Finding Oneself through a Cause: Elaine Goodale Eastman and Indian Reform in the 1880s

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During the 1830s, women found the abolitionist cause a means to articulate their own demand for equality. A half century later, the Indian Reform Movement offered women of the 1880s a field of action in which to use their talents and abilities when more conventional positions in politics, business, and the professions remained closed to them. In the cause of reform they found work, and in work they often found themselves. Some of the women leaders are relatively well known and have been the subject of scholarly study: Helen Hunt Jackson, Alice Fletcher, Mary Bonney, and Amelia Stone Quinton. The Women's National Indian Association has also received attention. Elaine Goodale Eastman has not heretofore been the subject of equivalent investigation, nor has anyone explored the overall meaning of women's role in the Indian Reform Movement.

of the 1880s, either for its impact upon the reform movement or upon the women themselves.

Yet even a cursory examination of the work of the women involved shows that Indian reform changed their lives. Helen Hunt Jackson secured her literary reputation under the inspiration of Indian reform. After a decade of writing mediocre novels and poems, she published *A Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona* in the last five years of her life. As a result of her work in the reform movement of the 1880s, Alice Fletcher established a distinguished career as an ethnologist. Amelia Stone Quinton, with Mary Bonney, created a life work for herself in organizing church women into volunteer societies to accomplish reform through government and church action. All of these women found a "cause" to which they could give heart, soul, and mind without seeming to threaten the American patriarchy. In this selfless devotion, which seemed appropriately feminine in its ideal of service, they also found a respectable and acceptable way to escape the confines of the role of "gentle lady" to which late-nineteenth-century America had assigned them. They found adventure, purpose, and personal satisfaction in the work they did. In short, they found themselves.

Elaine Goodale Eastman is a case in point. Like the others, she was an easterner who had no previous contact with American Indians before her introduction to the movement. Like Helen Hunt Jackson, she had literary aspirations and found that Indian reform and Indian life gave her a subject to write about. Like Alice Fletcher, she became personally and intimately involved with Indians, incorporating her work into her life. In 1891, she married Dr. Charles Eastman, a Santee Sioux, with whom she lived thirty years and by whom she bore six children. Like Amelia Stone Quinton and Mary Bonney, she was imbued with a "missionary spirit." Although only a nominal church member when she discovered the movement, Eastman felt a "call," first to teach Indians on the reservation, next to champion education and day schools for them, then to dedicate herself to her husband's people, and finally to devote many of her ninety years to writing about them.

Like the others also, Elaine Goodale Eastman became involved in the Indian Reform Movement almost by chance. In 1883, at the age of twenty, she needed a job. Sky Farm, her Berkshire home in Massachusetts, was breaking up because her father, Henry S. Goodale, could no longer earn a living farming the beautiful Mount Washington land. He took a position as an apartment manager in New York City, and his wife, Dora Hill Read, returned to her ancestral home in Redding, Connecticut, with the younger children. As eldest,
In the Indian Reform Movement of the 1880s, Elaine Goodale Eastman found the cause to which she would devote her life.

Elaine Goodale was expected to support herself. Like most young women of her day, she had limited prospects of employment. The job that seemed most appropriate materialized from Samuel Chapman Armstrong’s chance visit to Sky Farm several years earlier. The son of missionaries to Hawaii and a graduate of nearby Williams College, Armstrong had a strong evangelical sense of service to the black race and had commanded black troops during the Civil War. After the war, he persuaded the American Missionary Association to found Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia to...

2. Eleanor Mensel to the Author, 30 Nov. 1987. Eleanor Mensel is Elaine Goodale Eastman’s fourth daughter and fifth child, born in 1901 at Crow Creek, South Dakota. For a good portrait of women’s opportunities in this era, see Louisa May Alcott, Work: A Story of Experience (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), which is a reprint of her 1873 novel. In describing employment possibilities for an uneducated but clever and intelligent young woman, Alcott depicts her heroine, Christie, as a domestic servant, a governess or tutor, a seamstress and laundress, and a paid companion—the primary possibilities open to Elaine Goodale some ten years later.
"lift up" former slaves through education and self-help. He made a powerful impression upon the earnest, serious-minded young Elaine Goodale. He invited her to come to Hampton to teach American Indian students who, in 1878, had been added to the black enrollment.

The missionary overtones of the position appealed to Dora Goodale. She had reared her daughter in the New England tradition of gentility, emphasizing "plain living and high thinking," with frequent admonitions of duty and service, but with pretensions to both aristocratic family background and to learning. She apparently believed that the Hampton job would be less demeaning for Elaine than work as a governess or a paid companion. As Eastman later wrote, "Salaries were nominal and it was whispered that several of the staff had volunteered to serve without compensation," although she was not in that enviable financial position.3

In many ways, Eastman appeared ill-prepared for the work she set out to do at Hampton in October of 1883. She was academically limited, socially inexperienced, and politically innocent. She arrived with little formal education and no teacher training. Growing up in a close family circle, she had spent a happy childhood wandering meadows and woods near her home, poring over Tennyson, Browning, Dickens, Eliot, Hawthorne, Macauley, and Gibbon in the small but select family library, and writing verse with her sister Dora. The precocious pair became known as the "Childhood Poets of the Berkshires" when their youthful efforts were published in several volumes.4 Her mother shunned the local schools and taught her daughters at home, her eldest receiving only two short terms at a New York boarding school to prepare her for college. Although offered a scholarship at Harvard Annex (now Radcliffe), Elaine Goodale could not accept it because the family was too poor. Instead, Hampton Institute became her "college," her "normal school," her "introduction to the world."5

Hampton expanded her social horizons. The young women Eastman met as teachers became her first close friends beyond the fami-
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ly circle. Her chief contacts as a child had been the extended Goodale family in the South Egremont district of Massachusetts and the Read relatives from Connecticut. Shy and awkward with people her own age, although pretty, she described herself at the time as unable to dance, totally uninterested in young men, without small talk. In fact, she was offended by attentions of the opposite sex. She prided herself on her nonconformity in fashion, advocating dress reform against whalebone corsets, high-heeled shoes, and cumbersome skirts.6

At Hampton, Eastman found other young women who were also eager for experience and employment. Teaching was an acceptable activity for young single women of the time. Florence Bascom, a teacher Eastman met in her second year, remained a lifelong friend. She accompanied Eastman on her first trip to Dakota Territory. Another teacher, Laura Tileston, taught with her on the reservation, and she corresponded through the years with yet another, Cora Folsom, who remained at Hampton.7 These young women, like Elaine Goodale, found opportunity in teaching Indians, but Eastman’s involvement would carry her far beyond the classroom when she became a leading champion of Indian education and reservation day schools by the end of the decade.

More surprising in terms of her later involvement in the reform movement, the young Eastman was also politically ignorant and certainly uninformed about the “Indian problem” when she arrived at Hampton. With only loose ties to the local Episcopal church, her highly literate family exhibited none of the moral and missionary zeal infusing so many Protestant bodies of the time and evidenced no political activity. She knew nothing of the “assimilationist” enthusiasm that engaged the attentions of so many of her female contemporaries of Boston and Philadelphia in the early eighties. While they were hastening to “save the red man,” Eastman still dreamed of writing memorable poetry.

In 1883 when Eastman came on board, the reform movement was already under full sail. In the decade and a half that followed the Civil War, the unspent moral force of evangelical Christian reform had begun to focus upon the Indian. For a century, the American Indian had been regarded as a savage enemy to be driven off the land by political and military means. Now, leaders who identified Christianity with American citizenship perceived the Indian as a sub-

6. Ibid., pp. 176-77; Eastman, Sister to the Sioux, pp. 13-14.
7. Eastman, Sister to the Sioux, pp. 18, 24, 31. Eastman named her fifth daughter after Florence Bascom and used the older woman as the model for the character Marcia in the novel Hundred Maples (Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Daye Press, 1935).
jugated creature suffering from injustice. Having freed their black brothers, they now turned their righteous indignation on a corrupt Indian Office, government failure to fulfill its treaty obligations of annuities and schools, greedy Indian agents, and wanton killing or forced removal of Indians. Of course, the first leaders to oppose such conditions were men, and their primary means of correcting abuses came through political, military, or administrative policy—such as the Board of Indian Commissioners established under Ulysses S. Grant's Peace Policy. Women neither voted nor held office and could play little part in this activity.

Gradually, male reform leaders concluded that even the reservations would have to go. The only way to solve the Indian problem, they believed, was to absorb Indians into American society. They would no longer be killed, removed, or isolated—they would be “civilized” and assimilated. This solution required education in white culture, Christianization, independent landownership, and citizenship. The issue now moved from the strictly political arena to the popular press because public opinion and the Congress had to be persuaded that this more “charitable” policy would work. Indian reform became a “cause,” a movement, and women, no longer excluded from the debate, promptly enlisted their emotions and energies in it. They could participate in “civilizing” the Indian through their own efforts and projects. Activity appeared to erupt spontaneously and almost simultaneously at several focal points.

One focal point was Boston. The catalyst for this center was the lecture in 1879 by Chief Standing Bear of the Poncas with Susette La Flesche (“Bright Eyes”) of the Omahas acting as translator and her brother Francis as chaperon. Sponsored by Thomas Tibbles, assistant editor of the Omaha Daily Herald and eventually the husband of Susette La Flesche, the lecture followed considerable press coverage of the removal of the Poncas from Nebraska to Oklahoma. The young woman who related the story of the Poncas’ desperate attempt to return to their Nebraska home electrified the leading citizens of Boston and Cambridge. They promptly formed the Boston Indian Citizenship Committee to advocate change in government policy on the Indians’ behalf. Included in the membership were the mayor of Boston, the governor of Massachusetts, and politicians.

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with strong ties to Sen. Henry Dawes, whose name would be attached to the act of 1887 that gave legislative reality to the reformers' ideas.  

More significantly, the Standing Bear/La Flesche lectures had a powerful impact upon the women of Boston and Cambridge as well. Indian reform became a popular cause in which they could participate. Alice Fletcher, already doing archaeological work for Peabody Museum at Harvard, was completely won over to the Ponca/Omaha point of view and began a lifelong friendship with the La Flesche family. With them, she arranged to camp among the Sioux for the purpose of scientific study of the culture—an unprecedented act for a woman. She quickly became a champion of Indian reform and in a few years was appointed the allotment agent who distributed tribal land to individual owners among the Omahas and Winnebagos in Nebraska. A recognized authority on Indian reform, she is credited with being the real force behind passage of the Dawes Act in 1887. Although she later changed her views on cultural assimilation, she remained active in Indian work all her life, gaining distinction as an ethnologist.  

The influence of the lectures of Chief Standing Bear and Bright Eyes did not stop with Fletcher but extended to other women, notably Helen Hunt Jackson. Already an established writer of poetry and novels, Jackson had never before taken an interest in causes. In fact, she was suffering from depression and lassitude, but passion for the Indian cause revived her spirits. She now took to heart the plight of the Poncas with a vigor and vitality that astonished her friends. "I think I feel as you must have felt in the old abolition days," she wrote her friend Moncure Conway. Turning first to research, after several months' work she published *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), cataloging the nation's poor compliance with its treaties with Indians. Her own interests eventually focused upon the Mission Indians of California and resulted in her novel *Ramona* in 1884. The critical acceptance and popularity of these two works put her in the forefront of the champions of Indian reform. Jackson proved

9. Don Hickey, "The Trial of Chief Standing Bear," in *Glimpses of Nebraska's Past* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming); Valerie Sherer Maltese, "Helen Hunt Jackson and the Campaign for Ponca Restitution, 1880-1881," *South Dakota History* 17 (Spring 1987): 29-30. Brig. Gen. George Crook, commander of the Department of the Platte, who had been uncomfortable with the order to return Standing Bear and accompanying tribal members to Oklahoma Territory, had encouraged Tobbies to pursue the injustice.


that even if women could not vote, they could write and influence political leaders. Some critics even compare the widely read and filmed *Ramona* with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its effect on popular opinion.12

In the early 1880s, another stimulus to women's interest in Indians arrived in Boston with the lectures of Sarah Winnemucca, colorful daughter of a Paiute chief. Enlisting the aid of such distinguished New England women as Elizabeth Peabody and Mary Peabody Mann, Winnemucca published her story in *Life among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* in 1883. Peabody herself joined the fray when she published *Sarah Winnemucca's Practical Solution of the Indian Problem* in 1886. She described Winnemucca's California school and the efforts at self-help and self-determination that the Indian woman encouraged.13 These endeavors, along with those of Fletcher and Jackson, give strong evidence of the appeal the Indian cause held for New England women, a cause that led them to express their outrage and attempt to influence public opinion.

Meanwhile, another center of reform activity emerged in Philadelphia, growing from the missionary interests of women's church groups. These organizations provided activities in which wealthy, educated women could respectfully engage without challenging nineteenth-century gender prohibitions. Some of these groups, such as the Indians' Hope of Philadelphia, focused upon Indians, sending money and boxes of clothing and materials to the reservations. Among the Episcopalians, these activities aided Bishop William H. Hare's missionary efforts among the Dakota. A prominent leader among Episcopal women was Mary Welsh, wife of wealthy Philadelphia philanthropist William Welsh who was a member of President Grant's Board of Indian Commissioners. She shared her husband's religious concerns and traveled with him to Indian reservations. The Welsches established the Bishop Potter Memorial House in Philadelphia as a training school for women workers in the Episcopal church. Seven of its graduates served among the Dakotas with Bishop Hare in the Niobrara Diocese in the 1870s.14

12. Ibid., pp. 142, 150-57; *Notable American Women*, s.v. "Jackson, Helen Maria Fiske Hunt."


Bishop Potter's School was short-lived, however, and the Episcopal church's overall effort was small compared to the activity of the Women's National Indian Association, which grew out of a Philadelphia Baptist church missionary circle in 1879. Strongly evangelical in spirit and led by Mary Bonney and Amelia Stone Quinton, this organization ultimately involved hundreds of women in eastern and midwestern cities and small towns. The original purpose of the group was to arouse the nation to injustice and to petition Congress for reform. In 1882, they presented a petition with one hundred thousand names to Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts, calling for the Indian reform goals of education, citizenship, and allotment of tribal lands. However, the women soon found their energies directed toward more traditional female activities. They raised money to build libraries and houses and to support teachers of cooking, housekeeping, hygiene, and child care on reservations. They devoted much attention to Indian women, and they had a strong sense of Christian mission. According to Quinton, Christianity was unparalleled as a civilizer, providing "radical and speedy" results. Indian reform became her life work, and she remained president of the group until well into the twentieth century.

In Philadelphia, the women's political efforts were overtaken by the more professional Indian Rights Association, established in 1882. Under the direction of Herbert Welsh, a leading proponent of Indian reform, the new organization soon dwarfed the others. Like his uncle William Welsh, Herbert Welsh traveled to the Great Sioux Reservation, where he found the missionary work of Bishop Hare impressive. He concluded that the answer to the Indian problem was civilizing the Indian through a more efficient, less corrupt Indian Service. To this end, the Indian Rights Association vigorously sought information about the reservation, published papers and articles supporting their point of view, and lobbied Congress for specific legislation. Their activities were traditionally masculine in attempting to influence policies of government and church, leaving much of the teaching and missionary work to the women.

A third center of activity, the one that drew Elaine Goodale into the reform movement, arose at Hampton Institute in 1878, when


16. Quoted in Wanken, " 'Woman's Sphere' and Indian Reform;," p. 260.

Capt. Richard H. Pratt brought seventeen Indians who had been under his care as prisoners at Saint Augustine, Florida, to the school for training. Defeated in the Southern Plains War of 1875, the men under Pratt's charge had rejected their native way of life. They cut their hair, adopted military dress, worked in the community without guards, and began to learn English from some volunteer women teachers (including Harriet Beecher Stowe). Ready to leave the prison in 1878, some elected to continue their education, and Pratt sent a plea to agricultural and industrial schools to accept them. When Hampton's director responded favorably, Pratt recruited some additional students from the Great Sioux Reservation, and the school's Indian Department was born. Captain Pratt, however, sought larger fields of action, and in 1879 he persuaded the government to let him convert Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania into Carlisle Indian School, most notable of the Indian schools founded in these years. Education, particularly Christian and industrial or vocational education, was a primary tenet of the reform movement, and both Hampton's Armstrong and Pratt were leading proponents of it.18

Beginning in 1883, the leaders of all these groups advocating Indian reform gathered together and acted with greater unity through the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian. Albert K. Smiley, a Quaker member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, hosted these annual October meetings, inviting humanitarian, religious, political, and educational leaders to his resort near New Paltz, New York. Participants gave speeches, debated policy, and proposed resolutions, but they also exchanged ideas and got to know one another through these annual gatherings.19 Women reformers and missionaries also participated in this powerful forum for those concerned with the Indian problem. As Smiley said at the 1885 conference, "My aim has been to unite the best minds interested in Indian affairs, so that all should act together and be in harmony, and so that the prominent persons connected with Indian affairs should act as one body and create public sentiment in favor of the Indians."20

Eastman was unaware of this fervor when she set out to teach American Indians at Hampton in October of 1883, nor was she ac-
quainted with any of the leaders in the reform movement except Samuel Chapman Armstrong, who had hired her. Nonetheless, in the ensuing eight years, she became an important figure in the movement, familiar with most of the participants, and a leading spokesperson for some of its main ideas. Like other women of the decade, she found a cause to which she could give her heart, mind, and energy. More important, she found a field of action in which she could venture forth into new experiences and in which she could exercise her talents: teaching, advocating, administering, and, above all, writing. In finding a subject to write about for the rest of her ninety years, she found herself.

Eastman began her career as a teacher—that gateway to independence for so many nineteenth-century young women. She met her first Indians in the “adult primary” class at Hampton. Most of her students were older and bigger than she was—grown men who struggled to learn a “new language, new conventions, new social attitudes,” as well as the basic subject of geography that she was teaching. Hampton was modeled on a work and self-help plan. Half of the students’ time was spent in work (blacksmithing, bricklaying, carpentry, farming) and half in learning basic curriculum in the


*At the converted Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania, American Indians received both Christian and vocational training.*
classroom. The young women learned to cook and sew and were responsible for cleaning and laundry in their half day of work. The girls lived in Winona Lodge, the boys in the Wigwam, with a few married couples occupying six cottages on the campus. The roughly one hundred thirty Indian students had only minimal contact with over five hundred black students, but Hampton's black graduates sometimes acted as supervisors of the Indian students. In fact, Booker T. Washington, who did so much to make the school famous, acted as a "house father" for early classes of Indian men. Although the students came from many tribes, the largest number were Sioux from Yankton, Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock agencies.

Eastman did not quail before this pedagogical challenge. Believing that she benefited from having had no teacher training, she freely used her own ideas and approaches. She had no doubt of the superiority of the white culture she was imparting and referred to her students as "children." Yet she clearly enjoyed her work. Her first report in Southern Workman, Hampton's school paper, was not the usual factual account of student progress that other teachers produced. Instead, Eastman used dialogue and concrete detail, even a touch of humor, to bring her classroom to life for the reader. She recounted a student's comment upon a long, stilted sentence in the geography text: "Too much big words out of natural order." She told of another student who, when the students were asked to play the part of people from other cultures such as France, Germany, or China, chose to be an "Indian Savage" who could not speak English.

In her second year, Eastman taught natural history and botany, striving to "correct crude or false notions of animal and plant life and to encourage habits of exact observation" rather than to teach systematic nomenclature. Eastman totally rejected as superstition the sense of relationship that the Indian had with the natural world. She found their stubborn clinging to such "absurdities" exasperating, commenting on their total ignorance and lack of interest in such things as the respiratory systems of animals. Obviously, her scientific view of the natural world must have seemed equally incom-

22. [Helen W. Ludlow], Ten Years' Work for Indians at Hampton, 1878-1888 (Hampton, Va.: Hampton Institute, 1888), pp. 11-15; Paulette Fairbanks Molin, "Training the Hand, the Head, and the Heart: Indian Education at Hampton Institute," Minnesota History 51 (Fall 1988): 86.
25. Southern Workman, June 1885, p. 70.
prehensible to Indians who saw animals as their relatives. Like most of her contemporaries, Eastman did not understand this divergence in viewpoints concerning the natural world.

Although Eastman would continue to teach for several years, her career quickly took a welcome new direction during her second year. Armstrong recognized her literary talent and encouraged her to use it defending the cause of educating the “savage,” which many Americans believed was a futile waste of money. Within a year, she published an article in the *Independent*, stressing the practical work ethic of Hampton’s program as well as its emphasis upon Christian and American behavior for its students, who spoke English, wore “civilized” dress, and imitated the modesty and decorum of their white teachers. Although she extolled the virtues of Hampton, Eastman also defended the potential of her students and the enormous progress toward Americanization that she believed they made at Hampton. She quoted an Indian student who maintained that there were savages of all colors and that in Dakota Territory one might be more afraid of white savages than red ones.

In December 1884, Armstrong appointed Eastman editor of the new Indian Department of Hampton’s *Southern Workman*. His action reflected the growing importance of the Indian issue in the public mind. Not only did this appointment permit Eastman to exercise her literary talents regularly, but it also gave her much more contact with the leaders and issues of the movement. Alice Fletcher, Amelia Quinton, and Herbert Welsh were all listed on the *Workman’s* masthead as regular contributors. Under Eastman’s direction, the department and paper took on a more interesting format and a livelier content. She reported on scenes of Indian life at Hampton, news of the Women’s National Indian Movement and other friends of the Indians, issues before Congress, visitors to Hampton, and reviews of important books related to the reform movement.

In February 1885, the new editor reviewed Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona*, the romantic novel set among the Mission Indians of California that had been published the previous year. Eastman enjoyed the romance of the story but believed it really did not present “the Indian problem” adequately. Eastman claimed that the poverty of the Indian was made almost too picturesque. Moreover, they were, she observed, “dragged through a series of persecutions,

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26. Elaine Goodale, “Indian Life and Growth at Hampton,” *Independent* 37 (11 June 1885): 742. The *Independent* was a literary weekly published in Boston and New York from 1848 to 1928. It frequently featured essays on social issues such as abolition, Indian reform, and woman suffrage.
without the shadow of justice or excuse. Nearly every American who comes in contact with them is brutal, sensual, or mercenary.” While this portrayal was too harsh and condemning a picture to be persuasive to Eastman at this point in her life, she admired Jackson’s skill in dramatizing the Indian’s ability to express himself without words—to speak as the trees, rocks, and flowers spoke.27

Because Jackson was a well-known author, she appealed to Eastman more powerfully than any of the other reformers the editor met. Jackson was a poet who had bent her talent to a cause. With literary aspirations of her own, Eastman felt a special identity with the older woman. Could she herself do less? The October 1885 issue of Southern Workman carried a tribute to Jackson following the author’s death in August. We can assume that editor Eastman wrote the piece, although it carries no byline, because it states so clearly the goal that Eastman might have set for herself. The article writer admires Jackson, who through her art “made the Indian cause the cause of humanity.” The concluding paragraph described the future that Eastman seemed to be envisioning as her own: “Every life has its lesson. The lesson of Helen Hunt Jackson’s is that art may be obedient to the high demands of conscience, and still be art.” The article also quoted the author of Ramona as saying that before one attempted to write such a novel, one ought to spend ten years living with the Indians.28 Given Eastman’s subsequent career, it may well have been Jackson’s life and work that suggested the young editor’s course of action.

At the time of Jackson’s death, Eastman had not yet discovered a particular issue in the whole panoply of Indian reform to which she could give her particular allegiance, nor had she developed a precise plan of how she might serve the movement. Although she had embraced the goals of reform, she was irresistibly attracted to the native culture that she saw romantically described in Jackson’s work and that she had glimmers of from her students at Hampton. She longed for more immediate firsthand knowledge and confided to Armstrong her desire to travel to the homeland of so many of her students.29 She had begun to study the Dakota language and perhaps already considered using the teaching profession as her

28. Ibid., Oct. 1885, p. 105. Eastman’s fascination with Helen Hunt Jackson continued throughout her life. Over forty years later, she attempted a biography of the writer that she called “Spinner in the Sun.” A sketch from this work, called “Author of Ramona” and possibly published in the Delineator in 1930, is among her papers in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, Northampton, Mass.
29. Eastman, Sister to the Sioux, p. 23, and “All the Days of My Life,” pp. 177-78.
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passport to the reservation, but both formulation of her ideas and her “calling” lay in the future.

Armstrong was a genuine mentor. Not only had he provided this budding reformer with an opportunity to write, but he also encouraged her to meet other reformers. She met Fletcher when the latter visited Hampton, and she knew of the work of the Women’s National Indian Association through editing the Workman. Armstrong introduced her to the most aggressively assimilationist leader of the movement when he escorted her to an Anniversary Day at Carlisle School in Pennsylvania, where she met its founder—Capt. Richard H. Pratt. Like Armstrong, this brusque, outspoken advocate of enforced assimilation had served in the Civil War, but he was far more military in bearing and point of view than the mild-mannered Armstrong. He was an outspoken champion of eastern boarding schools as the most effective way of Americanizing the Indian. He told a Baptist convention in 1883, “In Indian civilization I am a Baptist, because I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked.”

He practiced this philosophy at Carlisle Indian School.

At the time, Eastman was not drawn to his military style of leadership, preferring Armstrong’s idealism and kindness. Yet she admired Pratt’s strength of purpose, energy, and steadfastness. When she wrote about him for the Indian Rights Association, she called him “uncompromising.” He believed that eastern boarding schools like Carlisle were the only way to civilize the Indian. He demanded citizenship for Indians, and to that end he opposed reservation schools, missionary support of tribal customs and language, and even permitting Indian students to return to their homes during the summer months. He insisted upon the use of English, uniforms, military drill, industrial training, and Christian ideals and morality.

Eastman considered his program to be somewhat impractical even though she respected Pratt’s confidence in his own vision. She wrote: “Captain Pratt and Carlisle School . . . are . . . important factors in [solving] the Indian problem. Carlisle is not the solution of the problem, it is giving valuable aid toward its solution. Carlisle would not be Carlisle without its great-hearted leader. May he long be spared to contradict the friends who persist in admiring him.

and to make much good work possible by eloquently insisting upon glorious impossibilities."32

Eastman would soon find herself in opposition to Pratt on the issue of reservation day schools, but before she could champion her own beliefs, she had to experience Indian culture for herself. Armstrong responded to her request to visit the Great Sioux Reservation by arranging for her to travel there with her friend Florence Bascom. Armstrong even suggested that she finance her trip by sending back accounts of it to the eastern papers. Thus, two years after she had arrived at Hampton, Eastman was on her way to Dakota Territory with a subject to write about and a potential market for her work. Whatever else she would do in Indian reform in the following years, she would find a way of expressing it on paper. Eastman’s trip was no ordinary tour of Dakota Territory. Accompanying her to

32. Elaine Goodale, Captain Pratt and His Work for Indian Education (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1886), pp. 6-8. Eastman maintained a long friendship with Pratt and his family despite their differences of opinion. Both she and her husband worked at Carlisle in 1899, and in 1935 she published a biography of him, Pratt, the Red Man’s Moses, which was one of her major works.
the reservation was Herbert Welsh, who went to persuade the Sioux to accept the 1885 Dawes bill for distribution of their land. The travelers also attended meetings in Pierre with white leaders of the territory and were present at a Crow Creek convocation of native clergy and laity of the Episcopal church under the direction of Bishop Hare. Bascom and Eastman listened to Welsh make his plea for the allotment bill before both white and Indian audiences and spent six autumn weeks visiting the Lower Brule, Standing Rock, Cheyenne, Rosebud, and Pine Ridge agencies, journeying by steamboat, buggy, lumber wagon, and horseback, often camping along the way.

Vivid, colorful accounts of the trip flowed from Eastman's pen for articles that appeared in the Boston Weekly Advertiser, the Boston Journal, the Hartford Courant, the New York Tribune, the New York Evening Post, and, of course, the Southern Workman. She had at last begun the work that she would continue to do well the rest of her life—reporting what she observed and experienced. Like a seasoned journalist, she described with great clarity the meeting at Crow Creek and Welsh's explanation of the Dawes bill. This proposed act of Congress would open about eleven million acres of the Great Sioux Reservation to white settlement in return for cattle for the Indians and money held in trust by the federal government. According to the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, three-fourths of the male population of the reservation had to agree to its provisions for the bill to become law. Although Eastman claimed that the council that she attended studied the issue from two points of view, no doubt existed in her mind that white culture was superior and would ultimately dominate. The red man would become an individual landowner, a citizen, and eventually be assimilated into white culture—a far preferable destiny in her estimation to his inevitable destruction if he resisted the westward movement of sixty million people that "can perhaps be guided, but not finally checked." The friends of the Indian, she argued, supported the Dawes bill as "the best practical compromise" for the Indian. Herbert Welsh and others fought against the Indians' destruction, using "white man's brain and hands" and seeing "with white man's eyes the needs of the Indian." In other words, the white man knew best.

Eastman did not see, any more than most of her contemporaries did, the damage that the cultural genocide implicit in such a course

of action could inflict upon a people. She believed enforced assimilation would save the Indian from physical destruction. She did not anticipate that destruction of their culture might be equally devastating to them. Unlike some reformers, Eastman felt drawn to the culture she advocated abolishing, and she was not totally contemptuous of those who favored a more moderate approach in bringing the Indian into American life. She admired the white missionary clergy who supported the Indians in hesitating to surrender their land, and who, like Bishop Hare, wanted the Indians to get the best deal possible, even to money payments rather than rations. "It is unfortunate," she wrote, "that our somewhat dogmatic Eastern friends are able to air their views in the newspapers and elsewhere, while the missionaries and the agents toil hard and say little. If we boast a broader outlook, we cannot deny them an infinitely greater experience." Even though she aligned herself with those advocating enforced assimilation, the Indian culture appealed strongly to her, arousing her sympathy for the people.

Eastman saved her greatest admiration for the Indians, recognizing the tragic quality of their dilemma. She recounted the long evening council where she listened to speech after speech from the assembled chiefs and was so entranced by their "musical tongue and native eloquence" that she forgot the lateness of the hour. The drama of the unequal contest between reservation Indians and white leaders did not escape her: "How onesided is this great dramatic struggle; how helpless and yet how proud; how ignorant, yet how profound; deceived, but always knowing it; outdone, but never confessing it; poverty stricken amid great possessions,—the unfortunate, the superb red man!"

Eastman also detected the aggressive expansionism of white settlers in Dakota Territory during the boom of the 1880s, an expansionism that was, in fact, the chief threat to the Indian way of life. While visiting Pierre, she was impressed with the bustle and prosperity of this little town on the Missouri River that boasted a railroad terminus, a new streetcar, a great hotel with a stately dining room and good food, a Presbyterian College with twenty-five students, and pleasant homes—all created by frontiersmen whose pluck, daring, and enterprise she admired. She realized that Pierre citizens were eager for the vast reservation lands across the river to be opened for passage to the Black Hills, but she claimed that they were fair and reasonable in their statements during a meeting with

35. Ibid., p. 118.
36. Ibid.
Elaine Goodale Eastman

Welsh over the Dawes bill. She contrasted the two ways of life taking place on opposite sides of the river. "On the east bank," she noted, lived "the sharp, practical, selfish, intense, money-making, speculating, aggressive American; on the west, the reluctant, inert, proud, dependent, helpless, irresistible Indian. On this side flaunts the crude, attractive, ambitious little city, on the other lie the vast, barren, lovely, useless solitudes."  

Above all, Eastman was captivated by the native life on the plains. She described the beauty of the autumn sunset when they camped in a lovely hollow along the Grand River, where water and a fire appeared "as if by magic," and "the beautiful and convenient Dakota lodge [rose] complete in the wilderness, its little nest of pole ends projecting from the top... rugs and buffalo robes within carpet[ing] the soft grass... and in the course of an hour or so we [were] all reclining on our rugs in Oriental ease, supping [on potatoes, steak, and coffee] with keenest zest in the drowsy warmth of our lodge. ... nothing could be more comfortable."  

Eastman had loved the outdoors since her childhood in the Berkshires, an


For Eastman, the prosperous 1880s town of Pierre symbolized the progressive forces that would soon overtake the Indian way of life.
enthusiasm that continued all of her life. She considered Indians experts at outdoor living and delighted in their primitive arrangements. She saw both beauty and desolation in the sweep of plain and prairies severed by the great, muddy Missouri River. "The sparsely wooded bottoms were gay with goldenrod and the coral-fruited buffaloberry," she wrote. "The high, rolling bluffs, lovely to look upon in certain lights when they took on melting tones of violet and rose, stood out upon a nearer view as barren sand dunes."39

Admiring as she was of the Indian in his natural environment, Eastman's views were inconsistent, making them characteristic, perhaps, of American attitudes toward the Indian. While she was critical of the ration system that forced the Indians to leave home or farm to come into the agency to collect rations, when she reached the western-most agency—Pine Ridge and the Oglalas—she still came down unequivocally on the side of reform. She greatly praised Agent Valentine McGillicuddy who had organized an Indian police force and who, she believed, ran the agency legally, fairly, efficiently, and firmly. He had the support of the "progressive" Indians—those willing to accept the white man's way in "the church, the school, the plough." The others, traditionalists who clung tenaciously to Indian dances, dress, and customs, rallied around old Chief Red Cloud in their defense of "barbarism." They were "malcontents," "chronic grumblers," "lazy Indians," "coffee-coolers."40 She even reported McGillicuddy's belief that the beef rations should be cut. "The Indian is naturally a carnivorous animal," she wrote, "and it is civilizing to give him a greater proportion of vegetable food."41

At the conclusion of her journey, Eastman wrote an essay called "Does Civilization Civilize." The essay summarized ideas she had expressed in earlier dispatches, but it also pointed clearly toward the future—her future. She concluded that civilization could indeed come to the reservation, to the masses, as effectively as it could come to individual Indians who were immersed in eastern American culture at Carlisle and Hampton. At every agency on the reservation, hundreds of Indians were making progress, she said, and life there "was not wholly savage or inert." The progressive movement among the people was "already strong and abundantly hopeful." However, the chief vehicle for insuring continued reservation progress, she claimed, was the reservation day school: "The day school

in the Indian village is, to my mind, the most important and the most neglected point in the whole field.**

While Pratt and others argued for eastern boarding schools that totally removed the Indian from his native environment, others believed that the day school on the reservation was a cheaper way to bring basic education to the whole culture, although such schools had not been notably successful up to that time. Although they were usually government run and funded, many church missions also ran day schools as well as reservation boarding schools. Staffing the government facilities was a struggle. Schools had been promised in the Treaty of 1868 but did not easily materialize. The White River Camp School, which Eastman spotted on her tour of the Lower Brule, had never been occupied. It was this school that she proposed to the commissioner of Indian affairs, John D. Atkins, that she take over and make into a model reservation day school.**

Eastman had found her "cause." She became a champion of reservation day schools. She recognized their weaknesses but believed they could be overcome with good teaching and administration. Because reservation day schools did not seem to operate perfectly, people believed there should be no more of them. Eastman argued that the operation of the schools suffered from a lack of system. The program had no overall supervision; no communication existed among the isolated schools; and the teachers did not receive enough assistance from anywhere. Possibly she already envisioned the role of supervisor to reservation schools, a position she herself would create three years later. She saw particularly the influence the local school could have on the whole Indian community—not just upon the children enrolled in the classroom. The day school, she argued, is the community's "object lesson in civilization," where the "neatly kept rooms, the neatly dressed teacher, the regular hours, [and] countless details are seen and studied and more or less unconsciously imitated." In keeping with this idea, Eastman suggested: "The school children ought to be the best dressed and the best fed as well as the best behaved children in the village. To this end, soap and water should always be provided in a warm and convenient place. . . . The women of the village ought regularly to meet and sew for them with materials furnished by the agent. . . . The lunch of coffee and hardtack which is usually given at noon should be prepared and served by the children themselves. . . . There ought to be regular sewing classes and other simple industrial training."**

42. Ibid., p. 130.
43. Eastman, Sister to the Sioux, pp. 25, 30-31.
44. Goodale, "Does Civilization Civilize," p. 130.
Eastman took her message to an even wider audience, joining other reformers at the Lake Mohonk Conference of October 1886 to speak in favor of day schools. Here she noted the opposition to such schools in Congress and elsewhere. Attendance of students was irregular, opponents argued, compared to the boarding schools where pupils could be much more closely supervised. Eastman responded that she did not believe Indian children were any more loathe to attend school than children anywhere. Pressure could be exerted to compel attendance, she asserted, mentioning McGillicuddy’s practice of withholding rations from families whose children did not attend. A second argument against day schools contended that the Indian home exerted too powerful an influence on children and that they had to be removed from that environment in order to get them to accept white culture. Eastman countered that the influence went two ways. Teachers influenced the community as well: “We must believe that good is to conquer and crush out evil. As far as my small experience goes I think the evil in an Indian camp
is negative rather than positive. The influence teachers find seems to be that of ignorance and superstition and lack of anything better than hostility to good ideas. The third objection to day schools centered on their lack of industrial training. Eastman countered that household training for girls and gardening and other kinds of work for boys could supply the need.

Notably absent in her arguments are any pleas based on nurture or caring for the child’s security and emotional stability by keeping him close to home—arguments that would be common today. Eastman did not have the advantage of modern psychology and child development, but she must have sensed in her reference to the whole community that a child’s educational welfare involved more than the individual child. The arguments she used in favor of day schools are always practical ones; yet, she appeared to practice and believe that educating a child close to home could, in fact, “uplift” and preserve the family. She clearly envisaged a family-centered approach to education. That, of course, characterized her own educational background.

Ideology, however, was not the most important development in Eastman’s life following her journey to Indian country in 1885. She had received a call, “a clear call to the heart of an ardent young girl—a call which she then and there silently promised herself to answer.” At Medicine Bull’s White River Camp near the Lower Brule agency, she had found an abandoned school. Late in the autumn of 1886, she returned to that spot to open a day school to teach Indian children on the reservation. Eastman’s use of the word “call” as well as the modest stipend of six hundred dollars that she received proclaimed her sense of missionary dedication to the work. Such feeling was common among the reformers, particularly women like Helen Hunt Jackson, Alice Fletcher, and Amelia Quinton. The female gender both before and since that time has often identified with the poor, the helpless, and the outcast, and the Christian church has long encouraged women’s systematic charitable efforts on behalf of such unfortunates. Sentiment of this type activated the work of religious bodies such as the Women’s National Indian Association. Young women’s missionary work had society’s seal of approval. Thus, when Eastman’s colleague from Hampton, Laura

45. Quoted in Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference, reprinted in Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1886, p. 48. Eastman’s viewpoint on Indian day schools prevailed after the turn of the century under Indian Commissioner Francis Leupp. Hoxie, Final Promise, pp. 201-2.
Tileston, was unable to get a teacher's appointment from the Indian commissioner, Bishop Hare appointed her as a "lady missionary" to do the teaching with Eastman.\(^{47}\) The missionary character of the project clarifies Eastman's motivations and actions. For most young women of her generation, career choices were extremely limited, but, like Eastman, many had to earn a living. She needed money so badly that she wrote to Herbert Welsh in the summer of 1886 for help in financing her trip to the West. He secured her a reduced rate on a railroad ticket.\(^{48}\) Had she been a poor young man in the 1880s, she could have sought both adventure and fortune in any number of business activities: railroading, mining, manufacturing, lumbering, even ranching and homesteading. This was the age of the robber baron, the self-made man, the rags-to-riches Horatio Alger hero that any ambitious, energetic young man might aspire to become. Young women had no such options. Wealth was not even a considered goal for the female sex, except through a "brilliant" marriage. Earnest, educated young women might pursue service to others, particularly as an extension of their nurturing female role, such as teaching and nursing, but they were not expected to work primarily for financial reward nor to sacrifice their gentility or the protection of a patriarchal male in order to earn a living. Eastman's mother may have based her objection to her daughter's plan to go west to teach Indians on the latter grounds, but "neither she nor any one else proposed a satisfying alternative."\(^{49}\)

Later in life, Eastman reflected upon this dilemma of her youth. Having begun to establish herself as a writer through her accounts of reservation life the previous year, she wondered why no one en-

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47. Ibid., p. 31. Other well-known names that might be mentioned in the missionary/teaching field of Dakota are Mary C. Collins, teacher at Oahe Mission for Rev. Thomas Riggs from 1875 to 1885 and teacher/pastor among the Sioux at Standing Rock; and Corabelle Fellows (Blue Star), teacher at Oahe, Cheyenne Agency, and Cut Meat Creek during these same years. See Richmond L. Clow, ed., "Autobiography of Mary C. Collins, Missionary to the Western Sioux," South Dakota Historical Collections 41 (1982): 1-66, and Kunigunde Duncan, Blue Star: Told from the Life of Corabelle Fellows (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940). Many women were also missionaries in the foreign field, serving in such places as India, China, Africa, Persia, and Ceylon. According to Rev. Augustus R. Buckland in Women in the Mission Field: Pioneers and Martyrs (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1895), p. 10, "The women missionaries are now hundreds where, not so long ago, they were but units or tens."


couraged her to become a professional journalist. "I sometimes wonder," she wrote, "that no effort was made to launch me upon the journalistic or purely literary career for which I had shown most fitness and which would seem to offer so much more of congenial association and tangible reward than the obscure and ill-paid pioneer work which I, in fact, undertook at this point."

Even though newspaper reporting provided adventure and fortune for young men like Samuel Clemens, Bret Harte, and Stephen Crane, the profession was not a conventional one for a well-bred young woman. Missionary teaching, on the other hand, was a natural, representing service, self-sacrifice, and nurturing but also promising adventure. Eastman could satisfy her longing for new experience in a quite acceptable way. "Few . . . would care," she noted, "to blaze a new trail in the obscure corner of a wild land, among recent 'enemies' speaking an unintelligible dialect. Behind such considerations lurked, no doubt, a taste for adventure and a distinct bent toward pioneering, possibly handed down through a long line of early American forebears."

Fueled by her dedication to Indian education, Eastman's pioneer spirit led her to a "straggling collection of one-room log huts . . . [on] the grassy terraces above the junction" of the White and Missouri rivers. Here Eastman established a model day school. Following her own earlier recommendations, she and Tileston introduced industrial training, invited the community to participate in school activities, and made the school an "object lesson" in white culture. In the course of her three years at the White River school, she introduced sewing and cooking classes for the girls, who not only made their own dresses but sewed some clothing for their male classmates. They cooked lunch, and Eastman took pride in the vegetables the boys had raised in the garden to add to the diet of hardtack and coffee. The boys also learned carpentry when a returning Hampton student was added to the staff. The young women provided entertainments and social life for the community as well. Eastman found the conduct of the children "exemplary" and claimed that by the second year every child over six in the neighborhood attended school at least part of the time. "They can all write well," she wrote, "sing a little, draw a little, talk a little, and understand a good deal."

50. Ibid.
51. Eastman, Sister to the Sioux, p. 29.
52. Ibid., p. 25.
Others soon recognized the young women’s work. William Anderson, the Indian agent for the Lower Brule, described them as showing “indomitable pluck, energy, and perseverance, . . . not only by educating the children and advancing them in a remarkable manner, but exercising a most wholesome influence over the whole camp.”

Herbert Welsh also gave them high marks when he returned from the reservation in 1887. “They had begun work at a place most unfavorable for such an enterprise,” he noted, “and where all previous efforts in the same direction had failed. . . . Truly the change which a half year’s work of two earnest young women had wrought in this once desolate place was magical. Their tiny dwell-

![Image](image_url)

"Eastman attempted to make the White River School (the third building from the left) a model of white culture. She spent three years at the isolated White River Camp, whose buildings straggled along the plateau at the junction of the White and Missouri rivers."

...ing house, while built in the most economical manner possible, . . . was most picturesque and attractive. It was strong faith in the Indian and a spirit of deep devotion to the work of God and the cause of humanity that led these ladies to build their lonely cabin in the White River Camp.”

Much of Eastman's energy in the last third of the 1880s went into championing reservation day schools. She continued to teach at White River Camp until the summer of 1889, but she devoted more time to advocacy. In January of 1887, she wrote a long letter to Albert Smiley, urging the Lake Mohonk Conference to "push" the day school idea in Congress and asking for participants' support in getting larger appropriations. She maintained that the day school should be the "great civilizing center" of the reservation, with appointment of competent teachers (preferably two for each school), erection of better and larger buildings to include facilities for industrial training, and more money for supplies. Claiming that the per-capita sum to educate the Indian child would still be only half that required in a boarding school, she maintained that the day school would be just as effective in achieving assimilation. In addition to such writing campaigns, Eastman also spent most of the summers of 1887 and 1888 back in New England speaking of her experience and ideas to Women's National Indian Association and other church and Indian support groups. She charged twenty-five dollars plus expenses for these talks because, as she told Welsh, she had to live.56

By the fall of 1889, she sought greater responsibility. So clearly formulated were her ideas on the needs of the Indian day school that she sought the position of supervisor of Indian education among the Sioux, a position she had envisioned three years earlier. With recommendations from both Samuel Armstrong and Bishop Hare, she persuaded Thomas Morgan, the new commissioner of Indian affairs, to appoint her to such a post early in 1890. With the appointment secure, she proceeded to South Dakota to hire a former Hampton student and his wife as drivers, procuring a spring wagon, horses, and necessary equipment for camping. She intended to make a long journey across the reservation to visit schools at every camp of every agency.57

After her appointment, Eastman's writing took on a much more authoritative and assertive tone. She was proud of her travels from March to November of 1890. Traveling twenty-four hundred miles

by wagon or horseback, she spent seventy-five nights in her tent and visited fifty schools. In her report to the commissioner of Indian affairs, she recognized that she had in a sense created the job to which she was appointed, but she stressed her eagerness to "encourage and rouse the teachers, to interest and stimulate the children, to satisfy and inform the parents, and to lay before the Indian Department . . . detailed, exact, and reliable statements." She was critical of much. Unskilled and incompetent teachers she considered the greatest weakness of the system. When she visited the schools, she gave them advice and counsel both personally and by letter, sometimes taking a class herself to demonstrate methods. She organized teachers' institutes to discuss matters like sanitation, citizenship, Indian organizations, and teacher preparation, as well as to provide teaching models. She encouraged reading circles. She universally condemned the school buildings as inadequate—lacking space, ventilation, bathrooms, and classroom furniture. She believed the diet of the children insufficient in vegetables and cereals, dried and preserved fruits, milk, and eggs. She also visited Roman Catholic contract schools, and although their facilities were superior, she claimed their classrooms were "mechanical and lifeless," with too much memorization and too little comprehension.

Considering the role women played in the Indian Reform Movement, Eastman's comments about women being more successful in teaching Indians than men are particularly interesting. She claimed that women related better both to the children and to the community. She developed this idea not only in her official report but also in two articles that she wrote for the general public. "Nothing that can be bought with money is half so valuable," she asserted, "as the aid of a capable, earnest woman, who makes her teaching a labor of love. . . . The teacher who remembers that all this Indian work is missionary work, philanthropic work, will be quite certain to obtain from her friends supplementary gifts to eke out deficiencies in Government appropriations." In another article, she commented, "I greatly prefer women to men in the Indian school room, and find them as a rule far more successful in doing a sympathetic and inspiring work. It is a great field for capable and earnest women . . . although at some sacrifice of worldly ambitions."

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As superintendent of education for the Sioux, Eastman (above, at right) traveled more than two thousand miles and visited fifty reservation schools in 1890. She posed at far right in the photograph below with participants in her first teachers’ institute. These meetings were designed to improve methods and strengthen the day-school system.
Whatever her own dissatisfaction or conflicts might have been, Eastman was clearly not a feminist in theory at this point in her life. She accepted the female stereotype of service and self-sacrifice, of expecting less than a male might demand. We certainly do not hear her enunciating the demands of suffragists and feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone Blackwell, or even Clara Colby, whose Women's Tribune was published from Beatrice, Nebraska, during some of these years. While she was working for citizenship for the Indian, Eastman did not appear to put a high priority upon her own citizenship rights. On the other hand, she acted independently, even if she thought quite conventionally. She wore moccasins and claimed that, even though the government did not encourage the teachers to do so, she had become fluent enough in the Dakota language to be mistaken for a native.62

Nor did she hesitate to assert her own ideas to Richard H. Pratt, the archenemy of the day school. He believed that the Indian adult was hopelessly stuck in barbarism and savagery and could only live out his life on the reservation as a ward of the government. The children, he said, must be removed from their homes, placed in schools far from the reservation, cut off from native dialects and customs, mixed with children from other tribes, scattered among eastern villages and farms during the vacation months, and forcibly Americanized. Eastman challenged him in a letter in July of 1890. “I differ fundamentally with you in regard to the best method of educating the Indians,” she told him. “I believe it is far wiser to educate the great majority of them in schools at their own homes. As to those who go to Eastern schools, I think that, after they have completed their term of study, their place is at home... I admire Carlisle greatly as a school, but I am unequivocally opposed to your theory.”63

As teacher, supervisor, and advocate for day schools, Eastman seemed to have achieved all she had longed for in the cause of Indian reform. Her talent for writing about life among the Sioux as she observed and experienced it also began to manifest itself in the last years of the decade. In a later generation, she might easily have gone on to become a professional journalist. She served as a reporter for the New York Independent during the Pratt Commission council at Lower Brule Agency over the terms of the Sioux bill in September 1888. In this effort to secure the required signatures

63. Eastman to Pratt, 14 July 1890, Richard H. Pratt Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn.
of three-fourths of the male members of the tribes to the proposal to open the reservation to white settlement, representatives of six agencies gathered "under a great awning in front of the agency . . . [with] . . . concentric circles extending from the chief's bench to the outermost rows of listening women, whose ample shawls could not wholly conceal their eager, intelligent faces."  

Eastman followed the speeches of the Sioux chiefs in their native tongues and claimed they spoke better than the three white commissioners. She found herself siding with the Indians, believing they should get more for the land. She did not hesitate to state her opinion to the chairman of the commission, Richard H. Pratt, when he challenged her as a government employee for failing to support the government position. Telling him fearlessly that she attended the meeting as a member of the press and would not let her position prohibit her from expressing her opinion, she threatened to resign.

64. Eastman, Pratt, p. 177.

*During the 1888 negotiations over a bill to open reservation lands to white settlers, Eastman did not hesitate to make her views known to Capt. Richard H. Pratt (center front), the head of the commission that met with the Indian tribes.*
Pratt offered no further resistance, and Eastman suspected that he sympathized with her independence in the face of official policy. Eastman had learned photography in the summer of 1887 and thereafter and throughout her year as supervisor, her camera accompanied her, adding to her versatility as a journalist. In an 1891 article entitled “Indian Girls in Indian Schools,” she wrote a vivid account of her experience as a teacher and supervisor, illustrating it with her own photographs. She commented upon the life of the people, their homes, clothes, schools, and individual children, as well as her own adversities and pleasures on the frontier. Implicit in the article were the conflicts that Eastman faced. If she felt torn between her belief in assimilation and her sympathy for the culture of the Indian that was being destroyed, she also appeared to describe a role for women that she did not exemplify. She was establishing a budding career as a writer/educator while she was advocating the domestic sphere for women. This doctrine accepted child-rearing and homemaking as the natural and divinely ordained role of women and envisioned her as a custodian of virtue.

65. Eastman, Sister to the Sioux, pp. 91-92.
Was Eastman aware of the inconsistency when she urged white women who were not wives and mothers to teach white domestic skills to Indian girls? At the end of the article, she showed a picture of an Indian baby and asked: "Isn't he the happy and well-cared-for looking youngster? And is there not every reason to hope for the future of such as he, whose mother has learned to make and keep a home?" Not only does she totally ignore the tremendous skills of native women in preparing and preserving food, in making and decorating clothing, household articles, and tipis, and in caring for children, she also appears to advocate a path that she herself was not following. Like any good journalist, Eastman might have slanted her article to the market—in this case, the Homemaker, in which it was published. Even so, the entire thrust of Eastman's educational philosophy and teaching seems to support the ideas that were so bluntly stated here. Such beliefs were, of course, commonly held by many of Eastman's contemporaries and are traceable to late eighteenth century notions of the "republican mother"—a strong, educated woman who would rear the future leaders of the new nation, ensuring ideas of liberty and virtue without challenging men in the political arena. Some of the women of Eastman's generation even argued for the vote on the grounds that women, as mothers of future citizens, needed to make their presence felt in American government to speak for the home and family.

Eastman did not get involved in the debate over suffrage. In fact, she really did not articulate her own sentiments on women's role and rights, but she had rejected marriage and vigorously pursued her own self-development throughout the 1880s, behavior that appeared antithetical to the belief that women belonged in the home. What justified work outside the home for so many women like Eastman, even while they championed the domestic sphere, was the missionary quality of the work. They viewed their projects as extensions of their maternal and homemaking role, caring for the needs of others with little expectation of material rewards. Sanctioned by the church and confident that their efforts were in service to others, thousands of women did all sorts of work in mission or social fields. Eastman fitted this category.

Nevertheless, at the end of the decade Eastman yearned for something more, for some new challenge. In the spring of 1888, when

68. Donovan, Different Call, pp. 167-69.
Bishop Hare offered her a position as a lady missionary on the Pine Ridge reservation, she poured out some of those yearnings in a letter to him, refusing his offer but revealing her true feelings more than she usually did. She did not want any work for a while, she said, because she needed to “find out myself and settle my future work.” She felt that her five years of teaching had cultivated her moral nature, but that she felt “uncomfortably cramped” in the schoolroom, particularly intellectually. She was interested in the educational problem of the Indian, but she longed to get closer to them; she felt that she could move right into a family and “find out many things to which I now have only a clue.” She had considered missionary work, but she believed she needed to find her own way to serve them. “I have felt capable at times,” she wrote, “of giving up all thought of an independent development and willing to ‘fill up their lives to starve my own out’—but would that really be better service than to call out and use the very best that is in me?” Finally, she confessed that she had an artistic motive in this action and longed to write something literary. “Before I went into this Indian work,” she remembered, “my art was everything to me.” Possibly, she envisioned a literary career for herself not unlike Helen Hunt Jackson’s.

In spite of her restlessness, Eastman returned to teach at White River Camp another year and took the position of supervisor the following year. She continued to concentrate on the day school issue. Perhaps, her financial situation prevented her from following her dream of living with the Indians and writing something more creative. In the late summer of 1889, she was briefly able to indulge her desire to live closely with them when she joined a hunting expedition with Whirling Hawk’s band in the Sand Hills of Nebraska. For six weeks she traveled by horseback and on foot, relishing the outdoor life she admired so much and so consistently encouraged the Indians to abandon. She called the episode a “pagan interlude,” during which she carried a journal and transmitted her ideas and impressions to paper. She spoke the Dakota language, wore native dress, praised the housekeeping of the women on the trail, and commented upon their personal cleanliness and the modesty and consideration of the men. She enjoyed the food and the air, the good-natured joking and teasing, and the conviviality of the group. The women seemed neither slaves nor drudges to her; yet, obviously they were not living the domestic life she taught their daughters.

69. Eastman to Hare, 6 May 1888, Bishop William H. Hare Papers, Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, S.Dak.
70. Eastman, Sister to the Sioux, pp. 94-102.
Ironically, this "assimilation" into the life of a Dakota band was an experience she cherished.

For the rest of the decade, Eastman continued to experience similar conflict in her own ideas and ambitions. Although she earnestly advocated reservation day schools as the best means of "Americanizing" the Indian, she felt keenly drawn to the culture she was trying to abolish. Although she wrote extensively during these years for the "cause," bending her talent to that purpose as Helen Hunt Jackson had, she yearned to write something more artistic and literary, less propagandistic. These conflicts culminated in her arrival at Pine Ridge Agency in November of 1890 for the two most momentous months of her life. In the course of six weeks, she met and became engaged to Dr. Charles Eastman, the reformers' ideal of the assimilated Sioux, and she lived through the horror of the Wounded Knee Massacre, which pushed the notion of enforced assimilation to its logical and violent conclusion. Six months after that shattering event, which shook the faith of so many Indians and so many reformers, she married Eastman.71

In the light of Elaine Eastman's search for self in the Indian Reform Movement, in her struggle with conflicts both in her ideas about Indian culture and in her ideas about her own role as a woman in the movement, it is not surprising that she so quickly fell in love and became engaged to Santee Sioux physician Charles Eastman. The act offered a resolution to her conflicts: a way to serve others and live closely and intimately within the Indian community while embracing the domestic sphere. Although she never expressly articulated an additional advantage, she had also found a rich source of material to write about. Eastman recognized the resolution of her conflicts when she wrote that the engagement had "followed almost inevitably upon my passionate preoccupation with the welfare of those whom I already looked upon as my own adopted people." Her impending marriage gave her a "thrilling sense of two-fold consecration," both to the domestic life of home and family and to "life-long service to my husband's people."72

After struggling to find herself in the Indian Reform Movement, after writing about her experience as teacher and supervisor in order to promote her cause, she now appeared to forsake her dreams to take on the traditional role of wife and mother. As she said, she made a "gift" of herself to her husband and his people.73 It was an idealistic, selfless gesture quite in keeping with the generous spirit

71. Ibid., pp. 155-71.
72. Ibid., pp. 169, 172.
73. Ibid., p. 169.
Through her work as an educator on South Dakota's Indian reservations, Elaine Goodale met and married Charles Eastman, a Santee Sioux physician, in 1891.

of the women of the decade who participated in the reform movement, but it was even more than that. By taking an American Indian husband, she was now able to live intimately in the culture, but because her husband was well educated and Christianized, the family would also be a model of the assimilationist ideal. Her marriage appeared to be a conscious act of total commitment.

That her vision of marriage, domestic life, and assimilation of the Indians did not work out the way she expected does not lessen the nobility of her intentions. The Eastmans' criticism of government and army in the Wounded Knee affair ultimately cost Charles his position as physician at Pine Ridge. In the next ten years of their life together, he struggled to support his growing family in a white world. It was only through publication of his stories of his Indian boyhood, with Elaine's strong editorial direction, that the family finally achieved some financial security. The price of Charles's suc-
cess was high for Elaine. Although she contributed much of the work, she remained in obscurity while he won celebrity and distinction as a writer and lecturer. After thirty years and six children, the marriage failed. Husband and wife lived the rest of their lives officially married but totally separated.

Nor was the reformer's dream of assimilation realized. The Eastmans moved from Indian country back to Massachusetts after the turn of the century and lost contact with reservation problems. The failure of the Dawes Act of 1887, which implemented the reformer's policies, became apparent early in the twentieth century with poverty and misery still enveloping many Indians who clung desperately to the remnants of their culture. Elaine Eastman, however, did not forsake the ideas that had so energized her in the nineteenth century, and she opposed the reform bill of 1934 that restored some tribal authority. Nonetheless, she remains an inspiring example of the brave, energetic, and enterprising women who gave their hearts to the Indian cause during the 1880s, grasped what opportunities came their way, and in so doing, often found satisfying work for themselves and a sense of their own identity.

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