, such as letters, diaries, and official reports written by women can help illuminate their

stories further. Also, the questions of how these women related to their Indian students demands deeper examination. So too do the experiences of the Indian women and men who worked for the BIA and their interactions with white employees. Additionally, a joint study of BIA teachers and matrons and other turn of the century female reformers in their parallel roles as “civilizers” and “social housekeepers” offers fertile ground for comparison. Nevertheless, this exploration of BIA teacher and matron memoirs provides significant insights into how women accepted, challenged, and even rejected socially prescribed ideologies of the cult of domesticity and the civilizing mission thanks of their experiences living and working on the Indian reservations of the American West.

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