A Second Wave of Hopi Migration

Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert

The current issue in the *History of Education Quarterly* is significant for various reasons. For the first time in the journal's history, scholars from several disciplines have converged to address topics relating to the history of American Indian education. The essays challenge historians to think of research methodologies that go beyond the traditional sources of documents retrieved from archives and other depositories. This is perhaps most clearly seen in KuuNUx TeeRIt Kroupa's essay on the Arikara Cultural Center and his attempt to understand their educational history through an Arikara lens of understanding. It is also evident in Adrea Lawrence's idea of "epic learning" and her inclusion of "Native" stories and their relationship to "place" as a frame to interpret American Indian education histories. Each of these articles, including Donald Warren's piece on Native history as education history, urges historians to think more broadly on how to create Indian education narratives. However, my intention here is not to provide a comprehensive response to all three essays. Rather, I want to briefly apply key topics in each text to help enlighten my own research on Hopis and the off-reservation Indian boarding school experience, and to offer some direction on how these issues might be applied to current and future studies.

When I began graduate school at the University of California, Riverside, I could not have imagined the increase the next several years would bring in the number of articles and books on the federal government's off-reservation Indian boarding school system. At the time, those interested in the Indian boarding school experience often relied on four major texts, including Robert Trennert Jr.'s *The Phoenix Indian School*, K. Tsianina Lomawaima's *They Called It Prairie Light*, Brenda Child's *Boarding School Seasons*, and David Wallace Adams' *Education for Extinction*.[1] Since the early 2000s, nearly every scholar who has

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[1]Robert Trennert Jr., *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); K. Tsianina Lomawaima,

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researched and published on this system has built upon the work of these scholars. We are indebted to them. We run to Adam's book to understand the complex system of federal Indian education policies, and look to Lomawaima's and Child's work as examples of how to center ones study on the Native voice, both in oral and written forms.

My interest in the history of American Indian boarding schools comes from who I am as an enrolled member of the Hopi Tribe from northeastern Arizona, and my family's involvement in the U.S. government's off-reservation Indian boarding school system. Over the years I have written at length about my grandfather, Victor Sakiestewa Sr., who attended Sherman Institute, an off-reservation Indian boarding school in Riverside, California. However, several other members of my family also went to boarding schools, including my grandfather, Lloyd Gilbert of the Rabbit/Tobacco Clan from the Hopi village of Upper Moencopi. In the mid 1940s, at the age of fifteen, he began attending the Phoenix Indian School in Arizona where he took courses in science, health, writing, leather work, and American history, to name a few.[2] U.S. government officials created the Indian school at Phoenix and other off-reservation Indian boarding schools to weaken Native cultures and to train Indigenous youth in trades and skills that would be useful to tribal and American societies.

Considering Kroupa's plea for scholars to take "Indigenous" epistemologies seriously, how might an historian of the off-reservation Indian boarding school experience understand my grandfather's participation in the U.S. government's system to educate American Indian children and young adults? Typically, historians would interpret this narrative within a very confined framework of Indian education policies and attribute his participation in the system to the influences of other colonial forces. While scholars should never ignore the political or racist reasons U.S. government officials sent Native students to Indian schools; tribal-specific studies ought to compel us to think more broadly and ask questions directly related to the history and culture of a particular Indigenous people group. Is there a more nuanced way of understanding and interpreting this important part of Hopi and American Indian education history? Should historians be content to understand this experience primarily through a grid of Indian education policies

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They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); and David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1926* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

[2] Attendance and Scholastic Record By Semesters for Each Year, "Gilbert, Lloyd," Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Phoenix Indian High School Student Case Files, 1902–1991, National Archives and Records Administration, Perris, California, Record Group 75, Box 138.

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and the larger topics of Indian assimilation and acculturation? Is there a Hopi way of understanding what happened to the Hopi people? And if so, why does this matter?

Similar to many other Native peoples, the Hopi have very detailed origin and emergence accounts. These stories connect the people to the land, and give Hopis a worldview to understand and interpret the past, present, and future. In her essay, Adrea Lawrence keenly observes that place for Native people is a "sense-making tool," and for the Hopi this tool has always illuminated the past and provided meaning for those living in the present. From a very early age, the Hopi people are taught the great migration stories of long ago. We are told of a time, well before Europeans set foot on this continent, when a group of Hopis had emerged from an underground world to the present world we know today. Once in this present world, the people divided themselves into smaller clans and migrated in all four cardinal directions to gain knowledge and skills that would be useful to Hopi society.[3] How might this migration story enlighten our understanding of the Hopi boarding-school experience from a Hopi perspective? How can historians apply what the authors of this special issue have suggested to change the way historians construct and interpret Indian education narratives?

I have argued in my book *Education beyond the Mesas* that Hopi participation in the U.S. government's off-reservation Indian boarding-school system was part of a second wave of migration for Hopi people.[4] Once again, the Hopi left their homelands and ventured in all four cardinal directions to schools in Arizona, California, Pennsylvania, Utah, and beyond. During their migrations, they met and learned from other Indigenous people, experienced new cultures, and adapted or adopted the knowledge that they had gained to form the foundation of Hopi society. When my grandfather left the Phoenix Indian School during his eleventh-grade year in 1950, he also returned to his village of Upper Moencopi. But he arrived back at his village with new skills, shared experiences with other Hopi and non-Hopi students, and a different perspective on life. He migrated back to the Hopi mesas as a young man who had experienced life in a modern city, and he returned home with knowledge that would later prove useful to his people. Not every Hopi student returned home from the Phoenix Indian School. Some

[3]For detailed accounts of Hopi migration and emergence stories, see Alfred Hermequaftewa, The *Hopi Way Is the Way of Peace*, transcription of interview recorded by Thomas B. Noble (Indianapolis: Merideth Guillet, 1970), 1–9; and Edmond Nequatewa, *Truth of a Hopi: Stories Relating to the Origin, Myths, and Clan Histories of the Hopi* (Flagstaff: Northland Publishing, 1994), 1–15. Also, for an anthropological examination of Hopi migrations, see Patrick D. Lyons, *Ancestral Hopi Migrations*. Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona 68 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003).

[4]See Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education beyond the Mesas: Hopi Students at Sherman Institute, 1902–1929* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

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decided to live and work in Phoenix after their school term had expired, while others became sick and died at the school. But my grandfather was among the vast majority of Hopi students who migrated back to their ancestral lands, and who attempted to take what they had learned at school to make their lives better on the reservation.

When I, as a Hopi historian, use and highlight Hopi ways of understanding to interpret our education history, I place Hopi history and culture at the center of the historical narrative. In her co-edited book *Native Historians Write Back*, Seminole historian Susan Miller correctly observes that Indigenous thinkers often prefer to "work within" their "own people's specific worldview."[5] Native historians understand this. We get it, but our use of Indigenous frameworks or epistemologies in our work do not always clearly or convincingly translate with non-Native historians. Native academics need to continue asserting and introducing Indigenous frameworks of understanding in our dissertations, articles, books, and other publications. I know that scholars in fields such as American Indian studies would welcome this approach to Native history, but we have a broader audience to reach with our work. And this audience, including readers of this special edition in the *History of Education Quarterly*, need to be reminded that there are ways of thinking of Native education history that go beyond the theories and models so commonly used and accepted by historians.

The authors of this special issue have given historians of Indian education much to think about. Lawrence's reminder that "Indigenous groups" developed "curricula" specific to tribal beliefs, and that this curricula often conflicted with "Euroamerican" methods of educating youth, cannot be overemphasized. But we should also remember that Hopi and other Native systems of education are among the oldest forms of education in the Americas. They are tribal educations that the people created and implemented without the influences of colonial powers. And even though they changed over time, these philosophies and practices of education always reflected the needs and diverse cultures of Indigenous communities. As Osage scholar Robert Warrior once remarked, "Native education, of course, did not begin in the mind of missionaries or other colonial ideologues, but has its roots in the farthest reaches of history and has developed over centuries."[6]

For my grandfather, education did not begin at the Phoenix Indian School or even the Moencopi Day School, a school that he attended prior to his enrollment at the school in Phoenix. He had received a Hopi education within his community. He had been taught the

[5] Susan Ann Miller and James Riding In, ed., *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011), 39.

[6] Robert Warrior, *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 119.

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ceremonies and religious songs and dances of his people. He learned to plant corn, melons, and beans according to the Hopi way. He, and other Hopi students, including my grandmother and his wife, Ethel Sakiestewa Gilbert, who attended the Ganado Mission School on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona, did not arrive at Indian schools as blank slates, metaphorically speaking. Hopis who enrolled at U.S. government or mission schools came from close-knit village communities, and they brought their Hopi knowledge with them to school. This knowledge helped him to navigate the government's Indian education system, it connected him to his ancestral lands, and it reminded him who he was as a Hopi person. Although school officials may have forced my grandfather to look and behave less like an "Indian," they did not have ultimate control over the Hopi knowledge in his mind. And they had no way of determining how my grandfather would use, or not use, that Indigenous knowledge to counter or push back against the western education that he received within and beyond the school walls.

While school officials operated with constraints that hindered them from completely transforming the minds of Indigenous youth, they had power to weaken Native identities in other ways. When my grandfather arrived at the Phoenix Indian School his last name was Quache (pronounced "Kwaatsi") and not Gilbert. Meaning "friend" in the Hopi language, the name connected him to his family, fellow clan members, and to his village of Upper Moencopi. But at some point during his time at the school, officials required my grandfather to get rid of his Hopi name and instructed him to replace it with an English name. In response, my grandfather consulted with his siblings and they made the decision to use their father's first name "Gilbert" as their new English surname. The U.S. government's name changing policy was an act of colonialism that aimed to weaken and fragment Native cultures and identities.[7] But the government's name changing policy also had negative consequences for students and their families. My family was deprived of our Hopi surname. The name "Gilbert" has its origins in England, and I am reminded of this every year when I receive mailings from various companies that try to sell me a certificate or stationary with the Gilbert Family Coat of Arms embedded on it.

When Hopis clans of long ago migrated back to their ancestral lands to form Hopi society, they returned home with new names based on animals and other objects they encountered along the way. But unlike the U.S. government's name changing policy that attempted to weaken Hopi and other Native cultures, Hopi clans gave themselves names to

[7]For excellent discussions on the U.S. government's name changing policy at Indian schools see Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 139; and Katanski, *Learning to Write "Indian": The Boarding School Experience and American Indian Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 35.

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establish and strengthen their identity as Hopi people. Many Hopis who attended the Phoenix Indian School and other off-reservation Indian boarding schools during this era and before had their Hopi surnames taken away from them. I have often contemplated whether I should reclaim our Hopi name through the Hopi Tribal Court. Perhaps one day I will, but for now the name Gilbert connects me to my grandfather and his family, and it serves as a reminder of the negative consequences of colonialism. But it also gives testimony to our family's ability to overcome the U.S. government's name changing policy, and other attempts to assimilate him into American society. My grandfather did not lose his identity as a Hopi person when his name was changed to Gilbert. He returned to his village speaking fluent Hopi, he spent the next several years of his life participating in Hopi ceremonies, and he always kept his family closely connected to the culture of our people.

Finally, I want to stress that Hopi education history is also a living history. For the Hopi, their boarding school stories have never been a thing of the distant past. Hopis who attended schools such as Sherman Institute and the Indian school in Phoenix are still with us today. However, as I am realizing more and more, they will not be here to tell their stories forever. When my grandfather was an old man, and nearing the end of his life, I attempted to interview him about his time at the Phoenix Indian School. I asked him clear and direct questions, but he simply nodded and stared outside at his Chevrolet pickup truck and the hills surrounding his home at Upper Moencopi. His silence told me that the opportunity to hear his story from his own words had passed. I do wonder what he thought about his experience at the Indian school. Did he consider himself to be participating in a second wave of Hopi migration? I am not assuming that that he did. Perhaps he thought about his time away from home as a great adventure, and an escape from the harsh conditions of village life. Then again, perhaps he despised it, which may explain why he never completed his boarding school education. Now that he is no longer with us, I may never know the answers to these questions.[8] But I do know that framing the Hopi boarding school experience as a second wave of migration makes sense to me as a Hopi person. It explains my grandfather's involvement at the Indian school in a way that highlights the history and beliefs of our people, and it reemphasizes the understanding that a history on Hopi education ought to involve Hopi ways of thinking, and not just U.S. government Indian education policies and discussions of assimilation and acculturation.

[8]My grandfather passed away on February 8, 2013 at his home in Upper Moencopi. He was 84 years old. He worked for 26 years as a custodian at Northern Arizona University, which is located in the mountain community of Flagstaff. He had a passion for sports, especially basketball, and spent years refereeing elementary and high school games.

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