

May 20, 2022

She:kon,

My name is **Louellyn White**. I'm an enrolled member of the Akwesasne Mohawk (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe), and an intergenerational survivor of **Carlisle Indian Industrial School** in Pennsylvania. My grandfather, Mitchell Arionhiawakon White attended Carlisle (1900 – 1909) along with his brother John White (circa 1900 – 1909). My grandmother's sister, Genevieve Jacobs also attended Carlisle (circa 1914) and then Haskell Indian School (timeframe unknown).

I support H.R. 5444/S.2907 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.

My testimony reflects my personal as well as professional interests in supporting H.R. 5444. Like many Indigenous peoples, the lines between my personal and professional lives are blurred. I am an Associate Professor in Indigenous Studies and for many years I have researched my own family's experience at **Carlisle** and more recently the **Lincoln Institution**, another Indian boarding school which was in Philadelphia. There are notations in my grandfather's Carlisle records that he was sent from the Lincoln Institution, although I have yet to find verification in the historical record. I have published several articles and book chapters on these topics and am currently co-editing a collection of boarding school stories.

My Family

Any family stories of my grandfather's time at Carlisle were passed on to me by my father, Louis John White. There aren't many. And they all end with the phrase, "He didn't like to talk about it." I do know that my grandfather no longer spoke his language when he returned from Carlisle. His brother never returned home to live but rather stayed in Pennsylvania for his entire life where he worked at a printing press, a skill he learned at Carlisle.

The intergenerational impacts are difficult to parse out. I do not speak my language, nor did I grow up knowing much about our traditional Haudenosaunee culture. It is difficult to place complete blame on my family's time at Carlisle but I can confidently say that it surely didn't help them retain their language and culture. My father was a harsh disciplinarian who was ashamed that he didn't know his culture very well. He felt ostracized from his community and lived much of his life away from the reserve. He returned when he was 85 years old to live in a nursing home in Akwesasne. He was devastated when another elder asked him, "What kind of Indian are you if you don't know your language?" Had his father not attended Carlisle, where he lost his ability and will to speak Kanienke:ha, that conversation would never have happened and I would likely be teaching my own son our precious language.

Like many, my family's experiences at an Indian boarding school do not follow a simple narrative of "good" or "bad" but reflect the numerous messy and complicated stories throughout Indian country. I cannot say that my family was "forced" to attend Carlisle or even that there was blatant "coercion." There are archival documents from chiefs in my community requesting that children be sent to Carlisle and Lincoln to avoid living a life of poverty and alcoholism on the reserve. There are letters from students trying to convince other youth from the community to

attend those institutions and leave behind a life of “savagery” in exchange for learning how to read and write English. These experiences and documents attest to the complexity of how our relatives viewed these institutions and how stories varied greatly depending on the era and the type of institution that one attended. They don’t all fall into the neat category of victimization. However, the young people who were at Indian boarding schools were still subjected to a foreign institution designed to strip them of their very identities to benefit the colonial project. Regardless of how they got there, or how they viewed their experiences, the mere existence of these institutions was an act of cultural genocide.

My Work

My ongoing research involves burials of children from Carlisle who died while on **outings**. I worked with the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition in the early stages of this research and my findings were included in their report for a UN Filing on children who died and were missing from Indian boarding schools. This research has found at least **ten** children from Carlisle who were buried in Presbyterian, Moravian, and other church related and public cemeteries across Pennsylvania and New Jersey. I suspect there are more burials.

My most recent findings include approximately **32** Indigenous children's burials from the **Lincoln Institution**. The children who died were buried at The Woodland's Cemetery and the Fernwood Cemetery, and possibly others. Lincoln was a small Indian boarding school that existed from 1883 until approximately 1906. Lincoln was financially supported by the Episcopalian church and received U.S. Congressional funding. Lincoln purchased burial plots at the Woodlands and elsewhere and ceased to exist as an Indian boarding school in the early 1900s. In 1900, Lincoln lost its congressional funding of \$167 per child, per year, after allegations of abuse were reported.

My goal in undertaking this research has been to locate living relatives to make them aware of these burials. When children died, many times parents and family members were not informed, there was no funding to send their bodies home, and therefore, they have remained far from their homelands.

On September 30, 2021, I published some of my findings with Indian Country Today Media Network and subsequent follow up stories. There has been a considerable amount of response from the public and from Tribal communities about these findings. Some of the communities wish to repatriate children from these cemeteries.

Some of these children come from Tribal Nations who are no longer federally recognized, have faced removal, relocation, and allotment, and have no existing land base. Some of their family lines may not exist and the process for repatriation may be complicated by attempts at locating the next living relative. Some of the children buried far from home are from my own community of Akwesasne and I have yet to locate living relatives. Even if the families are located, they may not wish to repatriate but have some type of commemoration instead. It has taken considerable time and money to do this work.

My work is but a small dent in the enormity of documenting our lost children. It is but one small step toward healing. The passage of H.R. 5444 will help in locating and analyzing records across federal Indian boarding schools and work toward finding our children and bringing them home. Living survivors do not have much time to share their stories. Congress must act now.

I support H.R. 5444/S.2907 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.

Thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States.

In Peace and Friendship,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Louellyn White". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Louellyn White, PhD

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