

University of Nevada, Reno

**Indianness and Expectation: Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills as Iconic Native
American Athletes**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis connects and explains the experiences of iconic athletes Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills by analyzing the cultural and political structures that frame the Native American experience. At the turn of the twentieth century progressive ideas of assimilation were fused with Muscular Christian views of sport in the Native American boarding school system. As a result, sports emerged as a middle ground where Native American athletes were able to coexist, cooperate, and assert their identity in broader American society. As the only two Native American Olympic Gold Medalists, Thorpe and Mills actively challenged the representations of Native Americans. Their lives however, were vastly different. Changes in the federal Indian policies distinguish the experiences of Thorpe and Mills. While boarding school athletic teams remained central to Native American athletics, the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act altered the sporting middle ground. Boarding schools moved away from high profile athletic teams, reducing the number of prominent Native American athletes in mainstream society. Military service however, joined the boarding school and continued the sporting middle ground. The lives of Thorpe and Mills illustrate that, amidst these changes, sports remained an important place for Native American activism.

For Brenda,

who lives on in the process of history

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PROLOGUE

Billy Mills and Jim Thorpe are the two most recognized Native American athletes. Their memories and struggles linger in the national consciousness. Major motion pictures depict their lives, often raising the question, “Why are there not more Native American athletes?” The fact is there were, and are.

A visit to the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame in Lawrence, Kansas leaves one both surprised and underwhelmed. The Hall of Fame features over one hundred inductees, including seven of the athletes and coaches discussed here. Some won Olympic medals and World Series championships while others mentored thousands of Native American youth. Each individual has a compelling story about how they utilized the power of sport.

Yet, unlike the Professional Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio or the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame is not a major attraction. It is located in Lawrence, Kansas on the campus of Haskell Indian Nations University, tucked just inside the Coffin Sport Complex foyer. There are no memorabilia or bright colors. The inductees are not immortalized in bronze. Instead modest display cases house plaques that feature an image and a two-paragraph description of each inductee.

The American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame is, like many of its enshrinees, neglected and often forgotten. There is no sign on the highway to Lawrence announcing its presence, no book or brochure to elicit interest and tease visitors. One can live in and

move through the city and region never knowing that that Hall of Fame exists.¹

This thesis seeks to illuminate a few of the stories tucked away inside of this Hall of Fame. The lives of selected athletes illustrate the power of sport and the role it played in mediating the Native American experience. Sport provided a middle ground for Native American athletes. That middle ground allowed them to challenge and contest representations of Indianness and mainstream society's expectations. Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills illustrate the fluidity of sport as a middle ground for Native Americans in the twentieth century.

The concept of a sporting middle ground used here builds from Richard White's assertion that French, English, and Native Americans peacefully coexisted, cooperated, and freely asserted their identity in the Great Lakes region during the eighteenth century. Collegiate and professional sports were relatively young at the turn of the century and did not adhere to a firm policy of exclusivity. Sports provided a venue for Native Americans to enter broader society. Unlike White's middle ground, however, the sporting middle ground was not a place of equal power relations. Instead, sports were a space within the existing structures that offered increased agency but not equality. Thus, an individual's identity as an athlete allowed him to coexist, cooperate, and assert himself in the sporting world.²

The experience of these individuals however, extends far beyond the world of sports. A myriad of policies, representations, expectations, and institutions framed the

¹ I lived within 40 miles of the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame for over ten years and only learned of its existence upon starting research on this project.

² Michael Oriard notes new immigrants were widely accepted: "sports writers and journalists in all media ignored the 'race' of football players in the 1920s." Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 259.

Native American experience in the twentieth century. Yet, sport profoundly affected the way that Native American athletes were able to interact within and in some cases break free of these parameters.

Understanding the power of sport is a relatively new scholarly endeavor. In 1995 Elliot Gorn and Michael Oriard urged scholars to take sports seriously. They argue that the lens of sports, teamed with the “booming field of cultural studies,” uniquely reveals many important relationships within American culture.³ For example, “Sports also reveal just how interdependent particular subcultures and the larger consumer culture can be.”⁴ Sports have often fused diversity with the common.

Over fifteen years have passed since Gorn and Oriard’s article appeared. The literature on American sports history has grown and race has emerged as a particularly engaging topic, yet African American athletes have received the majority of scholarly treatment. American historians frequently use prominent sports figures such as Jackie Robinson, Jesse Owens, and Joe Louis to illustrate matters of race.

Sports historians pride themselves on their inclusivity, although beyond discussions of African Americans they are lacking. A survey of the two most authoritative textbooks on sports history, Richard O. Davies’ *Sports in American Life: A History* (2007), and Benjamin G. Rader’s *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, 5th ed. (2005), reveals a limited discussion of Native American athletes. Both discuss Jim Thorpe but more for his contributions to the sport of football and his 1912 Olympic controversy than as a racial actor.

³ Elliot Gorn and Michael Oriard, “Taking Sports Seriously,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 24 March 1995, A56.

⁴ Ibid.

While there are many popular Thorpe biographies, few scholars have elected to study his life. Likewise, Billy Mills has been completely neglected. In recent years the scholarly literature on Native Americans in sports has grown. Most recently C. Richard King published *Native Athletes in Sport and Society* (2005) and *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sport* (2001). John Bloom and Jeffrey Powers-Beck have contributed *To Show What an Indian Can Do* (2000) and *The American Indian Integration of Baseball* (2004). These books, however, focus primarily on boarding school athletic teams and lesser-known figures.

These athletes and teams are undoubtedly important subjects and they contribute to the understanding of Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills in this study. Yet, there is much to learn by studying iconic figures too. While Thorpe and Mills passed through the boarding school system, their athletic careers and representations extended far into the mainstream. They entered mainstream society and, through their position as famous sports figures, asserted their Native American identity by challenging Indianness and the attendant expectations. Sports fame offered opportunities to Thorpe and Mills that were not available to lesser-known Native American athletic figures.

In order to understand the role of sport in shaping the Native American experience however, Thorpe and Mills must be discussed within their socio-historic context. In doing so, this narrative adds clarity to both to the historical understanding and contemporary views and memories of Native American athletes. As John Bloom explains, contemporary articles frame problems on reservations “not as the outcome of historical events or

political interests and power but as cultural deficiencies of Native Americans.”⁵ He continues, “In each case, Native American cultures are portrayed as mired in a history of declension and death...inept at dealing with modern institutions and social realities.”⁶ Indeed, pervasive views such as these obfuscate the experience of Native American athletes.

A note on terminology and theoretical framework is essential: The terms “Indianness” and “expectation” are derived from existing literature on Native Americans. The idea of living with and challenging expectations is the topic of Philip Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004). Although he discusses the *unexpected*, his explanation of “expectation” is important. In his book “expectation” is a powerful word. Deeper and more complex than stereotypes, expectations contain longstanding meanings and representations that are more difficult to change than simplified and analogous stereotypes. Expectations are made up of discourse and ideology. For example, expectation incorporates “the colonial and imperial relations of power and domination existing between Indian peoples and the United States,” while a stereotype most frequently comes from a series of observations.⁷

Indianness, on the other hand, entails the representations and stereotypes of Native American culture. King suggests that “Indianness emerges largely through unstated contrasts with whiteness or the values, practices, institutions, and experiences

⁵ John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 126.

⁶ Bloom makes these statements in response to various newspaper and *Sports Illustrated* articles published in the 1990s. Ibid.

⁷ Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 11.

associated with Euro-America, 'modernity,' and 'civilization.'"⁸ To be sure, there are expectations of Indianness, but Indianness alone is not an expectation. The two terms are used here to help define and explain the structures that Native American athletes work through and challenge.

Likewise, the words "Native American," "American Indian," and "Indian" convey different meanings. All three are constructed European terms that contain lingering power dynamics of colonial and imperial rule. The connotation of "Indian" is linked to the expectations of Indianness. For the sake of clarity, it is not feasible to throw away these words. This study refrains from using "Indian," except in appropriate historical contexts and quotations (most native people refer to themselves collectively as Indians). Likewise, *The Chicago Manual of Style* explains, "Many among those who trace their roots to the aboriginal people of the Americas prefer *American Indians* to *Native Americans*."⁹ While acknowledging this preference, this study continues to use "Native American" because it documents how the use of the word "Indian" conveyed a host of derogatory connotations and stereotypical expectations. The use of the term "Native American" helps distinguish this work's distance from the negative associations embedded in the word "Indian" as a stand alone term and within the compound term "American Indian." This consideration outweighs the problems associated with the term "Native American."

Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills operated in their socio-historic contexts through sports fame. Although federal Indian policy and cultural stereotypes differed in their eras, sport remained a constant and allowed both to contest Indianness and expectation. Sport was

⁸ C. Richard King, "A Notable Exception: Notes on Notah Begay, Race, and Sports," in *Native Athletes in Sport and Society*, C. Richard King ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 215.

⁹ Russell David Harper, compiler, *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 402.

not always exempt from these structures, however, as federal policy had a profound affect on the lives of Thorpe and Mills. The pages that follow illustrate the complex relationship between athletics, federal Indian policy, and Native American culture.

CHAPTER 1

SPORT AS MIDDLE GROUND: THE ERA OF JIM THORPE

American sports were in their infancy at the turn of the twentieth century. The late-nineteenth century saw the invention of basketball, volleyball, and the revival of the Olympic Games. Likewise college football expanded west from its eastern private school roots. The nation took notice as daily newspapers were saturated with coverage of football making it one of the nation's most popular spectator sports. Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst established separate sports sections in their rival New York newspapers.¹

Parallel to these pages were national and international news reports. Readers would find on one page a summary of the Harvard-Yale game and on the next page a recollection from the latest "Indian" skirmish on the central plains. The "Indian Question" was a prominent issue in the westward expansion of the United States. Attempts to pacify and conquer resistant tribes gave way to varying models of assimilation as Manifest Destiny collided with progressive reforms. The result was a swirling array of policy and constructed representations that distorted the Native American experience. The nineteenth century witnessed a brutal assault on Native American territory, resources and culture.² Marked by the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877

¹ Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007) 75.

² The literature on Native American history is extensive. For some important works see Robert Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian From Columbus to Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University

and the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, the United States effectively quelled the armed resistance of native peoples. These events correspond to a rough chronological starting point for a new phase in the history of Native Americans.³

Print culture provided extensive and heavily sensationalized coverage of the Great Plains wars, reinforcing and codifying representations of Native Americans as savage and uncivilized. Further, this representation dovetailed with pervading scientific racism of the period, placing Native Americans within a racial hierarchy. Of course Native Americans, like all non-Anglo peoples, occupied lesser rungs on the evolutionary scale of the “races of men.”⁴

As the United States pursued an imperial agenda in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, representations of Native Americans became staples of the representations of the “ethnographic other” that accompanied the assertion of U.S. imperialist supremacy. Best represented at the numerous World’s Fairs and by performing troupes, the representation of the Native American was an essential part of the expression of Anglo supremacy atop the complicated construction of the evolutionary scales of man.

William F. Cody's “Buffalo Bill's Wild West,” which ran from 1883 to 1916, was

of Nebraska Press, 1984); Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004); Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans & Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005).

³The key term in this statement is “armed.” Native Americans continue to mediate United States policy and cultural representations. Further, while the United States would never seriously view Native Americans as an organized, foreign entity battling over formal definitions of territory and sovereignty, Native peoples would indeed use armed resistance, most notably in the siege of Wounded Knee in 1872. For more on these distinctions, see Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism: From Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴For more on scientific racism see the body of work of George W. Stocking Jr. particularly his seminal work, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays on the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968). For work more applicable to Native Americans see Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975).

the most influential of these representations. Richard Slotkin argues: “It was the most important commercial vehicle for the fabrication and transmission of the Myth of the Frontier.”⁵ The show consisted of various “epochs” that re-enacted historical events. In 1886 a portrayal of “Custer's Last Stand” joined the show's lineup and quickly became a central component of its success.⁶ Native Americans, mostly Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne, and veterans of the battle were hired to add authenticity. Cody’s experience in the U.S. Cavalry on the Great Plains allowed the historic re-creation of battles to be accepted as fairly reliable public education. In reality however, the recreations were closer to folklore than history.

This mythology played two roles. First, it offered representations of Native Americans and other non-whites as inferior “others” locked in scientific racism's stages of primitivism. This was done through various Wild West acts. One of these skits was “The Race of Races,” which pitted various non-white participants against each other to effectively prove their status within the racial hierarchy.⁷ Other acts simulated current and historical events. Custer's inglorious defeat at Little Big Horn and Theodore Roosevelt’s much-ballyhooed victory at San Juan Hill, served to illustrate racial superiority and reinforced the emerging imperial and military might of the dominant white race. To be sure, although Custer’s defeat was crushing for white mythmakers, Buffalo Bill enacted revenge in one of the Wild West’s most popular skits. The “Custer's

⁵ For more on the popularity and pervasive influence of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West see: Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 87.

⁶ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 76.

⁷ *Ibid*, 85.

Last Fight” reenactment concluded the Wild West and asserted white racial superiority by showing a fictitious “reconciliation between Whites and Indians” that reinforced American imperial power.⁸ In this respect Buffalo Bill's Wild West illustrated, perpetuated, and connected disciplined military manliness, moral and intellectual abilities, and whiteness.

This mythology had a pervasive influence. Much of the style and themes of the mythology presented in the Wild West show lingered on in popular imagination through dime novels and motion pictures. As Buffalo Bill and the Wild West show declined in public favor, the immensely popular stories of Zane Grey and the emerging motion picture industry intensified interest in the western genre. Likewise well into the 1930s production companies followed Cody's practice of hiring Indian actors as a means of authenticating their stories and appealing to the popular mythology of race on the frontier. Because of the mythology's influence as entertainment, its representations of Native Americans asserted white supremacy long after Cody's Wild West shows ended.

World's Fairs – particularly the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo – also produced stereotypical representations of Native Americans. While Cody ran the Wild West Shows as a form of entertainment, anthropologists produced academic representations of the “ethnographic others” at the World's Fairs. Ethnology exhibits at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition displayed the evolutionary progress of man and bore “witness to the triumph

⁸ For more on the Wild West's “Custer's Last Fight” epoch see Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 78-79.

of imperial and colonial conquest and domination.”⁹ In a style similar to “The Race of Races,” Native Americans were placed alongside other racial representations at the Ethnology Building of the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo to “reinforce the artistic presentation of racial gradients.”¹⁰

Imperial fervor drove both expositions. Ethnographic displays were less places to exhibit primitive cultural and racial differences than sites that placed subjugated people in the United States' emerging non-continental empire. This interpretation denied agency through the representations of indigenous peoples, while national and international imperialism asserted scientific racism and paternalism tendencies on a more permanent basis.

Philip Deloria suggests that an “antimodern appreciation for racial difference” was also prevalent in white society’s view of Native Americans.¹¹ For example, in addition to the negative perceptions resulting from the Great Sioux War of 1876, respect emerged for the brave Indian battling to defend his land and culture. White society both feared and respected uncivilized primitivism. Timeless wisdom and an intimate understanding of nature provided a sharp contrast with images of savagery. Although respected, these attributes were still caught in the grips of scientific racism as the fighting spirit of the Indian was connected to inherent, biological characteristics. Further, the portrayal of a primitive people close to the simpler ebb and flow of life had long been a

⁹ Rydell, *All the World's A Fair* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 57; Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press 2010), 94.

¹⁰ Rydell, *All the World's A Fair*, 137.

¹¹ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 131.

cornerstone of depictions of Native Americans.¹²

As Lee Baker argues, this anti-modernism was linked to the racial politics concerning the Native American in the late nineteenth century. Baker explains that because Native Americans were allegedly "vanishing" and primitively pure, "out-of-the-way Indians had a culture worthy of preservation and exhibition" whereas other racial minorities did not.¹³ Baker illustrates this point by contrasting the motives, methods, and eventual uses of folklorists and anthropologists' studies of Native American and African American culture. In fact, two professional anthropology organizations, the Bureau of American Ethnology and the Washington Society of Anthropology, involved at Chicago and Buffalo, focused on Native Americans because they were considered "safe" subjects unlike other racial minorities.¹⁴ One of the most powerful images emerging from this concentration was the romanticized image of the Native American as a primitive people who were vanishing.

Central to this representation was cultural authenticity. Amidst the assertion of racial inferiority evidenced in popular displays such as the Wild West shows and World's Fairs, anthropologists were consumed with what truly constituted a Native American.

Baker suggests:

By documenting and salvaging lost languages, religious and spiritual practices, kinship and tribal organizations, or phenotypic diacritics, anthropologists weighed in with science to help ratify the idea that genuine Indian identity could be

¹² Karen Kupperman's work, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000) demonstrates how powerful this reasoning was in the early encounter between English settlers and Native Americans on the Atlantic seaboard.

¹³ Lee D. Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*, (Durham: Duke University Press 2010), 69.

¹⁴ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 16.

constituted only through race, language, and culture of specific tribal populations, and anyone who fell out of these bounds was simply not a real Indian.¹⁵

By using scientific methods to identify and label what was and was not authentically Native American, anthropologists mirrored the mythmakers and entertainers of popular culture by asserting the power of dominant whites to assign representations to Native Americans.

The complicated representation of Native Americans informed the imperial push of the United States, and connected it to the broader navigation of the modern world. Dealing with the displacements of modernity was at the core of the Progressive project.¹⁶ Central was the urgency of progressive reformers to exhibit concern for, and offer programs to, the dispossessed in United States society. Amidst the popular depictions of the Native American as the ethnographic other, this progressive ethos was revising the accepted narrative. Best exemplified by Helen Hunt Jackson's 1881 work, *A Century of Dishonor*, progressives questioned long established policies and condemned the pattern of violence and dishonesty exhibited toward Native Americans.¹⁷ Progressive humanitarians certainly supported theories of evolutionary development and, at times, used racial hierarchies to create representations of the ethnographic other. Progressives believed that all men could advance through the stages of development and that it was

¹⁵ Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*, 115-116.

¹⁶ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ This coupled with the trial and tour of Standing Bear brought attention to corrupt and flawed policy. New "reform associations" who lobbied on the behalf of an interested public to alter Federal Indian Policy were formed after the tour. Helen Hunt Jackson was a member of one of these associations, and later, John Collier served as the executive secretary of one. They played an important role in the debate over assimilation and the General Allotment Act. Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 3-6. Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* (New York, 1881).

Anglo society's responsibility to prepare the Native American for assimilation into wider society. What assimilation meant and would look like was vigorously debated during the 1880s.¹⁸

This discussion placed Native Americans in a stage of "arrested development" that combined the crude depictions of the ethnographic other and the noble savage, and pushed ideologies of uplift that held assimilation as the goal. Without question, the progressive zeal of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century automated the "Indian Question" as a central issue of reform. No other policy symbolized this imperative more than the boarding school. That often-torturous educational system became one of the main vehicles of the Anglo effort to deal with the "arrested" Native American.

Although boarding schools began before the Dawes Act of 1887, their roles were tied to debate surrounding the new law. Indeed the allotment policies enacted in the Dawes Act were subject to six years of public debate prior to its passage.¹⁹ When the Dawes Act was passed in 1887, "community owned land was allotted to individual tribal members in parcels of 40, 80, or 160 acres."²⁰ The Federal government retained ownership for a period of twenty-five years. After this period of federal stewardship, ownership would be entrusted to individuals, but only after they demonstrated the

¹⁸ Jackson saw citizenship as the ultimate end of assimilation, but was wary of too quickly implementing reforms. Richard Henry Pratt believed in the ability of Native Americans to learn and preparing them to enter white society similarly to how immigrants were assimilated. For more on this debate, see: Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise*.

¹⁹ Although scholars almost always link boarding schools and the Dawes Act, they were linked philosophically, not legislatively.

²⁰ Helton and Robertson, "The Foundations of Federal Indian Law," in *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism since 1900*, Daniel Cobb and Loretta Fowler eds. (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2007), 37.

“competency” to handle the responsibility of “civilized” land ownership. Boarding schools were believed to be essential to creating trained and competent Native Americans.

Prior to 1879, missionaries provided all Indian education. Likewise, missionaries doubled as reservation officials in accordance with President Ulysses Grant's “Peace Policy.”²¹ The death of Nathan C. Meeker, “an honest, humanitarian Indian agent” who insisted that the Utes “forsake their old ways and become farmers,” led to policy changes.²² His death, which led to the “Ute War,” was seen as a clear signal that inexperienced, humanitarian focused Christians should not be charged with overseeing government policy and reservations.²³ The Dawes Act reversed Grant's policy of encouraging missionaries to become educational agents.

Second Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt would become a major player in the Boarding School movement.²⁴ Pratt served at Fort Sill on the Western Oklahoma plains where he gained firsthand knowledge of the legitimacy of Native American grievances in the “Indian Wars.” Among these grievances were broken treaties and the problematic system of rations. Despite these oft-violent encounters, Pratt's deep-rooted religious faith influenced his view of Native Americans. Likewise, as an officer in the Tenth Calvary –

²¹ Reservation officials were initially called “agents” but the title was later changed to “superintendent.”

²² Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 5.

²³ Likewise, news of the 1879 “Ute Massacre” thrust the “Indian question” into full-fledged national debate. Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 5.

²⁴ During Pratt's career educating Native Americans his military rank continued to improve. Although he started in education as a Second Lieutenant, he was a Captain for most of this time, and later Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, and Brigadier General upon his retirement.

famously called the “Buffalo Soldiers” – he thought frequently about issues of race.²⁵

Pratt believed that the Native American race had always “been treated as inimical and alien to our interest and has never been admitted to the opportunities to become the useful fellow citizens we extend to the immigrating races.”²⁶ If given the opportunity, and with proper education, Pratt believed that Native Americans could become successful members of American society.

It was Pratt's military experience that formed many of his views and prompted him to test his ideas. He was given the opportunity to put these beliefs into practice as warden of a group of prisoners at Fort Marion in Florida, where he experimented with Native American education. Pratt developed a curriculum of military drills and discipline, rudimentary English, and Bible lessons, hoping to “kill all that is Indian.” The experiment was a well-documented success. Illustrations of reformed prisoners appeared in *Harper's Weekly* and attracted visits from prominent government officials and educators.²⁷ Hoping to make a bigger impact on the “Indian Question” through education instead of warfare, Pratt convinced the federal government to let him open a school for Native Americans at an abandoned barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Pratt saw boarding school education as the answer to the “Indian Question” and in 1880 wrote to Senator Henry Dawes encouraging him to support the cause:

If a majority of the Senate and House concur in the views you expressed upon the Ute Bill day before yesterday, in reference to the education of Indian youth, and

²⁵ Sally Jenkins, *The Real All Americans: The Team that Changed A Game, A Nation, A People* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 23-27.

²⁶ Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*, ed. Robert M. Utley (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003) 116.

²⁷ Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 56-57.

will legislate accordingly, the “beginning of the end” of Indian troubles is reached. Education and industrial training for Indian youth, *for all Indian youth*, will, in a very short period, end Indian wars and, in not a very long period, end appropriations to feed and clothe them. I don't believe anything else will.

With great respect,
R.H. Pratt²⁸

Dawes and other legislators eventually backed Pratt, approving funding for a vast boarding school infrastructure. By 1902, there were twenty-five off-reservation Native American boarding schools in operation.²⁹ These schools formed the backbone of United States Native American education and were operated by the Office of Indian Affairs.³⁰

Pratt recruited students from tribes all across the nation. He promised tribal leaders and parents that education would improve their condition, providing better lives for their children. Following the model of the Hampton Institute for African Americans in Virginia, the school opened in 1879. Its curriculum mirrored that of his Fort Marion prison camp, focusing on military drills, discipline, hygiene, and elementary English.

At the core of the curriculum were the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. Pratt believed that “when the Declaration announced, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' it meant nothing unless it included the native Indian.”³¹ In his autobiography Pratt outlines his views on education and why it was the best solution to the “Indian Question.” He

²⁸ Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 252.

²⁹ Scott Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School 1898 - 1933* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 10.

³⁰ The Office of Indian Affairs began operation in 1824 but was later renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1947. Both will be referred to BIA hereafter.

³¹ Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 268.

desired a system that would allow Native Americans “to compete and prosper as 'self-determining' people through equality of intelligence.”³² Yet, in order to do so, their educational system must also be practical and efficient, which discounted a “system of education for each of their more than 100 different languages.”³³ Pratt created a much more rigid, structured schedule of classes and exercises based on his military background. The students were housed in a barracks, forbidden to speak their native languages, given haircuts, uniforms, and new Americanized names.

Myriam Vuckovic offers a glimpse inside the daily schedule and activities for students at one such school, the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, for the 1919-20 school year:

Daily Program – week days	
Forenoon	
Rising bell and reveille	5:30
Gymnasium and military drill	6:00
Bugle call; morning roll call	6:25
Breakfast	6:30
Band practice, first band (morning academic boys)	7:00-8:00
Care of quarters	7:00
Warning whistle for Industrial Department	7:15
Second whistle. Instruction in Industrial Departments	7:30-8:00
Productive work begins in Industrial Departments	8:00
School bell, academic	7:55
Academic Department begins sessions	8:00
Midday whistle. All Departments close	11:30
Mess Call; midday roll call	11:55
Dinner	12:00
Afternoon	
Warning whistle for Industrial Department	12:55
School bell	1:05
Whistle. Industrial and Academic Departments begin sessions	1:10

³² Ibid, 269.

³³ Ibid.

Academic Department closes	4:10
Band Practice, second band (afternoon academic boys)	4:10
Athletics for boys	4:20-5:20
Gymnasium classes and bathing for girls	4:00-5:30
Whistle. Industrial Departments close	5:10
Mess call; role call.	5:50
Supper	6:00-6:30
Evening sessions	7:30-8:30
Tattoo	8:45
Call to quarters	9:00
Taps	9:15 ³⁴

Saturdays and Sundays were less structured but still consisted of a half-day's work and church activities. To preserve decorum, free time was limited and genders were separated.

Military methods were efficient and helped minimally trained faculty members to maintain order. The military framework also served another purpose: displaying the progress of Native American students. Military training drills and marching, however, were not exclusively symbolic exercises for public relations; they were important parts of the curriculum.³⁵

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) incorporated the spirit of the Haskell schedule. These drills emphasized discipline and control and reflected the high moral and civilized standards of the military: uniformed dress, order, obedience, and hygiene. Military training was a means of acquiring the rote knowledge of physical education. Lieutenant C.D. Parkhurst, in an essay on “The Practical Education of the Soldier” for the *Journal of the Military Service Institute of the United States* asserted that physical education contributed to “quick and unthinking obedience to orders” among

³⁴ Quoted from 1919-1920 Haskell School Calendar in Myriam Vuckovic, *Voices from Haskell: Indian Students between Two Worlds, 1884-1928* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008) 91-92.

³⁵ Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 79.

soldiers.³⁶ Desiring similar results, Native American boarding schools emphasized physical education. Military drill was a practical way to introduce and enforce adherence to the tenets of white civilization and accelerate the process of assimilation.

The concept of Muscular Christianity had an effect on Pratt and the BIA's view of physical education. Advocates of Muscular Christianity believed that "strenuous exertion on the playing field and the development of devout Christian youth" were linked.³⁷ In the late nineteenth century Theodore Roosevelt and other prominent politicians, theologians, and military men fervently championed this doctrine. Consequently, the line between physical education and athletics became increasingly blurred. For many, athletic games were an extension of physical education, invoking many of the same positive qualities as military training.

Military and sports historian Donald Mrozek explores the link between physical exercise and formal sports. He demonstrates how General George Albert Wingate "promoted military training in the public schools of New York City, coupling it with the more palatable pursuit of sports."³⁸ Physical education in schools mirrored military training drills and physical education and provided the foundation for the incorporation of formalized sports in the school setting. Native American boarding schools followed this trend.

Steeped in the Muscular Christian tradition, competitive sports programs at Native American boarding schools were enthusiastically promoted as a means of teaching

³⁶ Donald J. Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality 1880-1910* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 53.

³⁷ Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 98.

³⁸ Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality 1880-1910*, 61.

character, sportsmanship, and civility. Sports chosen for Native American schools were based on what was “most prominent in the dominant society” and the availability of local teams against whom to compete.³⁹ The concept of competition, although hesitantly accepted by Pratt and the BIA, added another dynamic to athletics. The Muscular Christian concern with manliness, however, gave way to competition and provided opportunities for individuals and teams to prove their self-worth.⁴⁰ Games and competitive sports were intended to illustrate the discipline and character taught to Native American athletes.⁴¹ Thus, sports became a public relations tool and a means to showcase the progress of assimilation policy. Notably, traditional Native American games were not included.

Carlisle in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and Haskell in Lawrence, Kansas were the flagship boarding schools, featuring nationally prominent teams that successfully competed against the best college teams in the country – thus offering exposure to Native American athletes. Such exposure helped launch the successful careers of Jim Thorpe and Charles Albert Bender. While on one hand athletic competition placed Native American athletes in the limelight, it often did so with a “heightened attention to the players themselves as biologically defined racial 'others.’”⁴² Yet at the same time sport

³⁹ Joseph B. Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1988), 178.

⁴⁰ For more on the concept and application of muscular Christianity see: Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁴¹ An unintended consequence of competition was racial pride and a means “to show what an Indian can do” which challenged the racial hierarchy. Thus Native Americans themselves mediated the Muscular Christian aims of sport and competition.

⁴² John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 765.

allowed students to utilize their own racial identities as a source of pride and confidence.⁴³ Racial identity and sports success fused together teammates and helped students successfully adapt to the stressful and foreign boarding school climate. Bonds created by athletics – for both teammates and fans – were integral for student success.

The boarding school experience however, was quite devastating. The schools' purpose was to re-educate Native Americans by extracting them from their communities and families and stripping them of their culture, language, and religion. As Historian Scott Riney writes, the aim of boarding schools was to “kill the Indian, and save the man.”⁴⁴

In important ways, sport was a part of this process. It provided discipline and proved manliness; it was a socially acceptable way to pacify and change the alleged erratic wildness of Native Americans. Likewise, Americans' fascination with sport aided government boarding schools in effectively displaying the progress and intelligence of Native Americans. Yet, mainstream Anglo society, like the Progressive project in general, had a difficult time vacating long embedded and accepted scientific racism and discrimination in its representations of Native Americans and sport. A three-part article appearing in 1922 (decades after the establishment of the boarding school sports model) entitled “Racial Traits in Athletics” in the *American Physical Education Review* mirrored the scientific racism and racial hierarchies espoused in ethnographic displays and Wild West shows. The article, written by prominent Michigan coach and physical educator

⁴³ Ibid, 74-75.

⁴⁴ Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School 1898-1933*, 8.

Elmer D. Mitchell, evaluated the tendencies and make-up of athletes based on broad ethnic categories.⁴⁵ The ethnic categories were extensive and included: The Scandinavian, The Latin, The Pole, The Dutch, The English, The Irish, The American, The German, The Jew, The Greek, The Oriental, The Slav and Fin, The South American, and The Indian. When discussing “The Indian,” common tropes from popular culture and scientific racism appear: Mitchell compliments Native Americans on their stoicism and ability to endure pain. And, in terms of their place in the broad racial hierarchy, he writes:

Physically, the Indian has a tall, well-knit structure. His one failing as an athlete is psychological, in that he is not at home outside of his own environment. He is clannish by nature; the Reservation is only a contributing cause. While it is a common thing to see a negro teaming with white men, it is seldom that we see an Indian in that situation. The negro is willing to accept an inferior status the Indian is not. Therefore, the lone Indian finds it hard to mix because of racial difference, and yet his pride will not permit him to take the easiest way out of it—the way of the negro.⁴⁶

Despite the claims of progressives, the boarding school was a frontal attack on Native American culture and identity that offered little in terms of the inclusionary promise of assimilation. Scholars have recently noted, however, that significant retention of Native American identity despite the press of the assimilationist campaign occurred in the boarding school experience. The conversation has shifted and now scholars seek to understand the cultural survival and resistance strategies in boarding schools by examining student identity formation and community building. John Bloom argues that sport was one site where this took place within in the school. As K. Tsianina Lomawaima

⁴⁵ Topics discussed included mental and psychological abilities, physical strength and agility. Mitchell notes that some of the article's content comes from his own observations and discussions with other coaches.

⁴⁶ Elmer D. Mitchell, “Racial Traits in Athletics,” *American Physical Education Review* 27 (March, April, May 1922), 198.

states: “schools often strengthened rather than dissolved tribal identity.”⁴⁷ This middle ground may have been especially empowering for those involved in sport. A select number of Native American athletes used sport as a venue to gain entry into the dominant society. At the same time sport allowed Native American athletes to carve out a personal identity based, at some level, on connections to Native American traditions.

School athletics appealed to the heritage of Native Americans. As Joseph Oxendine argues in his *American Indian Sports Heritage* regarding the meaning of sports to native culture: “Sports were often used for recreational purposes and for social relaxation, they also extended deeply into the fabric of the culture.”⁴⁸ To be certain, just as there is great diversity of Native peoples and culture, so too is there diversity in their uses of sport. Sport was a cultural learning experience that varied among different tribes. Foot racing was popular among many Southwestern tribes while other regions were more interested in games of chance such as dice and stick games. Ball games, like lacrosse and shinny, also attracted widespread interest and evolved into modern sports although these traditional sports were not a part of the boarding school experience.⁴⁹

Boarding schools built from this cultural heritage by offering athletics. Considering the traditional importance and meaning of sport, Native American students took quickly to athletics and excelled in competitions. This excellence promoted ownership and expression of self and identity. Athletics provided a space for negotiation

⁴⁷ K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), xiii.

⁴⁸ Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage*, xiii.

⁴⁹ Shinny is similar to modern day field hockey and ice hockey. For more on sports played by Native Americans see Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage*.

within the strict world of boarding school assimilation, and in relation to the Indianness and expectations assigned by broader society. At the same time, the vigor exhibited by Native Americans toward sport was co-opted by mainstream society and continues to be perpetuated through use of mascots like the Cleveland Indians.⁵⁰

As an emerging popular stage, sports provided an enterprising place for Native Americans to blend their own cultural backgrounds with the popular representations assigned to them. Philip Deloria explains:

Sports served as a meeting place for transformation and persistence; for distinct, even mutually exclusive Indian and white interpretations; and for shared understandings. The fluidity of this meeting ground allowed whites to bracket racial discrimination (even as they practiced it), Indians to move more confidently into non-Indian society, and a modern bicultural athletic world to come into being.⁵¹

This meeting place, intentionally created or not, was the product of boarding school athletic teams. Sport was a place that combined the differing cultural and scientific views of Native Americans with their own cultural familiarity of games and physical activity. Representations of Native Americans as fighting savages, the scientific racism that supported racial hierarchies, and assimilation via the ‘uplift’ of the boarding school provide context for the emergence of organized sport and help explain the life and meaning of the Native American icon, Jim Thorpe and other Native American athletes of

⁵⁰ Cleveland’s mascot continues to be the Indians, and nearly every professional Native American athlete garnered the title “Chief” during their playing career. This overlap with permanency helps explain the power of scientific racism, and the lasting image of the “Fighting Sioux” that lasted well into the twentieth century. The issue of American Indian mascots remains central to the lingering legacy of their popular representation. For more on the mascot issues see: C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sport* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001). For more on the lingering representations of Native Americans see: C. Richard King, *Colonial Discourses, Collective Memories, And the Exhibition of Native American Cultures and Histories in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

⁵¹ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 131.

the early twentieth century.

Many excellent Native American athletes emerged in the early twentieth century including Charles Bender, Louis Sockalexis, and John Tortes Meyers. Jim Thorpe, however, was the overarching Native American athlete of this era. Thorpe stands out not only as the leading Native American icon, but also as one of the central sporting icons of the day. Indeed, Thorpe was selected “Greatest Athlete of the Half Century” by 252 out of 391 AP voters in a 1950 poll.⁵² Thorpe’s overwhelming support in the 1950 AP placed him above every prominent white athlete, including the second and third place finishers Babe Ruth and Jack Dempsey.⁵³ Thorpe’s achievements in football, baseball and the Olympics cemented his status. Clearly sport provided a vehicle for Native American Jim Thorpe to enter the consciousness of a highly racialized American society.

Thorpe's rise to athletic fame started at an early age. As a young boy in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma his father taught him to hunt, swim, and wrestle. By all accounts Thorpe’s father was an impressive athlete and Jim often bragged that his father was “the undisputed champion in sprinting, high jumping, broad jumping, and horseback riding.”⁵⁴ As a youth, Jim tried to emulate his father, competing in various games and competition and usually joined by his twin brother Charles and a legion of local boys. Although the activities were rigorous, sportsmanship and fair play were always enforced. Camaraderie and satisfaction of physical activity and games characterized Thorpe’s early life. For the

⁵² Bob Bernotas, *Jim Thorpe: Sac and Fox Athlete* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992), 95.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ R.W. Wheeler, *Jim Thorpe: World's Greatest Athlete* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 11.

first eight years of his life the brothers were inseparable, but tragedy struck as Charles died. Charles' death left Jim distraught and alone.⁵⁵

Following Charles' death, Thorpe became disinterested in school. He ran away a few times until his father sent him to the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. If the Haskell experience did not change the direction of Thorpe's life, it at least foreshadowed it. Although he did not stay at Haskell long, the school opened his eyes to new possibilities in sport. Athletics seemed to make life better for Thorpe. His grades improved and his outgoing nature returned. Thorpe used games to help him adjust to being away from home and he began to envision a life centered on sport. "It was at Haskell that I saw my first football game and developed a love for it," Thorpe would later write.⁵⁶ At Haskell, Thorpe became aware of the Carlisle Indian School and its famed athletic program.

Thorpe left Haskell in 1901 and returned to Oklahoma shortly before his mother died. When the teacher at the local school, Walter White, organized athletic competitions and teams, Thorpe again thrived and it became difficult to keep him away from school. After this time back home, where sport was crucial to his school attendance, Thorpe enrolled at Carlisle. He agonized about leaving his family but the lure of sport was too strong.

Thorpe was again traumatized by death when two months later his father died. Returning to Oklahoma was not an option. Thorpe became disenchanted and withdrawn.

⁵⁵ Bernotas, *Jim Thorpe*, 27-31.

⁵⁶ Kate Bufford, *Native American Son: The Life and Sporting Legend of Jim Thorpe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 28.

Carlisle reacted by sending him to live with various families in their Outing Program where students lived with families and worked as hired help.⁵⁷ Carlisle split the earnings between the school and savings accounts given to students upon graduation.⁵⁸ Some families treated their workers well, while others did not. Thorpe spent the next three years bouncing between different Outing Program families, sometimes running away to flee uncomfortable situations, which followed the pattern of behavior from his early childhood. At other stops, Thorpe endeared himself to the families and resumed his physical lifestyle.

Once back at Carlisle full-time, Thorpe was punished for his erratic behavior and told his education was going to take longer than originally planned. Disappointed and upset, Thorpe followed one of his established patterns and turned to sport. Thorpe funneled his energy toward athletics as a way to prove himself and make school officials “sorry for having treated me that way.”⁵⁹ Jim Thorpe consistently saw sport as a way to navigate his experience and assert his own agency and in no time, Thorpe asserted his presence in the Carlisle athletic program.

Thorpe immediately caught the eye of Carlisle coach Glenn S. “Pop” Warner. One afternoon while walking past track practice, Thorpe observed jumpers for several minutes and asked to attempt the high jump. Still in his work clothes, he easily cleared five feet, nine inches, breaking the school record. When Warner sent for him the next day, Thorpe,

⁵⁷ The Outing Program was an essential part of the industrial education offered at Carlisle and helped give Native Americans experience in mainstream society. It was but one of the many steps of the assimilation process seen as helping Native Americans understand and become more comfortable with mainstream society so they would leave “savagery” behind and integrate after graduation.

⁵⁸ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 36-41.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 42.

thinking he was in trouble, promised he could do better in proper attire.⁶⁰ Instead he was asked to join the track team. Soon after this incident, Thorpe was drawn to football, his sport of choice. Ever since Haskell, Thorpe had dreamed of becoming a football star. He recognized how society revered college football stars and he longed for the adulation and respect they received.

Thorpe's time at Carlisle roughly corresponded with the early development of intercollegiate football. The first game occurred in 1869 and by the 1890s, the game had experienced rapid expansion and widespread popularity. The early game was violent, disregarded protective gear, and relied heavily on brutal mass-momentum plays. Several deaths resulted each year, spurring debate among school administrators about the safety and educational merit of the sport.⁶¹

Leading Muscular Christians like Richard Henry Pratt and Theodore Roosevelt remained committed to the game. For these advocates, the sport taught discipline and character and was an expression of the manliness needed in American society. Critics, such as Harvard President Charles Eliot, saw the sport as violent, conducive to immoral behavior and a distraction from academics. A disparate figure from Eliot, boxer John L. Sullivan joined the criticism. Sullivan argued that boxing did not "compare in roughness or danger with football [because] in sparring, you know what you are doing. You know what your opponent is trying to do, and he's right in front of you, and there's only one. In

⁶⁰ Ibid, 43.

⁶¹ Davies, *Sports in American Life, A History*, 64-82.

football, say there's twenty one people trying to do you.”⁶² This early debate resulted in a series of rules changes and the creation of an oversight institution, the forerunner of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).⁶³

This debate and especially the rule changes affected Thorpe's career. Mass momentum plays such as the famous flying wedge were banned and the previously prohibited forward pass was legalized. These new rules, along with other minor changes made between 1905 and 1920, established the modern game. Led by the innovative Pop Warner, the Carlisle Indians responded quickly to the various adjustments.

Pop Warner and Carlisle immediately embraced the forward pass as well as many trick plays that emphasized speed and deception.⁶⁴ Writing at the end of Thorpe's first season, 1907, Caspar Whitney, owner and editor of *Outing* magazine – a leading sporting publication of the day – noted: “Carlisle's game was conceived under new rules and was played brilliantly from first to last as a team, as well as individually, especially with regard to the spectacular formers Houser [sic], Exendine and Mount Pleasant. They use the forward pass successfully as well as more persistently than any other team of the year.”⁶⁵ William Knox made similar observations in *Harper's Weekly*. In fact many leading coaches and journalists took note of the team's “eagerness to try new ideas, new plays.”⁶⁶

By embracing the forward pass and the new rules the Indians of Carlisle thrived in

⁶² Quoted in: Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 222.

⁶³ Davies, *Sports in American Life*, 64-82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 77-82.

⁶⁵ Caspar Whitney, “The View-Point,” *Outing*, December 1907.

⁶⁶ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 61.

the world of college football. Jim Thorpe had long used sport as a path of mediation in his own life, including the dislocation of the boarding school experience. Carlisle football, however, transcended this personal agency and became a place of negotiation where Native Americans mediated the representations of broader society.

Sally Jenkins makes clear that the Carlisle approach to the game was more than a simple eagerness for competitive advantage. Although Carlisle's players were often younger and smaller than their collegiate competitors, they were faster, more agile, and fueled by an intense racial pride.⁶⁷ This racial pride evoked images of the fierce Native American and reframed football as another contest of the races. Thorpe characterized himself and his teammates as “the descendants of the losing race [who] came east and...played football against the descendants of their conquerors with the same...fierceness of their ancestors.”⁶⁸ Warner agreed, explaining, “they believed the armed contests between the red man and the white had never been waged on equal terms” until the advent of sports.⁶⁹

No athletic event symbolized these feelings more than Carlisle's 1912 game against West Point Military Academy. The press took note, “it was a game such as the old reservation has seldom, if ever, staged. In a way it carried a distinct shock to the 3,000 spectators who had firmly believed that the big Army team had passed the stage where such a thing might happen.”⁷⁰ Indeed, expectations for the West Point team were high. Only a generation removed from the Indian Wars, Carlisle took on a West Point team that

⁶⁷ See Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*.

⁶⁸ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 61.

⁶⁹ Quoted in: Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 7.

⁷⁰ “Thorpe's Indians Crush West Point,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1912, S1.

featured future generals, notably Dwight D. Eisenhower. Yet, Carlisle had its own star too.

The prior summer, Jim Thorpe garnered international acclaim as the “greatest athlete in the world” for his gold medal and world record performances in the 1912 Olympic decathlon and pentathlon.⁷¹ Upon returning home he was triumphantly paraded through the streets of New York with his fellow Olympians. Decried the “world's greatest all-around athlete” in the *New York Times*' parade announcement, Thorpe attracted the loudest cheers.⁷² During the parade, Thorpe was described as being “true to his race's tradition...rarely ever permitt[ing] himself to depart from his accustomed stoicism.”⁷³ Regardless of the stereotypical tropes, Thorpe's athletic ability remained central to his identity at the parade and in newsprint. Thorpe was an athlete first and an Indian second. Stoic as he may have been, Thorpe was unaccustomed to being in the spotlight and did not always enjoy it.

The press coverage however, continued. Newspaper interest grew on the heels of Thorpe's Olympic feat. This coverage, combined with Carlisle's undefeated record, incited profound interest in the 1912 football contest against West Point. Carlisle won the game decisively and Thorpe once again dominated the headlines. The following day the *New York Times* proclaimed “Thorpe's Indians Crush West Point” noting “the Indians

⁷¹ The 1912 Olympics firmly established Jim Thorpe as the “World Greatest Athlete” when the King of Sweden told Thorpe, “Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world!” Thorpe's Decathlon record was not broken until 1932.

⁷² “Olympic Victors to Parade,” *New York Times*, 24 August 1912, 18.

⁷³ “Olympic Champions Cheered and Dined,” *New York Times*, 25 August 1912, 4.

simply outclassed the Cadets.”⁷⁴ Thorpe took center stage in the contest, as expected. Indeed, “The big Indian Captain added more lustre to his already brilliant record, and at times the game itself was almost forgotten while the spectators gazed on Thorpe, the individual, to wonder at his prowess.”⁷⁵ The game “was not the usual spectacle of the man with the ball outdistancing his opponents by circling them,” but rather “a dodging game in which Thorpe matched himself against an entire team and proved the master.”⁷⁶ Thorpe took expectations head on, dodging around them, rather than fearfully running away from them. The Carlisle team mediated the victory with its play on the field, while the press interpreted the victory through the superior athletic ability of Jim Thorpe, the individual. Indeed, according to the press it was Thorpe’s athletic ability alone that carried the team to victory, not the team’s skill and ingenuity.

Both the Olympics and Carlisle athletics, however, demonstrate that Native Americans were excelling at athletic events. That this excellence was framed within lingering ideas of the warrior spirit is important, but should not obviate the empowerment inherent in these events. Indeed, amidst the expectations attached to the ‘spectacle’ of the ethnographic other, Jim Thorpe and other Native American athletes, intimate with the often-debilitating boarding school experience, carved out spaces of autonomy and negotiated their experience and representations through the agency of sport. Although neither of these events escaped racialized representations, the empowering moments of the Olympics and the Carlisle victory over West Point demonstrate that Native Americans

⁷⁴ “Thorpe's Indians Crush West Point,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1912, S1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

through sport directly mediated their experience and larger representations.

After the climax of the West Point victory, controversy haunted Thorpe's success, changing the trajectory of his athletic career and deeply affecting the mediation of his sporting experience. Within a matter of months the three-time All America halfback was mired in controversy amid accusations of professionalism, which at the time was considered a serious violation of the rules of amateurism by the pious Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Stemming from accusations that Thorpe was paid for playing minor league baseball while working in Carlisle's Outing Program, the scandal undermined Thorpe's athletic achievements.

With no precedent established for how to handle such a matter, the AAU preemptively took action. Their actions disregarded the procedures, rules, and bylaws outlined in the 1912 Olympic rules, which stated: "Objections to the qualifications of a competitor must be made in writing...to the Swedish Olympic Committee...before the lapse of thirty days from the distribution of the prizes."⁷⁷ Likewise, the Olympic rules established a "Court of Appeals" to hear complaints about the "interpretation and application of the rules governing the Games" but such appeals must be submitted within an hour's time of the event.⁷⁸ Because the situation was unique, disagreement among whose role it was to make the final ruling defaulted to the AAU, which undoubtedly added insult to injury to Thorpe.⁷⁹

With so much of his personal identity framed in athletic success, the incident

⁷⁷ Quoted in: Bufford, *Native American Son*, 163.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 164.

⁷⁹ After over seventy years of debate and appeals, Thorpe was posthumously returned his medals on January 19, 1983.

devastated Thorpe as he went from “worldwide adulation” to “alone and abandoned.”⁸⁰ Throughout the process, he owned up to the allegations and blamed it on his naiveté, yet Thorpe had a few defenders. The *Los Angeles Times* was critical of the AAU's overt, rigid interpretation of the concept of amateurism; “It should be plain to any man with an ounce of brains in his head, who has ever had any connection with the AAU, that many of these so-called amateurs are the rankest kind of professionals.”⁸¹ The article prophetically said “nothing in the world will efface” Thorpe's records.⁸²

Thorpe's image suffered. He was no longer taken seriously as a candidate for college coaching positions and his Carlisle experience was over. The combination of these two factors forced Thorpe to embrace full-fledged professionalism.⁸³ At the time, Major League Baseball was the only formidable professional sports league. Thus Thorpe turned to baseball in 1913 and signed with the New York Giants.

Unlike African-Americans, Native Americans were permitted to play in Major League Baseball. The first Native American player, Louis Sockalexis, debuted in 1897.⁸⁴ By 1913, the New York Giants already had a Native American player, catcher John Tortes Meyers. Likewise, Charles Albert Bender, better known by the racialized

⁸⁰ Ibid, 168.

⁸¹ Quoted from *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 28, 1913 in Bufford, *Native American Son*, 164.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ The professionalism that Thorpe was accused of was nowhere near the level of Major League Baseball. While accounts vary, he likely made little more than enough to live during the two summers that he played minor league baseball.

⁸⁴ Although forgotten by many, Louis Sockalexis' lives on the mythology surrounding the Cleveland Indians. Although named the Cleveland Spiders when he played, many argue that new team name was inspired by the play of Sockalexis. See Jeffrey Powers-Beck, *The American Indian Integration of Baseball* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

name of “Chief” Bender, was one of Philadelphia Athletics' most dependable pitchers.⁸⁵ During twelve years with the Athletics from 1903 to 1914, Bender led the team to three World Championships and five World Series appearances.⁸⁶ These players had already negotiated Major League Baseball and served as proof that Native Americans could succeed in professional sport.

Athletics' Manager, Connie Mack, treated Bender with dignity, understood his unique abilities, and trusted him with various responsibilities, which included occasionally coaching first base. Mack called Bender by his middle name Albert, and valued him based on his athletic ability: “If I had all the men I've ever handled and they were in their prime and there was one game I wanted to win above all others...Albert would be my man.”⁸⁷

Bender, however, did not receive the same treatment from the public who called him “Chief” and greeted him with war whoops. This treatment dominated Bender's public representation and even his Baseball Hall of Fame plaque denotes “Chief” under his name.⁸⁸ Credit for Bender's success was usually given to the talents of his white manager, Mack. The racialized spectacle of the ethnographic other constrained Bender as evidenced in the article “Glory for the Indian” that appeared in the October 21, 1905 issue of popular *Sporting Life*:

Bender according to reports, is a typical representation of his race – being just sufficiently below the white man's standard to be coddled into doing anything that his manager might suggest – and to the proper exercise of this influence on the

⁸⁵ Powers-Beck, *The American Indian Integration of Baseball*, 69.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Quoted in: Powers-Beck, *The American Indian Integration of Baseball*, 69.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 76.

part of Manager Connie Mack much of the Indian's success as a twirler is due. Like the negro on the stage, who... 'will work himself to death if you jolly him,' the Indian can be 'conned' into take up any sort of burden.⁸⁹

Bender, like Thorpe, attended Carlisle, and his professional baseball career exposed the prevailing expectations facing Native American athletes. Bender often warned that achieving agency in professional baseball was difficult for Native Americans: “[I] wouldn't advise any of the students at Carlisle to become a professional base ball player. It's a hard road to travel.”⁹⁰ Bender minimized his Indianness and wanted to be appreciated in the same way that Connie Mack saw his value. Bender told the press following the 1905 World Series “I do not want my name presented to the public as an Indian but as a pitcher.”⁹¹ Achieving this goal was difficult, as Charles Albert Bender appeared caught between two worlds. He realized that embracing his Indianness might have affirmed the pervading racialized caricature, diminishing his search for agency.

Another Native American, John Tortes Meyers, negotiated his professional baseball experience differently. Unlike Thorpe and Bender, Meyers did not attend boarding school. Meyers dropped out of high school in California and began playing semi-pro baseball in the Southwest. There he met a Dartmouth player using a fake name to skirt the rules of amateurism. The new friend helped Meyers forge a high school diploma and enroll at Dartmouth. Once at Dartmouth, Meyers joined the football and baseball teams, as well as the Kappa Kappa Kappa fraternity. Despite his limited educational background, Meyers made good marks, particularly enjoying the subject of

⁸⁹ Ibid, 73.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 72.

⁹¹ Quoted in: Powers-Beck, *The American Indian Integration of Baseball*, 72.

history. Disinterested in football and tempted by the allure of big money, Meyers left Dartmouth early to play professional baseball. Meyers spent three years playing for various minor league teams before making his Major League debut for the New York Giants in 1909.⁹²

Unlike Philadelphia Manager Connie Mack, Giants Manager John “Muggsy” McGraw was less a gentleman. It was common for McGraw to verbally abuse his players and shout racial epithets at opponents. Not surprisingly Meyers’ relationship with McGraw was less than smooth. McGraw frequently over-ruled and often outright usurped Meyer's judgment in calling pitches.⁹³

Despite such friction, Meyers endeared himself to McGraw. In one important sense, Meyers’ background at Dartmouth and his experience on the semipro baseball field made him familiar with white society. Meyers was more confident in his Indianness and negotiations with the larger society. As a student of history he was well versed in Native American issues and he identified openly with his Native American ancestry. Instead of seeing his Indianness as a dangerous reification of the public images of the Native American, he challenged the position of Native Americans in mainstream society by using his baseball fame as a platform to educate the public about Native American issues.⁹⁴

Jim Thorpe was less proficient in baseball than football. Thorpe had limited

⁹² Ibid, 78-85.

⁹³ Ibid, 84-85.

⁹⁴ Powers-Beck, *The American Indian Integration of Baseball*, 78.

exposure to baseball while at Carlisle as the school dropped baseball in 1910.⁹⁵ Regardless, his iconic status and its potential effect on gate receipts made Thorpe's signing with the New York Giants in 1913 a big event. Not long after joining the Giants, Thorpe married his Carlisle sweetheart Iva Miller. They spent their honeymoon on the Giants and White Sox World Tour. While the tour was intended to expose the world to baseball, Thorpe's international Olympic fame made him the primary international draw. To the surprise of many of their foreign mainstreams, neither Thorpe nor his wife had dark skin like they anticipated. As a result, some countries altered their conceptions of Native Americans.⁹⁶

After the tour Thorpe found limited success on the major league playing field. Thorpe and McGraw feuded frequently and the press criticized Thorpe as failing to live up to his talent. While Thorpe's playing struggles continued, the birth of Jim Jr. in 1915 brightened his personal life. Thorpe biographer Kate Bufford describes Jim and Jim Jr. as two of a kind, "laughing, playing, teasing, like twins."⁹⁷ Indeed, being surrounded by his wife and his son energized Thorpe's life. He was more jovial and at-ease in the public spotlight; his life finally attained a sense of normalcy. Indiana University offered Thorpe a football coaching position in 1915 during the baseball offseason. Although the Indiana team won only one game the following campaign, the job allowed Thorpe to return to his first love, football.

Jim Thorpe loved football and football fans loved him. Known for his prowess on

⁹⁵ Ibid, 88.

⁹⁶ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 185-186.

⁹⁷ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 192.

the field, teams often persuaded Thorpe to give punting and other exhibitions during halftimes.⁹⁸ Testament to this popularity was a movie short, “Always Kickin’,” released in 1932 which starred Thorpe. In the comedy film, Thorpe portrays himself as a football coach teaching players how to kick the ball. Although much older, Thorpe easily outperforms all of the prospects. Instead of depicting Thorpe’s Indianness primarily as a spectacle, the film capitalized on both his fame and enduring athletic ability.⁹⁹

This same combination of talent and fame made Thorpe a valuable commodity to the early Ohio professional football teams. The working class Ohio towns of Canton, Portsmouth, Dayton, Columbus, Youngstown, and Massillon laid the foundation of professional football. It took little convincing for Thorpe to resign his coaching position at Indiana University and take up the professional game.¹⁰⁰

Now playing both baseball and football professionally, Thorpe focused primarily on football, often recruiting old Carlisle teammates to help coach and play on his teams. While the satisfaction for Thorpe and the other Native Americans on the teams was not as powerful as the Carlisle-West Point experience, football once again empowered Thorpe. The sport was his true athletic love and the one place where Thorpe reigned supreme.¹⁰¹ The uncertain nature of early professional football, however, as well as personal tragedy, soon dragged him down.

Jim Jr.'s death at age two devastated Thorpe and fractured his marriage with Iva.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 196.

⁹⁹ “Always Kickin’,” James Gleason, dir., 1932, *American Indian Film Gallery*, accessed 8 March 2011 from <http://www.jfredmacdonald.com/aifg/playaifg29_alwayskickin.htm>

¹⁰⁰ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 200-207.

¹⁰¹ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 208.

Thorpe typically turned to sport to deal with death and disappointment. But the 1918 football season was canceled due to the First World War and hurt his economic position. Jim Jr.'s death exacerbated Thorpe's drinking, another factor in his 1925 divorce from Iva. And none of these factors helped his tempestuous relationship with Giants Manager McGraw, who sold his contract to Boston two months into the season.¹⁰² To support his family, Thorpe bounced around the major and minor leagues with moderate success before ending his baseball career after playing eleven seasons in 1922.¹⁰³

The year 1922 also marked Thorpe's peculiar flirtation with an all Native American professional football team: the Oorang Indians. Although Thorpe's career was much more broad and his fame larger than the Oorang Indians, the experiences surrounding the team are telling of Thorpe's and, by extension, Native American athletes' negotiation with society's expectations. More important than the athletic prowess of the all-Indian Oorang team, however, was the emphasis on spectacle. The Oorang's 'games' became as much a spectacle as an athletic event. Walter Lingo, the proprietor of a large Airedale breeding kennel in LaRue, Ohio, owned the team. He used the team as a marketing tool for his kennel, and welcomed the spectacle. Charles Fruehling Springwood explains:

First, they were expected to play nearly all their games on the road, in the larger cities of their opponents, since contests in tiny LaRue (lacking even a football field) would hardly serve the purpose of advertising Airedales. Second, during halftime and frequently even before the games began, the players were required to dress in Indian regalia and emerge on the field to stage particular versions of Native dances and war chants, as well as to demonstrate the abilities of Airedales

¹⁰² Ibid, 213-216.

¹⁰³ Powers-Beck, *The American Indian Integration of Baseball*, 89.

by leading the animals to perform stunts.¹⁰⁴

Like earlier displays of Native American culture, such as those in the Wild West shows and Westerns, the Oorang Indians played to popularly imagined representations, which was Lingo's intention. While certainly Thorpe's iconic status as an athlete was important, he, like the others, were swept into the expectation of the spectacle of Indianness.

Recent scholarship has tried to make sense of the Oorang Indians and what they mean to the representations of Native Americans. While initially it appears puzzling and ironic that Native Americans would indulge in perpetuating false views of their culture, Gerald Gems suggests, "Thorpe [and the team] simply appropriated the negative images for their own benefit, not unlike the trickster."¹⁰⁵ Philip Deloria explains that "like the Globetrotters, who fused athletic exhibition with a familiar minstrelsy tradition, Indian athletes were often expected to reflect white cultural understandings of Indianness back to their predominately white audiences."¹⁰⁶ By mimicking white projections of Indianness, Native Americans showed their intelligence at work, which "allowed them to retain a sense of dignity and self-esteem."¹⁰⁷ Viewed in relation to the Globetrotters, Gems assertion has relevance for the Thorpe-led Oorang Indians as well as the Wild West Shows and the World's Fairs.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Fruehling Springwood, "Playing Football, Playing Indian: A History of Native Americans Who Were the NFL's Oorang Indians," in *Native Athletes in Sport and Society: A Reader* ed. C. Richard King (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 124.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald R. Gems, "Negotiating Native Identity through Sport: Assimilation, Adaptation, and the Role of the Trickster," in *Native Athletes in Sport and Society: A Reader*, ed. C. Richard King (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 12.

¹⁰⁶ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 129.

¹⁰⁷ Gems, "Negotiating Native Identity through Sport," 17; Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 130.

Native Americans participated in the mythmaking enterprises that capitalized on the public's fascination with Indianness. Many, however, failed to recognize or consider that Native Americans were acting according to a specific role, not representing Native American culture. Mitchell's article, written contemporary to the Oorang's existence, is instructive on the popular view of the team. He argues that Jim Thorpe's individual athletic prowess was subsumed within group-wide racialized faults. After lauding Thorpe as the "greatest all-around athlete of all times," Mitchell links Thorpe to larger views of Indianness:

The best place to study the Indian as a type is to note the characteristics of teams composed entirely of their own race.... Coaches agree that the Indian cannot stand reverses; that he will play sensationally while winning, but give in easily before setbacks; also Indian teams do not do well away from home. Indian teams lack persistent effort, and training or practice quickly becomes irksome if not relieved by the novel methods.¹⁰⁸

Although the athletic performances of the Oorang Indians were overshadowed by their halftime shows, the team played mostly on the road and won only three games in two years. Ignoring the underlying agency and intentionality of the team posited by Deloria and Gems, the Oorang Indians fit Mitchell's description.

Yet, seven years later Charley Paddock, writing in *Collier's*, used Thorpe to assert the athletic prowess of the team: "Jim Thorpe's professional football career reached its climax when he gathered about himself the greatest Indian team of all times and probably the finest group of professionals that ever played together."¹⁰⁹ Paddock's column speaks to the lasting iconic status of Jim Thorpe the athlete, as the "rescue" of the Indian team

¹⁰⁸ Mitchell, "Racial Traits in Athletics," 198.

¹⁰⁹ Charley Paddock, "Chief Bright Path," *Collier's*, 26 October 1929, 56.

flows through Thorpe the individual and not the pervasive traits of Indianness that enveloped the team in Mitchell's article. The example of the Oorang Indians is symbolic of how the expectations of Native American athletes dominated popular representation and suggests the difficulty of how Native American actors positioned themselves in the flux.

The boarding school experience was essential to the experiences of the majority of Native American athletes. It provided Native American athletes with a connection to the mainstream society and exposed them to the often disingenuous, even dangerous assimilationist and progressive ideologies. Yet, the inclusion of physical education and athletics in boarding school curriculum created spaces for mediation and negotiation. It is impossible to study the experience of Jim Thorpe and turn of the century Native American athletes outside of this context.

As seen in the various athletic endeavors of Carlisle football team, Jim Thorpe, and others such as Charles Albert Bender and John Tortes Meyers, sport was a middle ground, a site of mediation for Native Americans during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Sport offered a world where Indians could "challenge the social Darwinian myth of white superiority [by] often claiming a measure of revenge and retaliation on the contested spaces."¹¹⁰ Jim Thorpe's extraordinary athletic ability fundamentally enlarged this space for himself as well as for other Native American athletes. The continuing expectations of Indianness, however, and the spectacle of the ethnographic other so prevalent in other popular representations limited, just how far

¹¹⁰ Gems, "Negotiating Native Identity through Sport," 17.

claims could be asserted on race-neutral ability.

CHAPTER 2

THE MERIAM REPORT AND THE DECLINE OF NATIVE AMERICAN ATHLETICS

“Indian Athletes No Longer Win Great Fame in Sports” the headline of a 1926 *New York Times* article announced.¹ “Where once the annals of sports in the country recorded regularly the triumphs of Indian athletes, today there is no out-standing redskin in the whole field. The vanishing American has truly vanished from the gridiron and diamond and track as wooden statues of him have vanished from the cigar store” the article continued.² Indeed, after Pop Warner left Carlisle in 1915 and the school closed in 1918, fewer prominent Native American athletes emerged.

Although Jim Thorpe was still an iconic athletic figure and continued playing professional athletics into his forties, his skill had diminished. Other iconic Native American athletes of the day also saw their careers coming to an end. As their retirement approached, few Native Americans were in position to replace them.

Philip Deloria explains that a unique situation existed where “Indians had been able to move within certain white expectations in the first half of the century, but, in the second half, that changed.”³ He continues, “federal policy, economics, and social relations all meshed in ways that help explain the shift.”⁴ Deloria's observations are correct, as changes in the political and social conditions of Native Americans in the late 1920s and early 1930s funneled students away from boarding schools, altering but not disrupting the sporting middle ground. Athletic participation for Native Americans was

¹ “Indian Athletes No Longer Win Great Fame in Sports,” *New York Times*, 28 November 1926, XX9.

² Ibid.

³ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (University of Kansas Press, 2004), 131.

⁴ Ibid.

less public, however, it did not cease.

Assimilation dominated the approach to the “Indian Question” between 1887 and 1924. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 was the culmination of assimilationist policy. According to historian Brian Dippie, the 1924 Citizenship Act “was the symbolic high point of the assimilationist era.”⁵ It allowed broader society to demarcate an end to the “Indian Question.”

Like all policies related to the “Indian Question,” some Native Americans, especially those with extensive mediation of the wider United States society, analyzed the effects of citizenship. Zitkala Ša, a Lakota veteran of the boarding school experience and a Native American activist, published many literary pieces that took a critical stance toward assimilation. Her publications reflected the difficulties of an identity couched between her awareness of the wider society and traditional Native American culture. Zitkala Ša taught briefly at Carlisle and was mindful of the structures and expectations of the mainstream society. As a result she argued in favor of the 1924 Citizenship Act, hoping that it would bring attention to the problems facing Native Americans and provide a means for redress.⁶

Although as Frederick Hoxie observes, “the extension of citizenship to Indians did not alter their status as legal wards of the government. And the existence of the guardian relation could limit their rights as citizens.”⁷ Paternal control was by no means

⁵ Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 196.

⁶ Two important works that consider Zitkala Ša are: Dexter Fisher, “Zitkala Sa: The Evolution of a Writer,” *The American Indian Quarterly*, 5:3 (1979) and P. Jane Hafen, “Zitkala Ša: Sentimentality and Sovereignty,” *Wicazo Sa Review*, 12:2 (Autumn, 1997).

⁷ Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 236.

over.⁸ The 1924 Citizenship Act was not an abrupt break from policies of assimilation and hardly an official act that triggered the inclusionary aspects of full citizenship for Native Americans.

Any quieting of the “Indian Question” by the Citizenship Act of 1924 was short-lived. The Meriam Report, an independent nongovernmental study that recommended policy changes, was completed in 1928.⁹ The 1928 Meriam Report on the Problems of Indian Administration, like Helen Hunt Jackson’s *A Century of Dishonor* earlier, was pivotal in this debate. The report gave a scathing critique of the boarding school model of strict military-based education and cultural destruction as reprehensible and misguided.¹⁰ While assimilation was not abandoned, by the early 1920s the question of “whether the Indian should be programmed for a future within white civilization, or whether white civilization should learn to coexist with him” began to stir the policy debates.¹¹ Indeed, the Meriam Report was a watershed moment that changed the thinking on the “Indian Question.” New views of culture such as cultural pluralism, relativism, and functionalism outlined by Franz Boaz and other leading anthropologists, guided the report.¹² At the core of the proposals was hope that a new policy “will recognize the

⁸ Although the possibility of suffrage existed after the 1924 Citizenship Act, many Native Americans continued to be prohibited from voting by state laws. Utah was the last state to grant Indians the right to vote in 1956.

⁹ The Meriam Report was commissioned by Secretary of Interior Hubert Work in 1926, and completed by the Institute for Government Research in 1928. The Institute for Government Research, which describes itself as “an association of citizens for cooperating with public officials in the scientific study of government with a view to promoting efficiency and economy in its operations,” is an arm of the Brookings Institute.

¹⁰ Among these failures were a Native American “infant mortality rate double that of the general population, a death rate from tuberculosis seven times the national average, and an illiteracy rate that ran as high as sixty-seven-percent in one state,” Two-thirds of all American Indians yielded one-hundred dollars or less in annual income. Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 242.

¹¹ Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 279.

¹² Sherry L. Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans Through Anglo Eyes, 1880-1940*,

good in the educational and social life of the Indians in their religion and ethics, and will seek to develop it and build on it rather than to crush out all that is Indian.”¹³ Although the report backed away from cultural destruction by embracing new trends in anthropology and critiquing the failings of former policy – particularly the harshness of the boarding school experience – it did not break from the paternalism that had long guided federal Indian policy.

Most reformers and activist groups generally agreed with the Meriam Report's sympathy and new policy trajectory. One of these activists was John Collier, who was the executive secretary of the American Indian Defense Association in Washington D.C. His success as an activist and influence in both public and academic circles stemmed from this position and helped him gain an appointment as Commissioner of Indian Affairs.¹⁴ He characterized the Meriam Report as the most important and “challenging, humiliating and horrifying” document on Native American conditions written since Helen Hunt Jackson's 1881 book, *A Century of Dishonor*.¹⁵ Teamed with Collier's long tenure as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and his philosophy of cultural preservation, Native American life shifted from the national spotlight into local and regional settings.¹⁶ Like Jackson's book in the 1880s, the debate surrounding the Meriam Report aided Collier in reforming federal Indian policy. These public discussions established the foundation of

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

¹³ Lewis Meriam, *et al.*, *The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey Made at the Request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of Interior, and Submitted to Him, February 21, 1928* (Baltimore, 1928) quoted in Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 299.

¹⁴ Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search For An American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 201; Akim Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 22-23.

¹⁵ John Collier, “Hammering at the Prison Door,” *Survey*, LX (July 1, 1928), 389; quoted in Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 301.

¹⁶ Collier was a Franklin Roosevelt appointee and thus served during his four terms.

the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA).¹⁷

Collier used the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 to enact his changes. His contemporaries described the act as “the most important general piece of Indian legislation since the Allotment Acts.”¹⁸ According to Collier’s memoir, the purpose of the IRA was the:

Economic rehabilitation of the Indians, principally on the land. Organization of the Indian tribes for managing their own affairs. Civil and cultural freedom and opportunity for the Indians.¹⁹

Unlike earlier reformers and politicians who called for private property and an end to communal ownership structures, Collier and the IRA attempted to restore reservation lands and promoted a new system of localized tribal government. These new statutes were combined with a revamped education system that placed emphasis on preserving indigenous languages, arts and crafts, and traditional cultural practices.

Collier hoped that by preventing further loss of lands and organizing tribal governments, Native Americans could more effectively control their lives. The IRA followed the lead of anthropologists and loosened restrictions on Native American religious practices. It sought to ease the harshness of boarding school education by establishing on-reservation day schools.²⁰ While these new policy initiatives recognized the importance of traditional Native American culture, they remained paternalistic and were reluctant to give up political control. The most significant change enacted by the

¹⁷ The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 is also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act.

¹⁸ Olive La Farge, “Revolution with Reservations,” *New Republic*, LXXXIV (Oct. 9, 1935), 233-234; quoted in Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 307.

¹⁹ John Collier, *From Every Zenith: A Memoir* (Denver, 1963), 172-173; quoted in Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 307.

²⁰ Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 298-301; Taiwagi Helton and Lindsay G. Robertson, “The Foundations of Federal Indian Law and Its Application in the Twentieth-Century,” in *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism since 1900*, ed. Daniel Cobb and Loretta Fowler (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 38.

IRA was the establishment of a new political structure centered on tribal councils.

The tribal councils arising from the new policy, however, did not act as unmitigated agents of Native American political agency. While the IRA called for the councils to be democratically elected, the United States retained many aspects of the tradition of “semi-sovereignty.”²¹ The new tribal governments augmented the dictatorial powers of the BIA superintendent by serving as an advisory council. These councils did little to ameliorate the muddled nature of Native American citizenship and guardian status.

Indeed, “the new tribal council would be the only form of government on a reservation that the United States government would recognize as legitimate” and the BIA-appointed reservation superintendent retained his near autocratic power through the ability to veto any council decision.²² According to historian Akim Reinhardt, the political aspects of the IRA reasserted many aspects of the power relationship long embedded in the “Indian Question”:

Indians who advocated traditional Native governments did not always initially discern the rather subtle shift in colonial styles that IRA represented; to many of them, the IRA appeared to be further undermining what little remained of their sovereignty by usurping their indigenous political institutions and imposing foreign ones.²³

The shift in governance implied cultural functionalism and policy improvement but did not give up paternal oversight.

New schools on reservations followed the same thought process. Collier took office in April of 1933 and by July of the same year he closed six boarding

²¹Akim Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge*, 22-28.

²²Ibid, 26.

²³For more on the shift in colonial rule and government see: Akim Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge*, 28.

schools.²⁴ According to historian K. Tsianina Lomawaima, Collier was quick to act because “he believed it was the government's duty to bring education and modern scientific knowledge to the Indian communities and to reawaken Indian pride.”²⁵ To be sure, part of this rationale was the IRA's concern with religious practice. Collier saw reservation schools as an important step to promote “Indian religious beliefs and practices” without the interference of missionaries and educators.²⁶

Although as Akim Reindhardt notes, “the federal government did not yield [schools] to the authority of the new tribal councils.”²⁷ Instead they remained under the leadership of BIA appointed superintendents. Collier's director of education, Will Carson Ryan, wrote much of the critique in the Meriam Report and “issued a number of directives aimed at improving conditions in the schools.”²⁸ Many school superintendents took these directives seriously.

One school superintendent, Sharon R. Mote, made substantial changes at the Rapid City Indian School. Mote had worked at Haskell and embraced the use of extracurricular activities and opportunities to change the school's culture and improve student life. Among the extracurricular changes were bi-weekly movie nights, student socials, oratory, and athletics.²⁹ Athletics took a leading role, because, as Scott Riney explains, Superintendent Mote was familiar with the expectations of Native American athletics set by Carlisle and Haskell and made sure “the Rapid City Indian School did its

²⁴ K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Akim Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge*, 63.

²⁸ Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light*, 8.

²⁹ Scott Riney, “Loosening the Bonds: The Rapid City Indian School in the 1920s,” in Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc, eds. *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University Of Nebraska Press, 2006), 139.

best to uphold the reputation of Indian athletics.”³⁰ Unlike Carlisle and Haskell, Rapid City did not have the same national recruiting base and exposure, but the school still saw value in athletics.³¹

Sport was useful in developing Muscular Christian ideals and military based regimentation and discipline at the local level, so national exposure was no longer important. Many other day and boarding schools sponsored sports teams and utilized athletics in the same manner as Richard Henry Pratt and Pop Warner. No longer a public relations tool, competition became an important way to strengthen community pride at the local level. Mote attempted to develop an athletic association among neighboring Indian schools. Not all school Superintendents, however, were as student-centered as Mote, and the association failed to gain traction.³²

Nevertheless, Mote's “liberalization” of student life through sports and other extracurricular activities molded the Rapid City School in the image of public high schools.³³ Yet, just as importantly, these new activities maintained the “quasi-military organization of the classic off-reservation boarding school.”³⁴ Likewise, true to the IRA's goals, the new activities greatly improved student morale and allowed a less obvious form of paternalism to remain a central component of the curriculum.

Native American athletes no longer attained wide-reaching notoriety because the localization mandate of IRA affected the educational and athletic infrastructures, resulting in less opportunity for national exposure. The link between sport and community pride

³⁰ Ibid, 141.

³¹ Ibid, 141.

³² This came only after they were denied membership in the South Dakota High School Athletic Association. Ibid, 144.

³³ Ibid, 149.

³⁴ Ibid, 149-150.

established during the IRA resulted in increased cultural retention and provided a space for negotiation. Thus sport continued as an important venue to mediate the Native American experience and the representations of broader society. The post-athletic life of Jim Thorpe and career of Ned Crutcher demonstrate how the experiences and mediations of Native American athletes changed as a result of the IRA.

While Native American sports grew locally in the 1920s and 1930s as evidenced by the Rapid City Indian School, Jim Thorpe remained the leading Native American and sporting icon. Athletics gave Thorpe more freedom and opportunity than Native Americans living on the reservation. Sport made him a national icon and granted him a limited degree of respect. Thorpe understood the platform that his fame provided and used it to attract large crowds for professional football teams, and later lent his fame to Native American issues.

Jim Thorpe continued to intermittently play professional athletics and exhibit his physical skills into his forties. The Great Depression, however, severely affected the regularity at which he could find work. The publication of the Carnegie Foundation's study on "American College Athletics" also hindered his opportunities. The report exposed the already assumed but often ignored professionalism in big-time college football. Red Grange's decision to leave college early for an alluring payday in the NFL partially spurred the investigation. Grange's decision outraged many and caused them to lose their faith in the amateur system. Critics blamed professional football for preying on star athletes. And as a result the NFL failed to sustain the same level of interest and

support as college football.³⁵

The combination of the NFL's lackluster showing during the Great Depression, the Carnegie Foundation study, and his increasing age created economic instability for Thorpe and led him to shift his career towards motion pictures and public appearances. Hollywood had a penchant for hiring former athletic stars to help boost interest in films. Likewise Native Americans added “authenticity” to the day's most popular genre: the western. Thorpe negotiated his experience through recognition of his exceptional athletic ability and the persistent expectations connected to his Indianness. Similarly, in Hollywood, Thorpe realized his versatility and took advantage.³⁶

Appearing in mostly “B” level films, Thorpe's Hollywood career never quite equaled his athletics success. He often played Indian Chiefs, coaches, or served as an extra in battle scenes. Nevertheless, Thorpe became a central figure in Hollywood's Native American community during this period of his life. He was a charter member of the Screen Actors Guild and formed a casting agency to represent and promote at a decent and fair wage the use of authentically skilled Native American actors.³⁷

It is this aspect – political activism – that is omitted in the evaluation of Jim Thorpe. Of course, this omission stems from the very representations of Thorpe in Hollywood and his highly publicized struggle with alcohol. These representations linger to the recent past. In the 1990s, Thorpe's daughter Grace Thorpe sought to have her father included in discussions regarding the greatest athlete of the twentieth century. She

³⁵ Kate Bufford, *Native American Son: The Life and Sporting legend of Jim Thorpe* (New Yorks: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 258; Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History* (Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 147-148.

³⁶ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 267-268.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 280, 288.

campaigns vigorously “to contest and reclaim who Jim Thorpe was, whom he served, and what his athletic career meant.”³⁸ While Grace Thorpe succeeded in having Jim Thorpe named the greatest athlete of the twentieth century by a 1999 ABC Sports Internet poll, her campaign reinvigorated old assumptions about Thorpe and the tragic Native American.³⁹ As John Bloom writes:

Not only was Jim Thorpe unable to buy himself a positive public image, but the most popular image people have of his life is that of the “tragic Indian” whose life was defined by a brief, fleeting moment of glory that was ruined by a combination of bad luck and prideful self-destruction.⁴⁰

Perhaps no other cultural vehicle expresses the difficulty that Thorpe and his popular memory encountered than the 1951 Hollywood feature: *Jim Thorpe: All-American*. Burt Lancaster plays Thorpe and the film portrays him as a tragic hero, as historian Michael Oriard critiques: “Thorpe [is] the once proud but not pitiable fallen hero, rescued from his misery by Pop Warner: a superb natural athlete with a flawed character, saved by a Great White Father.”⁴¹

A telling scene in the movie shows Thorpe with war paint and headdress while serving as the emcee for a marathon dance competition. Bored and un-enthused, he is fired. In his dressing room, disappointed and down on his luck, Thorpe’s old Carlisle coach Pop Warner arrives. They have a short conversation where Warner invites Thorpe to the opening ceremony of the 1932 Olympics. Thorpe is disenchanted and asks Warner

³⁸ John Bloom, “No Fall From Grace: Grace Thorpe’s Athlete of the Century Campaign for her Father,” in *Native Athletes in Sport and Society: A Reader*, ed. C. Richard King (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 230.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 235.

⁴¹ Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 291.

to leave. Warner complies, but first criticizes Thorpe's attitude:

Somewhere along the line you've gone completely haywire. Picked up the idea the world owes you something. Well it doesn't owe you a thing. So you've had some tough ones, been kicked around. They took your medals away from you. So what. All I can say is that when the real battle started, the great Jim Thorpe turned out to be a powder puff.⁴²

Thorpe reconsiders and joins Warner at the ceremony. As they watch the dignitaries enter the stadium, Warner reminds Thorpe that United States Vice President Charles Curtis is also an Indian.

In the movie, the exchange with Warner and the recognition that Charles Curtis is Native American have a major effect on Thorpe, demonstrating the possibility of individual effort and cementing Thorpe's acceptance of the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" attitude. As *Jim Thorpe: All-American* ends, Warner is giving a speech at Thorpe's induction into the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame. At the end of his speech Warner, proud of the advice he had given Thorpe, boasts, "And so Jim Thorpe found himself, was again on the truth path, the bright path, teaching and helping young people everywhere, this was his greatest victory."⁴³ These final words, along with the criticism Warner shared with Thorpe, validate the assumptions that the guiding voice of Anglo paternalist assimilation is central to the Native American experience.⁴⁴

Stories like this one implicate Thorpe as a naïve, undisciplined man who relied on athletic talent but squandered the riches he earned. While there is some truth in the film, the tragic hero motif discounts the events, politics, and economics that run parallel to Jim Thorpe's life. Scientific racism, ambiguous and inconsistent policies toward the "Indian

⁴² *Jim Thorpe -- All American*. Film. Michael Curtiz. 1951, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1951.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Despite these weaknesses and limitations, Thorpe was on the set during much of the filming.

Question,” and the expectations of Native Americans shaped Thorpe’s experience and modified his outstanding athletic successes.

The mediation with his experience as a Native American and sporting icon, not surprisingly, influenced Thorpe’s acceptance of some of the expectations conveyed in the popular representations. Yet Thorpe was far from passive and like other famous Native Americans was engaged with pressing political issues. While Thorpe hardly changed the stereotypical Hollywood representation of the Native American, he successfully lobbied for fair wages and treatment of Indian actors. Thorpe consistently sought work for himself and other Native Americans. His acting agency marketed itself as a purveyor of skilled and authentic Indian actors, taking ownership, at least in part, of Native American representations.⁴⁵ Over time Jim Thorpe became a prominent figure in Hollywood and he used this position to draw attention to Native American issues.

Thorpe’s activism regarding the Indian Reorganization Act demonstrates how his experience shaped his approach to politics. Like other Native Americans, Thorpe organized a meeting at his house attended by over sixty people.⁴⁶ He joined many fellow Native Americans in dismissing the BIA as an overbearing and meddlesome organization. Because of his Carlisle education and experience mediating white society, Thorpe believed in the concepts of assimilation and citizenship. He protested a California bill to segregate Indian and Mexican children in the public schools. And in discussions of IRA, Thorpe implored his fellow Native American “to shed his inferiority complex and live like a normal American citizen.”⁴⁷ In fact, Thorpe became an outspoken critic of the

⁴⁵ Bufford, *Native American Son*, 280, 288.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 295-296.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 304.

“Indian New Deal,” believing it coerced Native Americans into “communistic cooperatives.”⁴⁸

The model of assimilation taught to Thorpe at Carlisle and through sport by Warner, affected the way he negotiated political issues and viewed the promise of individual uplift. The causes in which Thorpe involved himself focused on recognizing and restoring Native American agency rather than government assistance. Uplift could be taken into Native Americans' own hands by recognizing and asserting their authenticity to secure work. He advocated that Hollywood actors use their Indianness as an asset. In this regard, Thorpe believed in citizenship more than the IRA because it followed in the assimilation model of uplift.

Little if any of Thorpe's activism would have been possible without his athletic career, and few other figures of the day could boast of similar achievements, or similar media attention.⁴⁹ As such, the expectations and representations of Thorpe exceed those seen by prior star athletes. Juggling media attention proved to be difficult and stressful, let alone acting as the personification of his race to an international audience.⁵⁰ Jim Thorpe has too often been portrayed as a man who could not overcome his Indianness, rather than as the first modern sports celebrity trying to balance his private life with the media's gaze. Jim Thorpe became an enormous figure. He was one of the first modern

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Thorpe was the first President of the National Football League, helped make the 1912 Olympics the most successful games at the time, and was chosen greatest athlete of the twentieth century. His athletic career, across multiple sports, left him little down time. Professional football and baseball had him in the spotlight year round.

⁵⁰ A 1929 four-part article by Charley Paddock appearing in *Collier's* puts Thorpe's athletic prowess in context with his racial heritage. Thorpe was not typical of the inferior and vanishing American, instead “he seemed to possess all the glorious strength of a dying race.” The article suggests that if only all Indians had the same strength of Thorpe, they would not be “dying.” Charley Paddock, “Chief Bright Path,” *Collier's*, 26 October 1929, 30.

athletes. Thorpe's popular celebrity and minority status is similar to that of Jack Johnson or Tiger Woods. Likewise, Babe Ruth serves as a white example of a larger-than-life sports figure. Although Ruth came after Thorpe, his drinking and womanizing was acceptable behavior and made him more popular, while Thorpe's tarnished his image. His complex and mediated life, now accepted as a normal part of athletic fame, was new to the sporting world.

On the heels of *Jim Thorpe: All-American*, John Steckbeck wrote *Fabulous Redmen: The Carlisle Indians and Their Famous Football Teams*. Acknowledging the powerful program (recalling the "West Point" moment), Steckbeck wonders why there are not more prominent Native American athletes: "For some twenty-odd years the Redmen raced across the stage of big-time football, leaving in their wake many a bewildered team...and then vanished from the American sporting scene forever."⁵¹

Much of this perceived vanishing relates to the long shadow of Jim Thorpe. Wilson "Buster" Charles came close to stepping out of the shadow, winning the 1930 AAU Decathlon National Championship and placing fourth at the 1932 Olympic Games.⁵² But he soon faded from popular memory, unable to live up to the standard of Thorpe.⁵³ Steckbeck was correct as fewer Native American athletes entered the popular consciousness of the United States sporting world.

To be sure, it was more than comparisons to the athleticism of Jim Thorpe that

⁵¹ John S. Steckbeck, *The Fabulous Redmen: The Carlisle Indians and Their Famous Football Teams* (Harrisburg, PA: J. Horace McFarland, 1951), vii; quoted in Joseph B. Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 259.

⁵² "Wilson Buster Charles," *American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame*, <http://americanindianathletichalloffame.com/wilsoncharles.php>

⁵³ Although his fame did not last long, it was Charles, not Thorpe, who was Billy Mills' childhood hero. Mills says that it was easier for him to relate to Charles' fourth in the Olympics than Thorpe's "greatest athlete in the world" fame.

prevented Native American athletes from entering the mainstream. Structural changes to the boarding school system spurred on by the Meriam Report and enacted by John Collier in the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act were the primary causes. With Collier's drive to cultural functionalism by strengthening tribal governance and preserving Native American communities and their heritage, the BIA promoted day schools over boarding schools. The result was the dismantling of the boarding school infrastructure, which had served as the main site of exposure and opportunity for Native American athletes.

Sports at all schools came under fire as well. The 1929 Carnegie Foundation study criticized the use of high profile athletic programs to gain notoriety for universities. Notable schools such as the University of Chicago and Northwestern University built strong football teams in hopes of attracting donors as a means to become elite academic institutions. Their success also resulted in an unscrupulous undercurrent of money and illegal recruiting that bolstered the Carnegie Foundation's case.⁵⁴ Fears that Native American boarding schools were doing the same soon emerged.

In the wake of the Carnegie study and the findings of the Meriam Report, big-time athletics at Native American boarding schools became controversial. Administrators worried that boarding school sports deviated from the true ideals of amateurism. BIA officials worried about semi-professionalism and fraudulent handling of money.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Davies, *Sports in American Life*, 147-149; Bufford, *Native American Son*, 258.

⁵⁵ Carlisle had a special athletic dorm and, some sources say, provided spending allowances to players. Student-athlete benefits along with the remarkably high salary for Pop Warner were the subjects of a series of newspaper accusations of professionalism and shady dealing. Most of the money came from ticket receipts and fees paid by schools since Carlisle played most of its games on the road and was a popular draw. See Sally Jenkins, *The Real All Americans*, 242-245. Likewise, Haskell raised \$185,000 for the construction of a 10,500 seat stadium which it dedicated with an elaborate homecoming ceremony in 1926. However, 100% of the funds were donations from American Indians. See Joseph B. Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage*, 200; and John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 37-50.

According to John Bloom, sports “revealed larger cultural tensions that surround efforts to assimilate Native Americans” and became victim to the prevailing voices in charge of the BIA.⁵⁶

Athletic programs like those found at Carlisle and Haskell took the brunt of the efforts of Collier and the BIA.⁵⁷ But the efforts extended to all boarding schools. A 1935 letter from Collier to the Superintendent of the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma detailed the role of athletics:

I believe in athletic training of all sorts for the students in our vocational schools, but you must keep in mind that their vocational education is the primary object of their attendance and that athletic contest with teams from various parts of the country are of secondary importance and must not be permitted to interfere with their vocational training.⁵⁸

Collier began to differentiate between intercollegiate and interscholastic competition, favoring interscholastic contests as they were less exploitative and more cost effective.⁵⁹ Interscholastic competition was less intense, required less travel, and Native American boarding school students were closer in age to high school students.⁶⁰ Indeed, many schools like Rapid City were already competing with high schools in their local communities.

The combination of the economic climate and new federal policies had significant effects to be sure. Collier took office in 1933 during the heart of the Great Depression.

⁵⁶ John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do*, XI.

⁵⁷ Although Carlisle closed in 1918 and was replaced by Haskell as the flagship boarding school, both programs symbolized and had the corrupt big-time sports programs that Collier despised.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁹ John Bloom, “Rolling With the Punches: Boxing, Youth Culture, and Ethnic Identity at Federal Indian Boarding Schools during the 1930s,” in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 69-70

⁶⁰ The concern over travel was both economic and educational. Carlisle played almost all of its games on the road causing its students to miss a lot of class.

His new policies to reorganize and clean up athletics served a dual purpose as they also cut spending. Football was the main target. The Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, which had replaced Carlisle as the most formidable Native American boarding school football team, dropped its intercollegiate football team in 1938.⁶¹ Other boarding schools across the nation soon followed suit.

Following the football cutbacks, boxing emerged as a major sport at many boarding schools. Although in the eyes of the general public, boxing “squirmed uncomfortably under the stares of moral absolutists” and stirred controversy, it was an attractive and logical choice to replace football.⁶² Boxing existed in military training practices, required less equipment, and was more cost effective compared to football. The violence of boxing and the lingering attachment of Native Americans to the notion of “savage” physicality, however, led to strong opposition within the BIA.⁶³

The positive instructional value of boxing was identified early on by the military. Lieutenant Colonel and Army surgeon A. A. Woodhull cited the James J. Corbett – John L. Sullivan fight of 1892 as evidence that “speed and agility were the superior qualities to be developed through physical training.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Woodhull believed that with

⁶¹ Over time the Haskell Institute evolved and is now Haskell Indian Nations University. The school has returned to competing in intercollegiate football, although in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, not at the more marquee NCAA level.

⁶² Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History*, 171.

⁶³ John Bloom, who has written extensively on Native American boarding school boxing, embraces the viewpoint of the general public suggesting that “it is ironic that sports were instituted for moral character” because the sport of boxing often offended “the moral sensibilities of those who operated boarding schools.” He argues that boxing was “seemingly at odds with federal aims to direct productively the cultural life of students.” These views ignore the context that boxing developed and dismiss the benefits that led to its introduction at boarding schools. Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do*, 70.

⁶⁴ Donald J. Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality 1880-1910* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 56.

boxing “primitive force” could “be made efficient through intelligence.”⁶⁵ Boarding schools sponsored this form of amateur boxing which fit within the framework of the Muscular Christians’ aims of athletics endorsed by Pratt and the BIA. And amateur boxing was quite different from the professional prizefighting and bare-knuckle pugilism deplored by broader society.

Prizefighting and bare-knuckle pugilism were in fact dangerous and violent sports, while amateur boxing, also called “scientific boxing,” is frequently described as a “sweet science” that places focus on precision, agility, and conditioning over brute strength. In addition to being used as a military tool for creating discipline and intelligence, harnessing brute strength, and refining it into useful controlled movements, boxing was also a popular activity among American college students, promoted by politicians and even practiced by Theodore Roosevelt until 1904. Boxing also played a prominent role in the curriculum of many colleges. Harvard and Washington State University had policies that required nearly all of their students to box.⁶⁶ Likewise, boxing was an endorsed activity by the NCAA, AAU, and the Olympics.⁶⁷ Thus, boxing was a popular and acceptable way to harness and refine the “savage” perceived to be

⁶⁵ Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality 1880-1910*, 56.

⁶⁶ Brian Mejia, “Harvard Boxing Sees Revival,” *The Harvard Crimson*, May 1, 2009, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2009/5/1/harvard-boxing-sees-revival-a-crowd/>; Kane, “You Could Blame It On The Moms: There is hope of a revival of college boxing, which has fallen into sad and unjustified disrepute,” 54.

⁶⁷ The organization and infrastructure of amateur boxing was created long before its introduction to boarding schools. The Naval Academy began boxing in 1865 as a recreational activity. Team boxing at the Naval Academy began following the First World War in 1919. Likewise amateur boxing was quite popular on other university campuses. The sport grew in popularity to the point that in 1878 the New York Athletic Club sponsored the first national amateur boxing championship. The International Boxing Association was formed in 1921 to promote the sport and develop a set of rules for intercollegiate competition. The first NCAA Boxing Tournament took place in 1932. See U.S. Naval Academy Boxing History <http://www.usnaboxing.com/history.htm> ; Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prizefighting in America*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 199; E.C. Wallenfield, *The Six-Minute Fraternity: The Rise and Fall of NCAA Tournament Boxing, 1932-1960* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 3, 19-20.

inside American Indians and make them more like educated white men.⁶⁸

Because of the popularity and educational value of boxing, illustrated by its presence at colleges and military institutions across the nation, Native American boarding schools chose to incorporate boxing into their athletic programs. By 1948 “boxing as an official sport affect[ed] about 2,000 young men in 15 Indian grammar schools and high schools.”⁶⁹ These boxing teams competed mostly in local and statewide competitions. AAU Golden Gloves Tournaments at the high school and club level were most common. Localized events allowed for boarding schools like the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma and the Stewart Indian School in Carson City, Nevada to compete and develop prominent teams.⁷⁰

Stewart's team dominated Nevada amateur boxing from 1937 to 1948 and received substantial press coverage and support in local newspapers. A Nevada community and culture that embraced boxing surrounded the school. Press coverage of the team shows that through the sport the community also began to embrace Native Americans.⁷¹

Between 1935, when the team began, and 1948, when the team was discontinued, the Stewart boxers won ten Nevada Golden Gloves team titles.⁷² Through winning, the

⁶⁸ Wallenfield, *The Six-Minute Fraternity*, 12; Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality 1880-1910*, 47.

⁶⁹ “Boxing and Pride Fighting,” *Chester Times* (Chester, PA), November 29, 1948.

⁷⁰ More prominent boarding schools such as Haskell and the Sherman Institute competed in boxing, however Chilocco and Stewart's teams are the best documented.

⁷¹ Stewart was located in Carson City, Nevada, a mere 30 miles from Reno. Reno was the site of the annual Golden Gloves tournaments and much of Stewart's competition. Likewise Reno is the home to the University of Nevada whose boxing team was a major NCAA program and attracted more spectators than its basketball team.

⁷² The newspaper sources are unclear on some of the years that Stewart won the title. Stewart is most likely to have won titles in 1937, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944 (shared), 1945, and 1948; but may have won titles in 1946 and 1947 as well.

Stewart boxers took ownership of the sport and gained the respect of the larger white community. Similar to the football teams at Carlisle, boxing at Stewart allowed Native Americans to carve out their local identity and challenge the representations and expectations of Indianness within broader society. The success of Native American boxers in the Nevada community on such a large scale forced changes in racial attitudes and enabled the boxers to create a new image for themselves.

Part of the team's mediation was through community service and charity work. These acts helped Stewart endear itself to the local community and combat popular notions of Indianness. A contest with the Hawthorne Navy team sponsored by the local Lions club is one such example. The match raised “money to purchase a stretcher bed for Carson City and an electric [basketball] clock for Carson City and one for Stewart.”⁷³ In another instance of charity the team hosted an event where all of the gate receipts went to aid the “Nevada state museum (old mint building) fund.”⁷⁴ A boxing card held on the Stewart Indian School campus in March of 1939 attracted 1,156 spectators, which is impressive considering that the population of Carson City was 2,478 in 1940.⁷⁵ By donating the gate money, the team benefited the larger community and distanced itself from the memory of corrupt big-time sports programs at Carlisle and Haskell.

Athletic Director Albert Hawley was instrumental in mediating the image of Stewart Boxers. Hawley held the respect of the community and he served as chairman of the Nevada State AAU committee and manager of the Nevada Golden Gloves boxing

⁷³ *Desert Brave 1946*, Carson City, NV, Nevada Historical Society Library, Reno, NV.

⁷⁴ “Paiutes, Navajoes Await Fistic Frays,” *Nevada State Journal*, February 6, 1940, p. 7.

⁷⁵ “Total Attendance,” *Nevada State Journal*, March 11 1939; “Nevada Place Names Populations 1860-2000: 1940,” *Nevada State Library and Archives*, http://nevadaculture.org/nsla/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1036&Itemid=90

tournament. Prior to coming to Stewart in 1936, Hawley attended and played big-time football at Haskell in the late 1920s. He was also an All-American Honorable Mention as a center and team captain for the Davis and Elkins College football team. Hawley's athletic acumen helped him to earn his position within broader society and to mentor his boxers. He was rewarded for his important role as a coach, athletic administrator, and athlete with the Department of Interior's Distinguished Service Award in 1966. He was also a member of the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame's second class of inductees in 1973.⁷⁶

Stewart played by the rules and followed the BIA's directive on amateurism. The team's community involvement further served to discount notions of professionalism. Hawley fought hard to protect his boxers from "promoters who have attempted to get Indian boys to fight professionally."⁷⁷ One such individual was sixteen-year-old Arthur Case, a 1943 Nevada Golden Gloves and 1942 Pacific AAU champion. Hawley's protection of athletes indicates that boxing at the Stewart Indian School was used as an extra-curricular physical activity, not a tool to develop professional fighters or a ticket to wealth and fame.⁷⁸

Instead of professionalism, Stewart boxers typically joined the armed services. Native Americans have traditionally served in the military in high numbers. Donald Fixico estimates that "25,000 men and 700 women served in World War II, 10,000 served

⁷⁶ Stewart Athletic Director Albert Hawley was Gros Ventre and Assiniboine. For more on Hawley see: "Indian From Nevada Is Now officer in Navy," *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 10, 1943, 14; "Albert Hawley," *American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame*, <<http://www.americanindianathletichalloffame.com/alberthawley.php>>

⁷⁷ "Reno Fight Story Brings Denial," *The Salt Lake Tribune (Morning Edition)*, October 11, 1939, p. 16.

⁷⁸ Norman Montellier, "Cravath Plans Two Varsity Teams at Trojan Lair," *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, July 20, 1943, p. 8.

in Korea, and 43,000 in Vietnam.”⁷⁹ One of these men was Stewart Athletic Director Albert Hawley who was a naval officer during the Second World War. Hawley’s military background likely played a role in encouraging the Stewart boxers to serve. Personal success helped Hawley relate to his athletes as well as understand the role of boarding school sports and the corruption the BIA feared.

Military service provided Stewart boxers with an opportunity to continue mediating their experiences through sport. The physical regimentation, discipline, and hard work championed by Pratt and Muscular Christians mirrored much of the military's structure. As a result the boarding school experience, particularly athletics, prepared Native Americans for military service. Because of boxing's military tradition, the Stewart boxers’ skills and discipline helped them more easily conform to the demands of the armed forces.

Military service itself was another mediation tool. As both soldiers and athletes, Native Americans became more accepted by the broader society. Military service identified and safeguarded Native Americans as patriotic heroes – evident in the press coverage surrounding the Stewart boxers. Now endeared to the team and its prominent boxers, the local press kept the community up-to-date on the military careers of former Stewart boxers.

The story of Ned Crutcher is particularly indicative of the community's support and the success that boxing provided to Native Americans. Crutcher was a popular and successful boxer while at Stewart. For a 1940 match the *Nevada State Journal* listed him

⁷⁹ Donald Fixico, *Daily Life of Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 82.

as the headline fight, “the talk of fans from Pyramid Lake to Walker Lake,” which are near reservations.⁸⁰ The attention was warranted as Crutcher was a successful boxer during his career at Stewart and won a Pacific AAU middleweight title.⁸¹

Crutcher joined the Marines in 1941 prior to Pearl Harbor and served in the Pacific. In the Marines, Crutcher served at Guadalcanal, “with the First Marine Raiders who acquired fame in their commando blows against Jap isles, and was with the Second Division's original invaders,” attaining the rank of Sergeant due to his bravery and valor.⁸² He resumed boxing when the Second Division was stationed for rest in New Zealand. In New Zealand Crutcher regained his old form and won the division championship.⁸³ Upon becoming the best fighter in the Second Division, he was named captain of the Marine team, and featured in *Ring Magazine*. Crutcher became a minor celebrity for his boxing achievements in the Second Division and his heroism.⁸⁴ Ty Cobb, Sports Editor of the *Nevada State Journal*, noted that feature stories on Crutcher appeared in papers across the West coast.⁸⁵

Following the rest period in New Zealand, Crutcher returned to the United States for medical care as a result of malaria and minor wounds. During his hospitalization in

⁸⁰ “Crutcher – Reymus Battle Holds Fans Interest in Stewart Card,” *Nevada State Journal*, February 26, 1940.

⁸¹ “Nevada A.A.U. Champions Ready For Trip To Pacific Tourney In San Francisco,” *Nevada State Journal*, April 7, 1945, p. 8.

⁸² Ty Cobb, “Inside Stuff,” *Nevada State Journal*, September 1, 1944, p. 14.

⁸³ Other boxers besides Ned Crutcher and those at Stewart joined the military where they experienced successful boxing careers. Philip Deloria’s great-uncle Phil Lane boxed at Haskell in various AAU bouts before joining the Army. Once in the Army he won his divisional championship. After Lane’s time in the army he was a scholarship member of the University of Oregon boxing team. Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 264 (endnote 35).

⁸⁴ While Crutcher was not the only former Stewart boxer reported on in the *Nevada State Journal*, every former Stewart boxer featured served in the military. Indeed, it was their military service as much as their boxing that resonated with the local community.

⁸⁵ Ty Cobb, “Inside Stuff,” *Nevada State Journal*, August 2, 1944, p. 10.

southern California the *Nevada State Journal* published multiple stories recounting Crutcher's experiences in the war, including one story with his mailing address so that he could reconnect with old friends and teammates. Crutcher did more than reconnect with his old team; after receiving a medical discharge, he became their coach. In fact as a result of the respect for his military and boxing career, Nevada AAU Commissioner Jim Aiken selected Crutcher as coach of "the entire Nevada senior team."⁸⁶

Despite such successes, boxing and boarding schools continued to face controversy. A 1940 study published in *Research Quarterly* presented data from questionnaires completed by doctors, athletic directors, neurologists, coroners, and other science and health care professionals. The conclusion was that "boxing should not be included in the sports program of an educational institution" because "the primary aim of boxing is to inflict bodily punishment and injury on the opponent."⁸⁷ The study damaged the public's view of boxing and caused the BIA to worry about violence, injury, and ferocity of crowds.

As a result of public pressure, the BIA issued a statement that discouraged boxing in November of 1948.⁸⁸ In the statement, Director of Education for the BIA Willard Beatty said "there was strong sentiment against boxing on the part of North and South Dakota schools" thus leading to the creation of a new policy to support them.⁸⁹ The Stewart Indian School followed the BIA directive and discontinued their team.

⁸⁶ Ibid; Ty Cobb, "Inside Stuff, *Nevada State Journal*, September 1, 1944, p. 14; "Nevada A.A.U. Champions Ready For Trip To Pacific Tourney In San Francisco," *Nevada State Journal*, April 7, 1945, p. 8.

⁸⁷ H. E. Kennedy, K. A. Thacker, and M. C. Gebhart, "The Evaluation of Boxing as a College Activity," *Research Quarterly* 11 (1940): 90-93.

⁸⁸ "Indian School Boxing Criticized," *Reno Evening Gazette*, November 24, 1948.

⁸⁹ "Boxing and Pride Fighting," *Chester Times* (Chester, PA), November 29, 1948.

Crutcher's experiences illustrate that sport, and in this case amateur boxing at the Stewart Indian School continued to be a venue for Native Americans to transition into and be accepted by larger society. Sport for Crutcher and other boarding school athletes was more than a means to conform and ascend to a better life. Athletic competition allowed him to take on Indianness and expectation by exhibiting himself and proudly showing "what an Indian can do." Disciplined and successful Native American athletes who beat whites challenged the racial hierarchy of their day.

While the IRA's assault on boarding schools and athletic competitions affected Crutcher and the Stewart Indian School, Indian schools shifted their focus from the national to local level. Unlike the era of Jim Thorpe, Crutcher's fame and athletic ability did not carry him on to national and international fame. Instead, Crutcher became a local hero and role model for other boxers, both Native and non-Native.

Stewart continued to follow Carlisle's Muscular Christian model of developing discipline and character. The school also used athletics to foster public support and acceptance. The combination provided for the continued successful cultural transmission of Native Americans into broader society, yet on a smaller, more local scale. Haskell's athletic program, like Stewart's, also shrank. Once home to a famed football and track team, it was now relegated to high school competition. Although Haskell continued to be the flagship boarding school, fewer students enrolled because of new on-reservation day schools.

On-reservation day schools also sponsored athletic teams. Because they competed primarily in small towns and with high schools, Native American athletes received less exposure. Professional scouts and college recruiters rarely saw day-school athletes. And

if promising Native American student-athletes were seen, their transition to college became more difficult because few had experience with mainstream society and even fewer had lived away from their family support system.

The policies outlined in the Meriam Report and IRA created difficulties and directly impacted the lives and experiences of Native American athletes. In time these difficulties became ingrained into new conceptions of Indianness and changed the expectations for Native American athletes. The *Denver Post* published an article in 1987 entitled “Sporting Dreams Die on the 'Rez” which shares the challenges and vices that detour from college careers many talented Native Americans athletes. The article notes, “Indians often find themselves without any real ethnic support system in college and become homesick for reservation life,” but does not mention the role that the Meriam Report and IRA had in creating these conditions.⁹⁰ This is not to say that boarding school education was the best option, or that cultural functionalism had no place in federal Indian policy; but rather the conditions that created star athletes were dramatically altered by policy changes which eliminated one of the prime venues for the contestation on the national level of Native American representations. With that venue reduced and fewer Native Americans rising to fame, new policies ultimately reinforced the “vanishing American” stereotype.

⁹⁰ Kevin Simmons, “Sporting Dreams Die on the 'Rez,” *Denver Post*, September 6, 1987, 1C, 19C.

CHAPTER 3

POST WAR INDIAN POLICY AND THE RISE OF BILLY MILLS

Billy Mills was born in 1938 on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota during the early application of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). As Mills matured into adulthood the new policies of Termination and Relocation radically altered Native American life. Other shifts in society affected Mills and Native Americans, most notably the African-American campaign for civil rights and the related struggle of Native Americans for Self-Determination. Mills, like Jim Thorpe, became an iconic American sports figure and was in a unique position to mediate change for the wider society. Mills credits the storytelling of his youth for helping him to navigate the challenges. In an oral interview conducted in 2011, Mills recalled that the storytelling of his father gave him “an advantage that a lot of my peers mates did not have.”¹ Sport was often a part of this oral culture.

As a child of the early twentieth-century Billy Mills’ father Sidney Mills spent his life in poverty on the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota. He was familiar with and proud of the many notable Native American athletes in the early twentieth-century such as Charles Bender, Jim Thorpe, and Wilson “Buster” Charles Jr. Sidney Mills also competed in sports and as an Army veteran he likely learned to box in the service. Unlike the Stewart boxers, however, Sidney Mills entered club boxing matches to earn money. That money was important to Sidney as he used it to provide food for his

¹ Billy Mills, interview with the author, Fair Oaks, California, 3 January 2011.

family.² Yet boxing was more than a way to make money for Sidney Mills. Life was difficult on the poverty-riddled Pine Ridge Reservation, and sport was one of the few ways to escape the destitution. Sidney Mills understood this fact and encouraged his children to take up sports. Sport could provide money for a better life and required that his children learn the values of hard work and discipline.

Hard work and discipline were at the core of the stories Sidney Mills shared with his children. Buster Charles' life story especially resonated with Sidney Mills. Similar in age to Mills, Charles' athletic performances elicited national press coverage and inspired comparisons to Jim Thorpe. Between 1929 and 1932 Buster Charles was a prominent Native American athlete and one of the United States' premier track and field competitors. Despite the challenges that the Indian Reorganization Act posed to Native American sports, the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas remained a leading boarding school with a national reputation for strong athletics. Charles was an Oneida born in Wisconsin, but migrated to Haskell to compete in track and field. Sidney Mills certainly knew of the Haskell Institute and was particularly drawn to Charles' story of persistence and overcoming of adversity.

At the U.S. Decathlon Championships in 1929, Charles won the first six events before suffering an injury and failing to capture the title. He returned healthy a year later and claimed the AAU crown. Sports editors reminded their readers “Wilson (Buster) Charles, full blooded Oneida Indian of Haskell Institute today won the title of America's

² Keith Schneider, “How the Long Race was Won,” *Miami Herald*, 26 November 1983, 2C.

best all-round athlete, the second Indian to hold that title since the days of Jim Thorpe.”³ Jim Thorpe was the standard of comparison for all Native American athletes and Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* announced Charles as Thorpe's successor. Similar to the representation of Thorpe, U.S. society recognized Charles' athletic ability, yet made sure to demarcate him as Indian.

Charles' athletic feats, while exemplary, did not match Thorpe's achievements. An intense rivalry with Jim Bausch of the cross-town major track program, the University of Kansas (Kansas), became the major story of Charles' career. The battle between Bausch and Charles established them as the pre-eminent decathletes in the United States. Bausch, however, always edged out Charles. Charles led the 1931 nationally-acclaimed Kansas Relays decathlon going into the final day, but lost as Bausch staged a furious comeback. Despite winning the same number of events, Bausch eked out a victory over Charles on total points at the 1932 Olympic Trials.⁴ At the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, Bausch set a world record while winning the Gold medal and Charles barely missed a medal, finishing in fourth place.

Sidney Mills stressed to son Billy that Buster Charles always worked hard, fought through injury, and never gave up. These traits also seemed more achievable when observed through Charles' example rather than that of the icon Jim Thorpe. Billy

³ Fait Elkins is the only other American Indian to win the AAU Decathlon Championship. He won it in 1927, but failed to make the 1928 Olympic Games due to an injury at the Olympic Trials. For more on Elkins see: Bil Gilbert, "The Twists of Fait," *Sports Illustrated*, 16 October 1991 accessed 7 April 2011 <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1140440/index.htm> "Indian Best U.S. Athlete," *The Daily Independent* [Murphysboro, Illinois], 26 Aug 1930, p. 6.

⁴ The decathlon consists of ten events spread equally over two days. The decathlon is scored on a points system. Points are awarded based on an athlete's time/distance/height in each event rather than their place.

Mills recalled that he considered Thorpe to be “more like a god and you don't have your gods as heroes.”⁵ In Charles, Sidney and Billy Mills saw the value of overcoming adversity and the fruits of hard work. Fourth place did not seem impossible.

The story of Buster Charles is emblematic of Sidney Mills’ teaching of the “virtues and values” of Lakota culture. Billy Mills was taught by his father that to become a Lakota Warrior one must go on a journey to the center of his soul and understand the four virtues: bravery, fortitude, wisdom, and generosity. According to Mills, bravery and fortitude enable the journey to find wisdom, and wisdom empowers individuals to make smart decisions that ultimately result in generosity.⁶ Perseverance and discipline were essential aspects of the Warrior’s journey and Sidney Mills used the example of Buster Charles’ athletic career in his teachings of the Lakota spirit.

These lessons made a significant impact on Billy Mills. Resilience and hard work championed by Muscular Christians mirrored the Native American virtues and were fused in Sidney’s storytelling, providing an example for the younger Mills of how to become a respected Lakota Warrior. Sport served as a bridge between the two societies. How Billy Mills internalized these lessons is central to understanding his mediation following the Second World War.

Similar to the childhood experience of Jim Thorpe, Billy Mills’ upbringing included plenty of physical activity. In tune with his father’s approach to physical activity as an important aspect of daily life, Mills partook in vigorous play with his childhood friends. Pine Ridge, the second largest Indian Reservation in the United States,

⁵ Mills, interview with the author.

⁶ Mills says that this is not how a traditionalist would teach the Lakota virtues and values, but that this is how his father and grandfather taught him.

offered Mills and his friends expansive territory to explore. Often they rode their bikes fifteen miles to the reservoir, swam a half-mile across it, and played Tarzan for a few hours before repeating the journey home.⁷

While Billy Mills' memory elevates the aspects of physical activity and play in his childhood, the conditions at Pine Ridge were hardly idyllic. Death, disease, and poverty were among the host of challenges its residents faced. Likewise reorganization required by the IRA forced political changes on the Oglala Lakota people. Prior to the IRA, the Oglala Lakota people of Pine Ridge had their own formal governmental institutions following the U.S. model. The Oglala Council, formed in 1891, borrowed concepts from United States governance models in establishing a constitution and bylaws while at the same time maintaining traditional cultural rituals and values.⁸ The Oglala Council, however, did not meet the IRA's requirements and was supplanted by a new governing body called the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council (OSTC). The creation of OSTC and its new constitution was influenced by BIA officials and left many traditional cultural components out of the new government.⁹ Historian Akim Reinhardt explains that the new council was "a legislative body that governs by majority vote, which is antithetical to the Lakota tradition of governing by consensus."¹⁰ The BIA's continual involvement on Pine Ridge ensured the "semi-soverignty" of the OSTC. Between Oglala Lakota reorganization in 1936 and World War II, the BIA dictated Lakota life. For example, Reinhardt notes that in 1938, the year Billy Mills was born, "the United States

⁷ Mills, interview with the author.

⁸ Akim Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee* (Lubbock, Texas Tech University Press, 2007) 36-37.

⁹ Ibid, 36-39.

¹⁰ Ibid, 39.

federal government supplied 82.55 percent of the total income (in cash, goods, and services) to the entire Indian population of Pine Ridge Reservation.”¹¹

The Mills family was directly affected by these conditions. According to a 1939 economic survey, Sidney Mills found temporary employment in the Indian Service.¹² Mills’ sister Estelle died at a young age from tuberculosis. Tragedy was not uncommon for Billy as soon thereafter cancer took his mother.¹³ These events certainly made the young Mills aware of the difficulties that life presented him on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Amidst these tragedies however, his father remained a guiding voice. He used traditional Lakota stories to explain the tragedies and reassure the younger Mills that he would be happy again one day.¹⁴ Within these stories sport remained central. One of the first books he read following his mother’s death “was a collection of articles a Jesuit priest gave my Dad to read, they were about the Olympics.”¹⁵ Mills remembers that one of the articles stated, “Olympians were chosen by the Gods” and “with achievement comes honor, and with honor comes responsibility.”¹⁶ Sidney added “with responsibility

¹¹ Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge*, 48.

¹² The Indian Service did not employ Mills in 1940. “Sidney Mills Economic Survey, 1939” Box 908-917, Economic Survey and Related Records, 1940-1941, Records of the Pine Ridge Agency, SD, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration-Kansas City, MO.

¹³ Schneider, “How the Long Race was Won,” *Miami Herald*, 26 November 1983, 2C.

¹⁴ See Billy Mills and Nicholas Sparks, *Lessons of a Lakota: A Young Man's Journey to Happiness and Self-Understanding* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2005) for Mills’ modern retelling of these stories.

¹⁵ Mills, Interview with the author.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

comes accountability,” insisting his son live up to the standards of the Warrior by considering how his actions affected others.¹⁷

Billy and Sidney Mills became very close during the years after his mother died. Not only did Billy’s father comfort him and teach him about life, but Sidney also relied on Billy. Sidney Mills was often ill and suffered a severe stroke. After the stroke, Sidney frequently pulled Billy out of school to care for him.¹⁸ As a result the two bonded over stories and the shared time together. A lot of that time was spent fishing. Although the time he spent with his father was relatively brief, Sidney is a central figure in Billy Mills’ memories of Pine Ridge.

Sidney Mills died from a heart attack when Billy was twelve. Following his death, Billy and his siblings were orphaned. Sid, the oldest son, held the family together. Twenty-one at the time, Sid was in the Navy and took on the role of stern father. Like their father, Sid believed in hard work and discipline. He was also very pragmatic, encouraging his younger brothers to learn a trade and earn their own money. Part of this pragmatism involved sending the younger brothers to Haskell.¹⁹

Sid’s insistence that his brothers attend off-reservation boarding schools and learn to earn their own money came both from economic necessity and his familiarity with the era’s new federal Indian policy. Like many others of his generation, Sid’s naval service made him aware of the opportunities available to Native Americans off of the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mills recalls being woken up to walk his father to the hospital in the middle of the night.

¹⁹ Billy Mills’ older brother Walter and younger brother Chet also attended the Haskell Institute. Like Billy, sport was also important for them. Walter was a senior when Billy was a freshman and played on the school’s very successful football and basketball teams, which inspired Billy. Chet, six years younger, played football at Haskell while Billy was running at Kansas.

reservation. The federal policies of Termination and Relocation stemmed from observations following the Second World War when large numbers of returning Native American service men chose to enter mainstream society rather than return to the reservation.²⁰ These observations were joined by veteran critiques of life on the reservation and the discrimination they faced. According to historian Donald Fixico, “Bureaucrats began promoting the idea that the Indian experience in World War II indicated that Native Americans were capable of assimilating into urban life.”²¹ The result was an onslaught of various Congressional efforts to encourage Native American assimilation by terminating or reducing federal appropriations to Indian services.²² The goal was to relocate Native Americans to urban centers. Legislators saw Termination and Relocation as a bridge between assimilation and the IRA by terminating federal assistance to Native Americans and relocating them to cities. These views, however, continued to reflect the paternalism of previous policies.

The debate surrounding the new policy was vigorous. Not all Native Americans wanted to end the trust-relationship with the United States because this meant the loss of valuable land, services, and further violated many of their treaties. The National Congress of the American Indian (NCAI) was organized in 1944 and worked to contest the Termination and Relocation policies.

²⁰ Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960*, (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 6-10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²² Much of the termination policy was put into effect through House Concurrent Resolution 108 and Public Law 280 in 1953 (Mills’ freshman year at Haskell). These laws sought to destroy tribal sovereignty and extend state and federal jurisdiction over tribal lands without the consent of Native peoples. Daniel Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008) 11.

Sid Mills personally mediated the changes with a long and successful career in the private sector and, later, an important position in the BIA. Those experiences likely impacted his decision to send his brothers to an off-reservation boarding school. Unlike on-reservation day schools, Haskell provided an opportunity for students to interact with mainstream society and learn skills that they could use in either broader society or on the reservation. Billy Mills arrived as a high school freshman at Haskell in the fall of 1953 and flourished.

The Indian Reorganization Act affected the Haskell Institute. Following the Meriam Report boarding schools and their curriculum dramatically changed. Although it continued vocational training, Haskell was now equivalent to a public high school. Like the Rapid City School, Haskell offered extracurricular activities, especially sports. The school's teams competed with other local high schools, providing interaction with white society. Remembering his father's advice, these activities gave Mills a support network that allowed him to thrive. Mills was also aided by the fact that many of Haskell's instructors were Native Americans who had been through similar experiences and could relate to their students. One instructor was Warner A. "Tony" Coffin Jr.

Coffin, a Potawatomi, was a Haskell graduate who later earned a bachelor's and master's degree from Kansas. A man of integrity and loyalty, Coffin was given the highest distinguished service award by the Department of Interior for his work at Haskell. He began coaching at Haskell in 1940 and, with the exception of a brief stint as a Naval officer during the Second World War, Coffin remained at Haskell until his death in

1966.²³ Military service opened Coffin's eyes to the broader world. He realized that there were alternatives available for Native American youth besides an impoverished life on the reservation. He used his role as coach to deeply influence and mentor thousands of Native Americans, including Billy Mills.²⁴

Coffin was like a second father to Mills. “He had a way of taking young people, many [from] poverty, orphaned, some abandoned, and he made us a family” Mills recalls.²⁵ As his coach, Coffin molded Mills into a championship caliber distance runner, and as a mentor he taught him about the world. Indeed, Mills became a champion. Mills was active outside of athletics at Haskell. He was a member of the H Club, served on the student council, and wrote stories for the *Indian Leader* student newspaper. But it was in athletics that Mills truly excelled. Capitalizing on his youthful endurance, developed during childhood play on Pine Ridge, Mills captured three cross country state titles.²⁶ He broke Wes Santee's Kansas State record in cross country while finishing high school with a two year unbeaten streak.²⁷ This was a major accomplishment for Mills as Wes Santee was an elite runner for the University of Kansas. Santee was the 1953 NCAA

²³ Born in 1916 and out of college by 1940, Coffin may have attended high school alongside Buster Charles and at the very least knew of him and the opportunity that sport provided for Native Americans.

²⁴ Completed in 1981, Haskell's basketball arena and sport complex was named in honor of Coffin. In 2009 Coffin was posthumously inducted into the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame for his role as a coach. The American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame is housed in the Coffin Sports Complex at Haskell. “Coffin Sports Complex Dedication Program,” in Warner A. “Tony” Coffin file, Haskell Archives, Haskell Cultural Center and Museum, Haskell Indian Nations University Lawrence, Kansas.

²⁵ Mills, Interview with the author.

²⁶ Cross Country was not an official Kansas high school sport until Mills' senior year at Haskell; however he won two unofficial state titles at the University of Kansas' end of the year invitational meet before winning the first Kansas state individual cross country championship. His Haskell team also claimed the first state's first cross country team crown.

²⁷ For more on Santee see Neal Bascomb, *The Perfect Mile: Tree Athletes, One Goal, Less Than Four Minutes To Achieve It* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2004); “Student Spotlight,” *Indian Leader* (Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas) 60, no. 3 (26 October 1956).

individual cross country champion, a 1952 Olympian in the 5,000m, and among the trio of runners vying to be the first to break four-minutes for the mile run. Although Santee failed to break the four-minute barrier he set three world records while at Kansas.²⁸

Mills was just as good on the track. He won the state championship in the mile twice and lowered Glenn Cunningham's twenty-seven year old state indoor mile record. Cunningham's record, set in 1930, was once the national high school mile record.²⁹ And Cunningham, like Santee, was an Olympian. Cunningham placed fourth in 1,500m at the 1932 Olympics and second in 1936 Games.³⁰ While attending the University of Kansas, Cunningham won back-to-back NCAA championships in the mile and broke the world record twice.³¹

Such Kansas high school performances drew attention to Mills and many believed that he was destined for greatness as well. As Mills experienced success in running, his name began to appear in newspapers. One morning Coffin noticed Mills sitting in the school library reading about himself. Mills recalls that Coffin offered a few words of advice. "Don't just read about yourself," he said "any time you're in the paper – you ran a very fast time so you're going to be in the paper a lot if you keep running – anytime you're in the paper just don't read about yourself...read about something local,

²⁸ 2009 Kansas Cross Country Media Guide. *Kansas Athletics Inc.* Lawrence, Kansas, 49.

²⁹ "Mills Sets Mile Mark, Tribe Wins Indoor," *Indian Leader* (Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas) 60, no. 13 (12 April 1957).

³⁰ The 1,500m is roughly 109m shorter than a standard mile, but is often referred to as the metric mile. The 1,500m is contested in international competitions where metric measurements are used, such as the Olympics.

³¹ For more on Cunningham, including the remarkable story of his recovery from near fatal childhood burns, see Paul J. Kiell, *American Miler: The Life and Times of Glenn Cunningham* (Halcottsville, NY: Breakaway Books, 2006); 2010 KU Track and Field Media Guide, *Kansas Athletics Inc.*, Lawrence, Kansas, 21,123.

read about something national, or something worldly.”³² This encouragement reminded Mills that there was more beyond the world of sports. Coffin encouraged Mills to develop as an individual and not just an athlete. Coffin’s mentorship built off the historical conscious and critical thinking that Mills’ father taught. This reading helped Mills learn to recognize and combat racism. When reporters tried to nickname him “Red” he joked back, reminding them that “his hair is black not red.”³³

Such lessons were important and helped Mills mature. Coffin's influence continued to resonate with Mills beyond his time at Haskell and helped him leverage athletic talent into something more than an enjoyable hobby. Indeed, other prominent Native American athletes launched successful athletic careers through boarding school sports success. Coffin saw no reason the same could not be true for Mills, especially because he broke the high school records of two local Olympians.

Coming out of Haskell, Mills was confident. He attended the same school as his hero, Buster Charles, and frequently ran at the University of Kansas in the Kansas Relays and state cross country races. Location was important for Mills, as the university’s campus on Mount Oread now rivaled Mount Olympus; Lawrence had become recognized as a place where Olympians were made.³⁴ These dreams were not lost on Mills or his Haskell classmates. Kansas cross country and track coach Millard

³² Mills, Interview with the author.

³³ Edward Haag, “Sports Spindle,” *Indian Leader* (Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas) 60, no. 2, (12 October 1956), 7.

³⁴ The University of Kansas featured many Olympians over the years, including: Jim Bausch (1932), Clyde Coffman (1932), Glenn Cunningham (1932, 1936), Wes Santee (1952), Jim Ryun (1964, 1968), Al Oerter (1956, 1960, 1964, 1968), Bill Neider (1956, 1960), and Billy Mills (1964). Note: this is not an exhaustive list, for a complete list See 2010 KU Track and Field Media Guide, *Kansas Athletics Inc.*, Lawrence, Kansas, 123.

“Bill” Easton took notice too. During Mills' senior year, the *Indian Leader* reported that Coach Easton “predicted that in the near future Billy Mills...would be known all over the world.”³⁵

Easton's words resonated with Mills. Although he had sixteen scholarship offers, Kansas continued to impress. Bill Easton had a magnetic personality and Wes Santee was personally involved in Mills' recruitment. Kansas had a tradition of developing Olympians and their recent success was impressive. The cross country team finished second at the NCAA cross country championships in 1955 and 1956 years and was team champion in 1953. Mills looked up to Santee, and it was perhaps inevitable that Mills enrolled at the University of Kansas on a track scholarship in the fall of 1957.³⁶

Although Haskell and the University of Kansas were both located in Lawrence, racial tension surrounded African Americans and Native Americans in the town. During a decade highlighted by *Brown v. Board of Education*, Wilt Chamberlain became just the third African American to play basketball at the school when he enrolled in the fall of 1955.³⁷ Chamberlain's recruitment was a highly publicized event promoted by forward thinking University Chancellor Frank Murphy.³⁸ Murphy, along with faculty members at

³⁵ Haag, “Sports Spindle.”

³⁶ Mills' scholarship offers included nearly all of the Big Seven Conference schools, as well as Oregon State and Notre Dame. He came close to choosing Oklahoma, but in his heart it was always the University of Kansas. Note: the Big Seven Conference became the Big Eight Conference during Mills freshman year, 1957-58, and its members formed what is now the BigXII Conference in 1996-97.

³⁷ The *Brown v. Board of Education* case involved nearby Topeka, Kansas. This proximity likely played a role in the community's drive to transform its racist attitudes.

³⁸ Chamberlain and Mills, knew each other and were track teammates. Although they never socialized much, Mills considered Chamberlain to be one of his friends. For more on this era at KU see: Aram Goudsouzian, “Can Kansas Basketball Survive Chamberlain? The Kansas Years of Wilt the Stilt,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 28 (Autumn 2005), 154.

Kansas, had begun to take note of the racism in Lawrence and on campus, hoping that a sports star such as Chamberlain would transform the community's attitude.

During Chamberlain's final year at Kansas, and Mills' first, Dean of Men Donald K. Alderson wrote a letter to Chancellor Murphy reporting his research on the racial views of local businesses. Alderson's findings were organized into three categories. Some establishments, such as the Eldridge Coffee Shop, served all customers regardless of color. Others, like the Wagon Wheel (currently known as the Wheel), regularly served blacks if they were in a "mixed" group with whites. The final category of restaurants refused to serve all "dark skinned people."³⁹ The research allowed Alderson and the Dean's Office to advise minority students about in which cafes they could expect service. This letter also illustrates the Kansas administrators' efforts to help students with racism both on and off of campus. Similar letters circulated throughout the Dean of Men's office. A 1961 office memo describes an incident where a foreign student of Indian descent was denied entrance into a barbershop. A community businessman reported the act and inquired about what the "Chamber of Commerce could do to help alleviate the situation."⁴⁰ The memo, written by Assistant Dean of Men Clark Coan, goes on to say: "I assured him that the University has long taken recognition of the problem and it has been worked on both by the University and community leaders."⁴¹

³⁹ Donald K. Alderson to Frank Murphy, April 26, 1957, Discrimination – D.K. Alderson 1957 – 1965 folder, Dean of Men Woodruff & Alderson Correspondence 1921-1974, box 19, series no. 52, University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁴⁰ The memo notes that the student was foreign but is ambiguous about whether the student is an American Indian or from India. Clark Coan to Deans Woodruff and Alderson, October 17, 1961, Discrimination – D.K. Alderson 1957 – 1965 folder, Dean of Men Woodruff & Alderson Correspondence 1921-1974, box 19, series no. 52, University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁴¹ Coan to Woodruff and Alderson, October 17, 1961, University Archives.

Not only was Mills thrust into this tumultuous climate after having lived a fairly segregated life from whites on the reservation and at a boarding school, but he had to handle the high expectations for his athletic performance. Mills was recruited with lofty goals. He was identified as an athlete and expected to perform at least as well as his personal history at Haskell and those Native Americans who came before him. Such expectations were difficult to manage for a young Native American living in a racist society for the first time.

Like many African Americans, Mills was becoming aware of the discrimination in the world around him. Yet many of his white teammates did not recognize or see discrimination. During his sophomore year teammate Bob Covey invited him home to spend the long Thanksgiving weekend. Covey was shocked to learn that it was the first white home to which Mills had ever been invited.⁴² Amidst the discrimination, the invitation gave Mills hope.

At Kansas, Mills felt different. Although Chancellor Murphy and Dean Alderson tried to reform the racial attitude of the campus, Mills was denied acceptance to a fraternity because of his ethnicity and not allowed to room with his best friends because whites, blacks and Indians could not live together. Likewise, he was asked to remove himself from NCAA All-American pictures. Dating proved difficult for Mills once fathers learned that their daughters were seeing an American Indian. Covey's friendship was a hopeful bright spot for Mills during a time of hopelessness.⁴³

⁴² Mills had been inside white homes before, usually to do work, but never invited in as a guest to have meals and stay. Easton invited Mills over to team barbecues in his backyard, but never anything more.

⁴³ Mills' later friendship, courtship, and marriage to Patrica Harris was also a bright spot.

Other Native Americans experienced similar actions across the United States. Although Native Americans thrived during the Second World War and in the military and Tony Coffin and Ned Crutcher were respected and accepted for their service, N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize winning book, *House Made of Dawn*, details how mainstream society did not always embrace Native American veterans when they returned home. Momaday's book was one of the first pieces of Native American literature to enter broader society and illustrate what life was like for many Native Americans in the twentieth century. Although fictional and written in 1968 after much of the Termination fervor subsided, Momaday's work can be read as a critique of the practice and policy. The book outlines the discrimination and difficulties that Native Americans faced while trying to adjust to life within broader society.⁴⁴

Indeed, life was difficult for all Native Americans. Termination and Relocation policies threatened the only way of life that many knew. Like allotment, Termination and Relocation effectively broke many long-standing treaties and angered the Native American community. The NCAI was but one of many organizations and activist groups that challenged the new policy's implementation.

Sol Tax, a long time American Indian activist and professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, organized the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference. The Chicago Conference championed Pan-Indianism and established collective indigenous goals. Tax saw the conference as a way to combat the federal Termination and Relocation policy and "emphasize community action based on self-determination"

⁴⁴ N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

by facilitating “communication between the widely scattered Indian groups.”⁴⁵ In the wake of the conference, the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) formed to unify disaffected Indian youth.⁴⁶

Such events flew under the radar during African American activism in the 1960s. This was not a coincidence. Historian of the Chicago Conference Thomas Niermann explains that some leaders encouraged “the Youth Council to engage in civil rights protests.”⁴⁷ Yet many members questioned “the logic of becoming a small part of an established movement.”⁴⁸ Instead they recognized that

the Indians’ cause was fundamentally different than the black cause. Blacks were fighting for equal rights and integration. Indians did not want integration. They wanted the government to honor treaty rights and tribal sovereignty.⁴⁹

Long before the emergence of the militant American Indian Movement (AIM), the American Indian Chicago Conference was a watershed moment of Native American activism. It built from the shared experience of military veterans and boarding school educated Indians to synthesize coherent and collective strategies to invoke policy changes. Native Americans became more “modern” in their resistance strategies. These strategies came to fruition during the 1960s, although not quickly enough for some. Mills was made aware of these various initiatives from Haskell faculty members who thought his athletic notoriety could bolster their efforts. Later in life Mills embraced

⁴⁵ For more on the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference see: Thomas A. Niermann, “The American Indian Chicago Conference, 1961: A Native Response to Government Policy and the Birth of Indian Self-Determination” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Kansas, 2006) 67.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 67.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 158.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

many of the conference's goals; however, during college he declined to participate as he dealt with his own struggles in school and on the track.⁵⁰

School and track were a struggle for Mills at Kansas, where he was one of only a handful of American Indians on campus. High expectations and unfamiliar surroundings weighed heavily. Mills and Coach Bill Easton often clashed. According to Mills, Easton was dogmatic, stubborn, and slow to embrace change.

The early 1960s were a time of change, not only in Indian policy and racial matters, but also in physical education. U.S. Air Force physician Kenneth Cooper, backed by the space race and President John F. Kennedy's Council of Physical Fitness, revolutionized the science of long distance training.⁵¹ His research on aerobics helped “create the conditioning program preparing America’s astronauts” and parts of it are still “used today by military organizations, amateur and professional athletic teams, law enforcement agencies, and many public schools and universities all over the world.”⁵² Physical education was evolved from disciplined, physical activity and games in the days of Jim Thorpe and Ned Crutcher to include the modern disciplines of exercise science and kinesiology.

Easton was already a very successful coach when Mills arrived at Kansas. He had a current streak of five consecutive indoor and outdoor track and field conference team

⁵⁰ Mills did not attend the Chicago Conference, but repeats many of the conference's themes in his work today. He is well read in Native American history and has become an advocate of teaching American Indian history to all students emphasizing treaty rights, broken treaties, and tribal sovereignty.

⁵¹ Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History*, (Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) 379-380.

⁵² “Dr. Kenneth Cooper,” *Cooper Aerobics*, 2011, accessed 9 April 2011
<<http://www.cooperaerobics.com/about-cooper/Dr--kenneth-Cooper.aspx>>

titles and nine consecutive titles for cross country.⁵³ Easton saw no need to embrace the new wave of scientific research. Mills was a physical education major and thought differently. Easton bucked innovation and appeared anti-modern and racist to Mills. When Mills would ask for more speed work, Easton would say “Son, you're an Indian, Indians run forever, Negroes run fast.”⁵⁴ “But coach, I don't wanna run forever, I wanna run fast, I wanna run the mile fast,” Mills would plead, but to no avail.⁵⁵ Easton subscribed to the stereotype of Native Americans as natural distance runners who could not develop speed, but only learn pace.

Yet racism was not the major problem for Mills. Rather it was the disconnect between coach and athlete. “With my passion to be great,” Mills reflects, “and his knowledge of how to be great...there was always a miss-connect.”⁵⁶ In the wake of the aerobics movement and Kenneth Cooper's research, Mills believed Easton was not keeping up with the times.⁵⁷ Mills understood and embraced the new modern form of physical education and sport training; his coach did not.

This difference of opinion deeply affected Mills' relationship with Easton. At times Mills thought that Easton did not take his goals seriously. During their conversations, he recalls Easton saying his goals were “too big, those are for Wes [Santee], you have to start smaller.”⁵⁸ Likewise they disagreed on race strategy. Easton

⁵³ 2010 KU Track and Field Media Guide, *Kansas Athletics Inc.*, Lawrence, Kansas, p 118; 2009 Kansas Cross Country Media Guide, *Kansas Athletics Inc.*, Lawrence, Kansas, p 54.

⁵⁴ Mills, Interview with the author.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Mills earned a degree in physical education at Kansas, and he studied the latest trends, which likely included Cooper's finding on aerobics.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

wanted Mills to be aggressive and lead in races while Mills wanted to start slower and patiently catch people. The disagreement came to a head during Mills' last race in college when during the race Easton told Mills to "get in front or get off the track."⁵⁹ By then the years of conflict had broken Mills. Instead of standing up and explaining himself, Mills usually reacted by withdrawing and hoping the conflicts would resolve themselves. But the conflict was not resolved and Mills finally had had enough so he dropped out of the race.

Over his four years at Kansas, Mills did not know how to respond to Easton. He cowered to Easton's authority. The very sound of Easton's voice caused Mills to feel distress and to lose focus. Although wise in critical thinking and conscious of the painful past of American Indians, never before had Mills needed to stand up for himself and face an antagonist who was supposed to be a mentor and coach. The experiences with Easton were traumatizing for Mills. During his junior year Mills considered suicide. On numerous occasions he thought of quitting school or transferring.⁶⁰

Tony Coffin was a key figure in supporting Mills and convincing him to stay at Kansas. Coffin helped Mills realize that he had a unique talent and opportunity. He saw the bigger picture of Mills' life. According to Mills, one day over lunch Mills told Coffin that he planned to drop out. Coffin started crying. Mills thought Coffin was crying out of empathy, but Coffin explained:

I'm crying because you have [snap] that much of an opportunity to do something great, and you're running away from it. Most people have no idea what they could be great at, let alone how much of an opportunity. You have that much

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

[snap] that much of an opportunity to be great. You're running away from it, that's why I'm crying. Go for that opportunity and you could help not just yourself, you could help your people. You've got to go for it.⁶¹

Coffin understood the power of sport. He had observed it as a coach and saw the potential for Mills to harness sport. Coffin also knew the fleeting nature of opportunity, particularly for American Indians. Battling through expectations and stereotypes of Indianness was difficult, but worth the reward. Fewer and fewer Native American athletes had that opportunity in the postwar era. Encouraging Mills to stay in school was important.

Mills was a talented runner with an impressive record at Haskell from 1953 to 1957. He had broken the high school records of two Olympians and hailed from similar ancestry as the world's greatest athlete. As a result, the expectations for him at Kansas were tremendous. Under a more realistic set of standards, Mills' Kansas career was remarkably successful. Between 1957 and 1961 Mills twice earned All-America honors, was a Big Eight individual champion in cross country, and an important member of Kansas' NCAA team track and field titles in 1959 and 1960.⁶² Yet, he never won an individual national title. Many viewed this as a failure. Easton and others believed that Mills never reached his potential. Mills admits that some of it was due to immaturity. He was unaccustomed to the rigid authority of Easton and did not know how to express confidence in communicating his ideas and presenting himself. Mills struggled with the weight of Indianness and expectation.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Despite his rift with Easton, Mills was elected cross country team captain by his teammates. 2009 Kansas Cross Country Media Guide, *Kansas Athletics Inc.*, Lawrence, Kansas, p 21.

It is easy to see Bill Easton as a villain; however, Mills would be the first to say that Easton was not. Easton was a product of his time; a gruff leader who expected his athletes to follow directions. In some ways Easton was anti-modern. Mills frequently describes Easton as dogmatic. Easton was slow to change his workouts and coaching style. He did not realize that he intimidated Mills, who wanted a mentor to treat him with mutual respect and understanding. Easton did not coach that way; however, over time he mellowed and Mills matured, allowing them to respect and understand one another, but unfortunately the tempering of their relationship did not occur until after Mills left Kansas.

Looking back, Mills credits Easton for “helping me tremendously as a human being, but he didn't help me as an athlete,” although many of the lessons and experiences Mills had at Kansas helped prepare him for life after sports.⁶³ Easton represented the anti-modern expectations of Indianness that Mills desperately tried to move beyond. Eventually, Mills and Easton would become close friends but Mills was not yet ready to pursue such a relationship. In the meantime Mills married Patricia Harris and joined the Marines Corps.

Patricia Harris was white, and grew up poor in Coffeyville, Kansas. Bill Easton's daughter-in-law was also from Coffeyville and reported that Patricia's parents were divorced and her father had an alcohol problem. Although Easton and Mills did not see eye to eye, this news troubled Easton and he tried to protect Mills by opposing their marriage. Easton cared for Mills, but failed to express it in a way that Mills could

⁶³ Mills, Interview with the author.

understand. Easton called a compulsory work out on their wedding day and “any one who went to the wedding would be kicked off the team.”⁶⁴ Although most of the scholarship athletes attended anyway, this action furthered the rift between Mills and Easton.

Patricia and Billy were married January 27, 1962, a few weeks after graduation.⁶⁵ Because Patricia was white their courtship faced many obstacles. Both mainstream society and Mills' family were not accepting of their union, at least initially. At one point early in their relationship Mills' sister asked Patricia “what are your plans with Billy?”⁶⁶ Despite roadblocks, Patricia and Billy carried on. Their bond was strong; they felt comfortable together and believed in each other's goals. She played an important role in helping Mills mature, overcome expectations, and stay committed to running.

Following his wedding, Mills worked in Lawrence before taking a commission as an officer in the Marine Corps in October of 1962 and quit running. Patricia took notice. “She knew how uncomfortable I was not running,” he recalls. Running was central to Mills’ identity. Patricia insisted Mills return to running, telling him: “You're not the person I married and I don't know what could change in – in a 120 days, maybe it's the fact that you're not running.”⁶⁷ Like Tony Coffin's words of encouragement, Patricia motivated him and helped Mills realize his opportunities. From the advice of Coffin,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mills completed his eligibility in the spring of 1961, but had one more semester to graduate.

⁶⁶ There were never any problems among Mills' siblings about his marriage to Patricia. Within the larger Native American community, however, people asked “what are you doing, why are you marrying a white woman?” Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Patricia, and the stories of his father, Mills came to realize that “every passion has a destiny,” and his was an Olympic gold medal.⁶⁸

That passion led Mills to join the U.S. Marine Corps. His decision to join the Marines involved many factors. Some were simple. Mills liked the Marine uniforms as a kid. Other factors were more complex.⁶⁹ He knew about the long tradition of military service among American Indians. His brother served in the Navy, his father was in the Army, and he had an uncle who won a Silver Star. Tony Coffin was a former Naval officer. Mills had seen the famous photograph of Iwo Jima, featuring Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian.⁷⁰ Military service appealed to the culture of many Native Americans. For Mills it played into his knowledge of Lakota culture, particularly the concept of the Warrior.⁷¹

Mills also decided to join the Marines in 1962 because it allowed him to become an officer, avoid the draft, and continue running track. Wes Santee continued to be a role model for Mills, and influenced his decision as well. Santee served in the Marines after he exhausted his NCAA eligibility at Kansas and explained to Mills that the various armed services branches recruited former college athletes for their athletic programs. The goal of most of these athletic programs was to develop athletes for the Olympic

⁶⁸ “Every passion has a destiny,” is an inspirational quote frequently attributed to Billy Mills and builds off his father's lessons for how to set goals and achieve happiness in life.

⁶⁹ Mills recalls being inspired by the 1955 film *To Hell and Back* about the life of Audie Murphy, World War II's most decorated American soldier.

⁷⁰ Hayes was celebrated and paraded around the world by the U.S. government to raise patriotic support for the war. Donald Fixico explains, the “continuous public exposure led to his ruin,” because “celebrity status prohibited Hayes from fulfilling a personal quest as a soldier in his tribe's warrior tradition.” Mills did not know this at the time, and although he did not see ruin, he too felt less a soldier for not seeing combat.

⁷¹ Ibid.

team.⁷² Military service was a simple way to subvert the amateur system and was a particularly common practice during the Cold War. In addition to training, the military branches developed rivalries and competed with each other. The truest sign of superiority, however, was having the most members on the Olympic team.

Thus, the Marine Corps was congruent with Mills' traditional cultural values and offered him an opportunity to continue serious running. It protected Mills' amateur status, saving him from the scrutiny that Thorpe had faced. The military also provided discipline, structure, and access to the latest research that supported Mills' high-level training. This period of Mills' life was integral to his journey to the Olympics. "The first time I felt like I belonged was being a Marine," Mills recalls.⁷³ The sense of belonging helped Mills become confident and mature. He once again trusted his abilities, and for the first time had the support and freedom to train the way he wanted.

As a Marine, Mills' coach was Earl "Tommy" Thompson Sr.⁷⁴ Although a Canadian, Thompson was the long-time U.S. Naval Academy track coach.⁷⁵ Thompson was also a champion in his own right. He won the 1920 Olympic gold medal in the 110m high hurdles and coached the Navy track team to an NCAA championship in

⁷² Besides Santee many other Olympics athletes served in the Marine Corps during the Cold War. Perhaps most prominent among them was Bob Mathias who won the gold medals in the decathlon at the 1948 and 1952 Olympics.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The Canadian Tommy Thompson should not to be confused with the Tommy Thompson who influenced thousands of American Indian youth as coach at the Sequoyah Vocational School in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. For more on the Oklahoma Tommy Thompson see Patti Dickinson, *Coach Tommy Thompson and The Boys of Sequoyah* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

⁷⁵ Thompson coached track at the Naval Academy from 1927 through 1963.

1945.⁷⁶ While Patricia was the first white person whom Mills trusted, Thompson was the first white man.

When they first met, Thompson told Mills, “I don't want to coach you son, but you have great talent, I'd love to be your mentor. But you have to let me inside.”⁷⁷

Thompson knew about Mills’ troubled relationship with Easton and hoped he could help.

Mills could never let Easton inside; their views were incongruent. But Thompson was different. He blended anti-modern wisdom and modern science in his coaching.

Thompson’s words echoed the stories of Mills' father and left an impression. Sidney Mills taught Billy that the journey to becoming a Lakota Warrior also started “inside,” at the center of the soul. The parallel struck Mills and allowed him to trust Thompson.⁷⁸

After completing officer training school in Quantico, Virginia, Mills became a Motor Transport Officer. He was assigned to the First Force Service Regiment at Camp Pendleton, California, where he did most of his training.⁷⁹ Mills’ weekly mileage increased from the forty-five miles he ran in college to nearly one hundred miles per week. His training partner, Alex Breckenridge, a fellow Marine and marathoner, encouraged Mills to maintain the high miles.⁸⁰ “I had never done any quality distance training until I met Alex,” Mills remembers.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Earl 'Tommy' Thompson,” Canada Sports Hall of Fame, accessed 10 April 2011: <http://www.sportshall.ca/accessible/hm_profile.php?i=437>

⁷⁷ Mills, interview with the author..

⁷⁸ While at Haskell, Mills started seeing many parallels between mainstream society and his traditional values. He utilized these parallels to develop critical thinking and understand the broader society on his terms.

⁷⁹ William H. “Billy” Mills, Marine Corps Sports Hall of Fame, accessed 10 April 2011 <<http://www.usmc-mccs.org/sports/hof/2001-mills.cfm>>

⁸⁰ Breckenridge competed in the 1960 U.S. Olympic Trials in both the marathon and 10,000m. He failed to make the team in the 10,000m but did in the marathon, placing 30th at the 1960 Rome Games. Breckenridge's experience helped Mills prepare for his shot in the same races in 1964. Richard Hymans,

In addition to increasing his mileage, Mills also changed his diet. Marine doctors diagnosed Mills as hypoglycemic and borderline diabetic. Before being diagnosed, Mills sometimes lost energy and faded at the end of races. He competed in the 1960 U.S. Olympic Trials for the 10,000m, but failed to make the team. According to Mills he was in fourth, challenging for the third place and qualifying spot when he went low blood sugar. Mills “zoned out” and does not remember the fifth mile of the race. Fixing his diet and managing his blood sugar allowed Mills to maintain his energy levels and become a much better runner. The result was a re-energized Billy Mills.

Mills quietly trained and competed throughout 1963 and early 1964 without attracting much media attention. In fact, it was not until four days after he qualified for the U.S. Olympic team, finishing third in the marathon, that the *Lawrence Journal-World* took note. The simple story reported that Mills was the “first track man with KU ties to qualify for the U.S. Olympic team,” but did not assess his chances of winning a medal.⁸² Nor did the article mention that the race was just Mills’ first marathon.⁸³ The Olympic trials for track and field events took place in September, and shortly thereafter the *Journal-World* reported that Mills earned his second Olympic berth in the

The History of the U.S. Olympic Trials – Track & Field 1908 – 2000, (Indianapolis: USA Track and Field, 2004), 161.

⁸¹ Mark D. Hersey, “Mills' Moment, April 21, 1984” This Week in KU History, <<http://www.kuhistory.com/proto/story.asp?id=74>>

⁸² “Ex-Jawhawk Bill Mills Qualifies for Olympics,” *Lawrence Journal-World* [Lawrence, Kansas], 7 July 1964.

⁸³ Earl Morey, “Tony Unsurprised by Mills Victory,” *Lawrence Journal-World* [Lawrence, Kansas], 14 October 1964.

10,000m.⁸⁴ Mills was the only American to qualify in two individual track and field events in 1964.⁸⁵

The marathon and the 10,000m are two of the most difficult distance races. The 26.2 mile marathon is run on trails and city streets and relies on endurance. The 10,000m, on the other hand, is a grueling twenty-five laps around the track that require mental focus, endurance, and speed. Competitors pay close attention to their lap times. Pace and precision are more important in the unforgiving race. The difference of one or two seconds per lap results in several meters of separation. Consistent pace is the key to maintaining position. Speed is also important. Strategically timed surges challenge the other runners and create separation. Likewise, the final sprint relies on good positioning to test the limits of both speed and endurance. A slow pace allows an athlete with superior speed to outkick the field at the finish, while a fast pace grinds at the pack and goes to the runner with the best endurance. As a marathon qualifier, Mills had endurance. Finding the right balance between speed and endurance, however, was essential to his success.

The 1964 Olympic Games were held in Tokyo, Japan. Because they were the first Olympics held in Asia, Japanese officials went to great lengths to ensure successful Games.⁸⁶ Tokyo spent record amounts of money under “the burden of representing their cultural heritage” and to demonstrate their “recovery from postwar economic devastation”

⁸⁴ “4 On Team From Here,” *Lawrence Journal-World* [Lawrence, Kansas], 14 September 1964, 10.

⁸⁵ Morey, “Tony Unsurprised by Mills Victory,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, 14 October 1964.

⁸⁶ Frank Zarnowski, a professor of economics at Mount St. Mary’s College, lists the adjusted total costs of the Tokyo Games as \$1.926 billion, or roughly one million dollars per athlete. With the exception of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, which happened after his study, Tokyo ranks as the most expensive Olympics. Frank Zarnowski, “A Look at Olympic Costs,” *Citius, Altius, Fortius* 1, no. 1 (1992), 23.

to the world.⁸⁷ The *New York Times* frequently published reports from Japan about the infrastructure improvements and cultural attractions.⁸⁸

Public relations were important to the Tokyo Games' organizers. They planned to make use of satellite television, a developing technology. During the summer of 1962, the *New York Times* reported that Japanese scientists tested the “Telestar satellite” and saw it as a “hopeful sign for televising Olympic events.”⁸⁹ Indeed the games were the first broadcast using satellites, although with a several hour delay because of the time difference.⁹⁰ This new technology brought increased exposure to Japan and the athletes at the Games. Over 1500 reporters, cameramen, and technicians were in Tokyo for the Olympics according to a *New York Times* report, making the 1964 Olympic press corps the largest ever to cover an Olympics.⁹¹ Tourism in Japan increased sixty-percent from the previous year and an estimated 130,000 traveled exclusively to see the Olympic Games.⁹² Likewise corporate sponsorship increased from a mere forty-six companies in 1960 to 250 in 1964.⁹³

These storylines demonstrated the modernization of the Olympics. The development in satellite technology revolutionized the Games. Unlike 1912 and 1932

⁸⁷ Monroe Price and Daniel Dayan, eds., *Owning the Olympics, Narratives of the New China* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 186, 21.

⁸⁸ Among these infrastructure improvements were over fifty miles of new highway, a 344 mile high speed railway from Tokyo to Osaka, as well as an Olympic Village and new athletic venues. Robert Trumbull, “Only Finishing Touches Remain as New-Look Tokyo Prepares for Olympics,” *New York Times*, 27, Sept. 1964, S7; “Japanese Are Planning To Entertain Delegates,” *New York Times*, Sep 6, 1964, F10; “Field of Travel,” *New York Times*, Sept. 2, 1962, 217.

⁸⁹ “Telestar Gives Japan Hope For TV of '64 Olympics,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1962, 13.

⁹⁰ Kristine Toohey and A. J. Veal, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective*, (Oxford: CABI, 2000), 130.

⁹¹ “1500 to Report Olympics,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1964, 58.

⁹² Emmerson Chapin, “When Not To Go To Tokyo,” *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1964, XX39.

⁹³ Chrysostomos Giannoulakis and David Stolar, “Evolution of the Olympic Sponsorship and Its Impact on the Olympic Movement,” *Cultural Imperialism in Action: Critiques in the Global Olympic Trust*, (London, Ontario, Canada: International Centre for Olympic Studies, 2006), 180.

when Thorpe and Charles competed, the Olympic Games were now truly an international event subject to the instant gaze of sports fans worldwide. Likewise corporate sponsorships infused money into the Olympics. Some products like Wheaties cereal capitalized on the success of individual athletes and teams for marketing purposes.⁹⁴ What is more, the emphasis on an emerging industrial Japan in 1964 and its unique culture created space for the celebration of diversity and cultural difference.⁹⁵

The Games of the XVIII Olympiad opened on October 10, 1964 with an impressively choreographed opening ceremony. The ceremony symbolically announced Japan's return to the world's stage following the Second World War. Japan chose Yoshinori Sakai to light the Olympic flame at the ceremony as a powerful symbolic figure. Born in Hiroshima two hours after the United States dropped the atomic bomb, Sakai represented an emerging, youthful, modern Japan.⁹⁶

The symbolism was not lost on Mills. Years earlier, his friend Oliver Red Cloud told him to “go to the Olympic Games and you should represent yourself. Because if you represent yourself, you'll represent the Lakota, you'll represent all of America.”⁹⁷ Like Yoshinori Sakai, Mills hoped to emerge a powerful figure to challenge the representations of his people in a modern world.

⁹⁴ Wheaties' slogan “the Breakfast of Champions” relied on the endorsement of prominent athletes. Indeed, Billy Mills was featured on a box following the 1964 Olympics. “Billy Mills Wheaties box photocopy,” Mills, William Mervin file, Haskell Archives, Haskell Cultural Center and Museum, Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁹⁵ One of the phrases that Mills frequently uses is “unity through diversity” which he credits to the mission of the Olympics, his experiences in 1964 as well as traveling and meeting other Olympians since the Olympic experience.

⁹⁶ “Boy Born on Day A-Bomb Fell Chosen to Light Olympic Flame,” *New York Times*, 23 August 1964, 8.

⁹⁷ Mills, interview with the author.

For Mills the path was not easy. Unlike Sakai, his country did not see him as a prominent figure or gold medal hopeful. Upon entering the Games, Mills held the eighth best time in the 10,000m that year, however he had received little media attention and was considered a long shot to even medal. Instead, the U.S. hopes for a medal in the 10,000m rested on the shoulders of an eighteen-year-old phenomenon, Gerry Lindgren, who had bested the Mills in the trials by eight seconds.⁹⁸ According to *Sports Illustrated's* Olympic preview however, Lindgren was not a threat to finish in the top three. The 10,000m field was very strong and returned the 1960 Olympic Gold Medalist and World Record holder Ron Clarke of Australia. Bolotnikov of the U.S.S.R and Halberg of New Zealand joined Clarke as *Sports Illustrated's* favorites to medal. American runners had experienced little success in the 10,000m.⁹⁹ The only American to even medal in the event was Jim Thorpe's teammate, Louis Tewanima, who had finished second in 1912.¹⁰⁰ In the marathon Mills faced similar odds where Buddy Edelen, who "had set a world's best of 2:14:28 in 1963," was viewed as the only U.S. medal contender.¹⁰¹

Such low expectations threatened to derail Mills' journey. The day before the 10,000m – the first of the track events – Mills went to get new running shoes from U.S. team sponsor, Adidas. Mills was excited. "It would be the first pair of shoes I ever owned of my own," he recalled, "I wore BIA, – Bureau of Indian Affairs – shoes at

⁹⁸ Richard Hymans, *The History of the U.S. Olympic Trials – Track & Field 1908 – 2000* (Indianapolis: USA Track and Field, 2004), 176.

⁹⁹ "The Favorites in Tokyo 1964," *Sports Illustrated*, 5 October 1964, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Nabokov, *Indian Running: Native American History & Tradition* (Santa Fe, NM: Ancient City Press, 1981), 182.

¹⁰¹ Hymans, *The History of the U.S. Olympic Trials – Track & Field 1908 – 2000*, 77.

Haskell, I wore University of Kansas shoes at KU, I wore Marine Corps military – I wore government track shoes in the Marine Corp, now this was the first pair I was going to own on my own.”¹⁰² The U.S. representative for Adidas turned Mills away; his size eleven was popular and they only had enough for the potential medal winners.¹⁰³ Mills insisted that they promised him new shoes. He needed new spikes for the 10,000m and a lightweight pair of racing flats for the marathon. Unable to help him, the representative suggested that a dejected Mills try Adidas' competitor Puma.¹⁰⁴ After a few minutes of pleading, Puma agreed to give Mills one pair of shoes, not the two that he needed. As Mills was leaving a representative from local Japanese brand, Tiger Shoes, overheard Mills' struggle and offered him a pair of shoes for the marathon.¹⁰⁵ Mills now had shoes, but was disappointed by the broken promises and unequal treatment. He felt slighted by the shoe companies' reluctance to fulfill their obligations. Those broken promises reminded Mills of the painful past of Native Americans. He believed that they did not keep their promise because he was an Indian, that corporate America followed the direction of the U.S. government, and discounted Native Americans. Likewise, Mills believed that he was disrespected by collective low expectations. These perceived doubts of his ability inspired and motivated Mills' performance.

¹⁰² Mills, interview with the author.

¹⁰³ In the early days of corporate sponsorships companies sponsored teams not individuals. Sponsorships were a marketing technique. Companies sought to have the highest number of athletes on the medal stand wearing their shoes, which allowed them to convince consumers that their products were superior.

¹⁰⁴ It is ironic that the Adidas representative suggested Puma. Adidas and Puma were founded by German brothers Adolf “Adi” Dassler and Rudolph Dassler. Based on opposite sides of the Aurach River in Herzogenaurach, Germany, the brothers' and companies' rivalry was intense. For more on the history both companies and their rivalry see Barbara Smit, *Sneaker Wars: The Enemy Brothers Who Founded Adidas and Puma and the Family Feud that Forever Changed the Business of Sport* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ Tiger Shoes are commonly known today as ASICS.

Much to his surprise, when Mills arrived back at the Olympic Village, Adidas owner Adi Dassler was waiting for him. Dassler had gotten word of the way Mills was treated, apologized, and offered him shoes. Mills said “I don't want your charity...I have a pair already.”¹⁰⁶ Dassler told him it was not charity, “we make promises, and we deliver on our promises.”¹⁰⁷ Mills, still disappointed, reiterated that he had shoes already and left for dinner. When he returned to his room after dinner, he remembers, “there was like a dozen pair of [Adidas] shoes laying on my bed.”¹⁰⁸ The gesture meant a lot to Mills, who had long been used to disappointment and broken promises. Things were looking up.

The next day, confident and ready, Mills took to the track to prove his doubters wrong. He was in top shape. No longer running hundreds of miles, Mills had tapered his workouts to give him extra energy and speed. His strategy was to stay with the leaders and then rely on his deadly kick in the final laps. He knew he was in peak form, as he ran a personal best 23-second 200m at the end of his workout the day before the race. Indeed, this finishing speed was critical to his success. Australian Ron Clarke, the current world record holder, was nearly a minute faster than Mills' personal best time. Many thought it was Clarke's race to lose, although *Sports Illustrated's* preview of the Olympics noted that Clarke “is immensely strong but lacks sprint.”¹⁰⁹ Mills knew he could run faster because he had designed his workouts so that he would be at his fastest in Tokyo.

¹⁰⁶ Mills, interview with the author.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “The Favorites in Tokyo 1964,” *Sports Illustrated*, 5 October 1964, 64.

Twenty-four hours of rain had soaked the cinder track creating a sloppy and physical race.¹¹⁰ Mills stayed true to his strategy, sticking with the leaders. As the last lap approached, he was in the top three and within striking distance. On the final turn, he was bumped into lane three by leader Ron Clarke, and passed by Mohamed Gammoudi of Tunisia. Gammoudi then took the lead; Clarke was in second, and Mills in third place.

The order remained the same until the final stretch. With fifty meters to go Mills began his charge. He lifted his knees and lengthened his stride, sprinting his hardest. Quickly approaching Clarke, he moved out to lane four and flew by. As the world shifted its gaze, NBC announcer Dick Bank screamed, “Look at Mills! Look at Mills!” A couple of strides later he overtook Gammoudi for first and kept going. Three strides in the lead Mills broke the tape. He had done the impossible.

Shortly after breaking the tape, a Japanese official grabbed him. He shook Mills and asked, “Who are you? Who are you?”¹¹¹ At that time Billy Mills was still unknown, but within hours he would be known around the world. Mills had won the gold medal and his life would be forever changed.

¹¹⁰ Cinder tracks are made of finely crushed cinder rocks. They do not hold up well in rain and in recent years have been replaced by all-weather rubber-like, synthetic surfaces. The 1964 Olympics were the last to be run on a cinder track.

¹¹¹ Amidst the chaos of the finish, Mills never got to run his victory lap. Twenty years later, when he was visiting Tokyo for the filming of *Running Brave*, he finally got to take his lap.

CHAPTER 4

A HUMANITARIAN WARRIOR: BILLY MILLS AFTER THE OLYMPICS

In the days following the 10,000m Billy Mills became a household name. His identity was implanted in the public consciousness. Newspapers worldwide ran feature stories introducing the sensation of '64.¹ The world was touched by his story: an impoverished Native American, orphaned, succeeding against the longest odds. Mills became living proof of the American Dream. He was also an American patriot, a Marine Lieutenant with a sixteen-month old daughter. Military service helped temper the expectations of Indianness in the media coverage. Service proved his discipline, civility, and made him a safe, respectable minority amidst the tumultuous 1960s. These themes carried on throughout Mills' post-Olympic life.

The sporting middle ground was integral for Mills' experiences. The Cold War and 1960s civil rights altered life in the United States. Indianness and expectation had changed since the days of Jim Thorpe. While they remained important factors in framing the representations of Mills, he was able to play a more prominent role compared to Thorpe in molding his own public image. The patriotism and discipline of military service were an integral part of this self-mediation.

The standard tropes of Indianness, however, still informed popular press and news media coverage of Mills' athletic achievement. Articles frequently began by describing him as seven-sixteenths Sioux. While some noted, "He was the first United States citizen to win the 10,000m," they were flabbergasted that Mills was both an unknown and an

¹ Mills placed fourteenth in the Olympic marathon a fact often neglected and forgotten. Indeed, the University of Kansas 2009-2010 Media Guide for cross country and track and field neglect to list Mills' marathon. 2009 Kansas Cross Country Media Guide, *Kansas Athletics Inc.*, Lawrence, Kansas, 48; 2010 KU Track and Field Media Guide, *Kansas Athletics Inc.*, Lawrence, Kansas, 21, 123.

Indian.² Jesse Abramson of the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, “It was the noble redman, of all people, who administered fits to the world's finest.”³ Abramson continued, “Billy the Sioux took more scalps than his ancestors did at Little Big Horn. He left the greatest names in track strewn in his wake.”⁴ Yet Abramson concedes, “Billy Mills ... was unawed by assignment, confident in his own fitness and mental readiness.”⁵ If Elmer Mitchell's characterization of “Indian” athletes was true, how then was Mills the first American of any racial makeup, to win the 10,000m?

Many considered Mills athletic record prior to the Olympics to be lackluster and of course there was his Indianness. Following the Olympics, few newspapers remembered Mills' college and high school accomplishments. Ernest Mohl of the *Kansas City Star* recalled, “When Billy attended the University of Kansas he was not considered an exceptional distance runner.”⁶ Instead, he “was a jack-of-all-distances, master of none, a plugger without distinction in the realm of speed and stamina.”⁷ At the international and national level Mills had been overlooked because his college career was successful but not record breaking. “[Coach] Easton never felt he got Billy quite to peak performance at KU. Billy worked hard enough, in fact harder than most of the others on the KU track squad. But it was his mental condition that kept him back,” Earl Morey of

² Curley Grieve, “Just Good Old American Guts,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 October 1964.

³ Jesse Abramason, “U.S. Unknown Does the Impossible at Tokyo,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 October 1964, p 28.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ernest Mohl, “Sporting Comment,” *Kansas City Star*, 24 October 1964.

⁷ Jesse Abramason, “U.S. Unknown Does the Impossible at Tokyo,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 October 1964, p 28.

the *Lawrence Journal-World* commented.⁸ These descriptions adhere to Elmer Mitchell's characterization of "Indians" as natural athletes but psychologically weak.

Mainstream society did not know how to explain Mills' performance. A January 1965 Associated Press story came close, however, declaring Mills' race the top upset of the past year, "Over the years, the Sioux have shown themselves to be a tough, hardy lot even for Indians. The Marines are tough period." The article however, admits "Even that combination hardly seems likely enough to produce a victory for an almost unknown runner in one of the toughest of all Olympic foot races, the 10,000 meters."⁹ Was it his Indianness or the Marines that set him apart?

For some, this question was easy to answer: Mills was a Marine Lieutenant. It was the Marines that gave Mills the edge. The evidence was indisputable. After seeing Mills at the Olympic Trials, Bill Easton told the *Lawrence Journal-World* "you've never seen such a changed young man...He has grown up; he feels he is somebody now. He is working harder than ever, and he is going to surprise a lot of people."¹⁰ According to Easton and the sportswriters, it was the Marines that allowed Mills to overcome his Indianness. Like Ned Crutcher and Jim Thorpe before him, Mills became another example of successful assimilation under Richard Henry Pratt's military model that 'tamed' the inherent savage by regimenting his physical and mental worldview.

During the Second World War, military service, and the Marines especially, became known for cultivating the inherent toughness and athleticism of Native

⁸ Earl Morey, "Speaking of Sports: Strictly Personal," *Lawrence Journal-World* [Lawrence, Kansas], 17 October 1964.

⁹ Associated Press, "Mills's Upset Ranks No. 1," *Kansas City Star*, 10 January 1965.

¹⁰ Earl Morey, "Speaking of Sports: Strictly Personal," *Lawrence Journal-World* [Lawrence, Kansas], 17 October 1964.

Americans for patriotic causes. Although these views were tinged with paternal overtones, they replaced previous expectations of Indianness. Native Americans were no longer primitive and savage, but instead honorable and heroic. Military service helped to downplay their “otherness.” *San Francisco Examiner* sportswriter Curley Grieve overheard a native Japanese official attribute Mills' victory to “good old *American* guts [emphasis added].”¹¹

Even within the tempered expectations of Native Americans, military service retained its link to assimilation. That an undistinguished runner could join the Marine Corps and two years later win an Olympic gold medal was a testament to American military might and discipline. The impact of the Marines on Mills served both the agenda of assimilation-minded BIA officials and improved the image and recruitment of the armed services during the Cold War.

The Marines capitalized on those sentiments and the gold medal by parading Mills across the nation for recruiting.¹² Mills recalls that he did “show and tell [wearing] dress blues, going off to different functions doing public relations.”¹³ His Olympic performance was significant to the Cold War. It occurred during an era when the Soviet leader Khrushchev pounded his shoe on a table during a visit to Iowa, and Commandant Shoup of the Marine Corps said he would give his life fighting communism.¹⁴ Mills' 10,000m symbolized the toughness and discipline of the Marines.

¹¹ Curley Grieve, “Just Good Old American Guts,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 October 1964.

¹² Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Khrushchev visited Iowa in 1959, and Shoup was Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1960 to 1963. Mills contextualizes his own victory in this manner and believes it combined with Khrushchev and Shoup to help impact recruiting. *Ibid.*

Like Iwo Jima hero Ira Hayes, Mills' Olympic victory was used as a tool to attract young men to enlist in the Marines.¹⁵ Unlike Hayes, Mills never saw combat. Mills' public appearance and race schedule took up most of his commission. Mills ran well in his post-Olympic races. He set a world record for six miles in June of 1965. Mills confesses, "I really needed that record. In a way it was more important than the gold medal. The world record gave me peace of mind. ... The gold medal was considered a fluke by some people. So my world record was my way of saying to them 'Any Questions?'"¹⁶

When Mills' racing schedule was over, it was determined that he did not have enough remaining service time to join his unit in Vietnam.¹⁷ Mills he felt guilty that he did not go to Vietnam and offered to extend his tour of duty for another thirteen months if he could see combat. His General tried to protect him. "This is the Cold War. You were a peacetime hero. Don't let anybody make you a Cold War son of a bitch...you served us well, if it's not a career, you're married, you have a child, you can get out," he said.¹⁸ Mills still felt guilty and uneasy about not seeing combat, but came to understand that his public relations service had its value too.

Coming to this realization was difficult for Mills, however. He retired with the rank of Captain after three years, but wondered how could someone who did not fight be a respected officer? Mills admits that part of the reason he joined the Marine Corps was

¹⁵ At times, Mills felt guilty about the recruiting because he was convincing young people to serve, yet he never saw combat.

¹⁶ Six miles is shorter than 10,000m, which is 6.25 miles and a more frequently contested event. Earl Gustkey, "Billy Mills: Proof that 'Rocky' Can Happen in Real Life," *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, 10 July 1983.

¹⁷ Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

¹⁸ Ibid.

to become a Lakota Warrior. Was he really a valued warrior or did he take the easy way out? It was an internal struggle for Mills to balance his own experience within the Marine Corps with the expectations of his traditional culture. By avoiding combat, he felt like less of a Marine and less of a Warrior. The political environment of the era did not help these feelings. As a veteran Mills was eligible for G.I. Bill benefits, which could not be used on reservation lands. This was part of the Relocation policy that encouraged Native American veterans to live in broader society. Mills settled in California with his small family and began working as an insurance salesman.

Mills trained intermittently between 1966 and 1968, but with no serious goals in mind. That changed as the 1968 Olympic trials approached and he decided to give the Olympics another try. Nearing the age of thirty, Mills lost weight, battled hypoglycemia and Type II diabetes, and worked himself into shape. He was once again confident and strong, but that was not quite enough. The qualifying standards for the Olympics were more stringent for the 1968 Mexico City Games. Mills would not have been permitted to compete in Tokyo had they been in place.¹⁹ He did not finish in the top three of the 10,000m at the Olympic Trials.²⁰

Although he missed out on defending his 10,000m title, Mills thought the 5,000m was his stronger event in 1968. Unfortunately, he was not allowed to run in the Olympic Trials. Several factors contributed to this decision. First, Mills was not entered in the 5,000m and only petitioned to run it after failing to qualify in the 10,000m. Second, there

¹⁹ For example, the qualifying time for the 10,000m was twenty-five seconds faster than in 1964. "Standards Raised for '68 Olympics," *New York Times*, 19 May 1968, p S7.

²⁰ Mills placed fourth in one of the two Olympic Trials races, but his time was nowhere near the Olympic qualifying mark.

were questions of whether he was in good enough shape to compete.²¹ The third issue was race.

Mills proved his fitness in a tune-up run with 5,000m world record holder, Australian Ron Clarke. Mills was clocked at 14:32, which was eighteen seconds faster than the top qualifier for the Olympic Trials finals.²² Next Mills drew up a petition and collected the signatures of over forty athletes asking to let him run in the 5,000m finals.²³ The petition was denied.

Mills believes that race was a contributing factor. Lance Morrow of *Time* magazine describes the year 1968 as “pivotal and messy.”²⁴ Many African American athletes were at the forefront of sport during the intense time of civil rights activism.²⁵ Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and basketball superstar Bill Russell was named *Sports Illustrated’s* “Sportsman of the Year” in 1968.²⁶ Likewise, Muhammad Ali’s final appeal was denied that year and the African-American hero was convicted of a felony for refusing to serve in Vietnam. The decision outraged many and Ali’s popularity inspired a proposed African American boycott of the Mexico City Olympic Games led by Harry Edwards.²⁷

The black versus white conflict erupted at the Olympic trials. The U.S. Olympic Committee knew that if no African Americans competed, their team would be an

²¹ Mills suffered from a stomach cramp in the 10,000m and his blood sugar had affected some of his race performances. Likewise, he had only done about 30 miles a week in training.

²² “Athletes Petition Board To Give Mills Chance,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1968, p 57.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Quoted in: David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America* (Syracuse University Press, 1997), 104.

²⁵ Ibid, 104-106.

²⁶ Ibid, 105.

²⁷ Harry Edwards was a sociology professor at San Jose State College and helped organize the athletes. Together they formed the Olympic Project for Human Rights, which lobbied for an end to discriminatory practices against blacks. Ibid, 108.

international embarrassment. And the intense Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union drew close attention to the medal count. Although many African Americans signed his petition at the Olympic Trials, Mills was not part of the boycott movement. Instead he was caught in the racial tension of 1968. It was a black and white movement and those on the periphery were left out. Some of the more vocal boycott supporters believed that if Mills made the team it would mean one less spot for an African American athlete.²⁸ His petition was formally denied because he failed to fill out the proper form, although Mills remembers there was none required.

Public relations were important. Although Mills had the support of many, a handful of dissenting voices threatened the white administrators and altered the outcome. The stark contrast of black and white relations overshadowed the Native American struggle. C. Richard King notes, “The emergence of the civil rights movement and the narrowing of race relations to questions of black and white eclipsed the ‘Indian problem’ and its significance for most Americans.”²⁹ Once again, “Indians” had been deemed insignificant and out of the way. Their voice lacked the numbers and volume of African Americans.³⁰

Eventually the boycott was averted, but the racial tension of 1968 became immortalized in the fists of John Carlos and Tommie Smith held high on the 200m-medal stand. Mills remained angry about the way the events unfolded. He was disappointed that the sport which saved him was now turning its back on him. The African American

²⁸ Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

²⁹ C. Richard King, “Identities, Opportunities, Inequities: An Introduction,” in *Native Athletes in Sport and Society*, C. Richard King, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xi.

³⁰ The preceding paragraphs, on the tension and outcome of the 1968 Olympic Trials, rely heavily on Mills’ own interpretation of the events. Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

movement was sacred, however, and he realized that in time it could have dramatic effects on indigenous peoples too.³¹

Native Americans did not have to wait long for the benefits. While Mills was overlooked in the scuffle of African American activism, Native Americans as a whole were not. Historian Daniel Cobb explains:

As white backlash against Black Power, urban violence, and the perceived excess of liberalism intensified and popular and congressional support for the War on Poverty plummeted, American Indians had emerged as a safe minority as one of the few groups policy makers could champion without reprisal from the incipient silent majority.³²

This safe position stems from the carefully crafted strategies that the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) agreed upon at the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference. Following the 1961 Chicago Conference, the institutional activism of Native Americans increased. Vine Deloria Jr. helped to revitalize the NCAI and develop Pan-Indian coalitions to enact legislative change from 1964 to 1967.³³ Their work led to the passage of the Indian Civil Rights Act and the formation of the National Council on Indian Opportunity (NCIO) in 1968.³⁴ The NCIO was a major breakthrough for Native Americans. It allowed tribal leaders such as those in National Congress of the American Indian, to meet with members of President Lyndon Johnson's cabinet and discuss strategies to improve relations between Native Americans and the federal government.³⁵

³¹ Ibid.

³² Daniel Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 150.

³³ Ibid, 198.

³⁴ Ibid, 152-153.

³⁵ Ibid.

These discussions became the foundation for the self-determination movement and the NCAI chose to continue its activism through organizations working within government institutions. “Reasoning that the battle for tribal sovereignty would be won in Congress and the courts – but certainly not in the streets -- the NCAI publically announced on 31 March that it would not endorse the Poor People’s Campaign” further distancing itself from African American activism.³⁶ This decision, however, caused the coalition between NCAI and NIYC to splinter.

The Youth Council thought that the NCAI’s strategy was too slow. The NCAI rejected their youthful, militant “Red Power” movement and the two groups grew apart.³⁷ “Red Power” became closely associated with the American Indian Movement (AIM) which was founded in 1968. Historian Akim Reinhardt notes that AIM was influenced by the tactics and rhetoric of the Black Panthers” and provided a loud, audible voice to disaffected Indians.³⁸

AIM took its activism to the streets, valuing direct action over organization and planning. Like the Black Panthers for African Americans, the American Indian Movement particularly resonated with Native Americans who lived in urban areas. Most of AIM's founders had experience with or grew up in cities because of the relocation policy and the organization initially targeted Native Americans in similar situations. Among their early initiatives were “Survival Schools...designed to equip Indian children

³⁶Ibid, 154 .

³⁷ Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2009), 224-225.

³⁸ Akim Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 144.

with life skills for the urban environment.”³⁹ Likewise influenced by Momaday's *House of Dawn*, AIM members focused on issues affecting their daily lives such as discrimination in housing and jobs.⁴⁰

Amid this activism Mills had to balance his Native American heritage with his military experience. The pressure of traditional culture to be a warrior weighed on him. Combined with the controversy of 1968 and the Vietnam War, Mills struggled to negotiate his dual identity. Mills' personal struggle came to a head while he was attending a powwow in North Dakota. At the powwow, all the veterans in attendance were honored. Mills believed it was inappropriate for him to participate because he was not a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) or the Vietnam Veterans Association since he did not see combat.⁴¹ He thought that he had more in common with the women sitting next to him who would not be honored, but also served in the Marines. The powwow leadership still wanted to honor Mills, however, so they invited everyone who had served in the military down to join in the honor dance, including women. Mills still felt uneasy about being honored for service and only participated because it was all-inclusive.⁴²

Once he got back to his seat, Mills recalls that an old man came over and said:

America's making a big mistake. We should never compare the war with the warrior; wars are political. One war we are for, the next war we are against, so we must always separate the war from the warrior, always honor and respect the warrior.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Only those who had seen combat were permitted to join these organizations.

⁴² Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

⁴³ Ibid.

These words helped guide Mills. In Lakota culture, appreciation for warriors and military service were separate from politics. The old man's words were important in helping Mills accept his experience. Service, regardless of its specific nature, was valued. This observation allowed Mills to feel accepted by broader society and his local community. Today, while Mills agrees with the reporters – he would never had won the gold medal without the Marines – he also contends that he would never had won the gold medal without the influence of his father, wife, brother, and Lakota values.⁴⁴

Mills' traditional Lakota values maintained their resonance in his post-Olympic life. The concept of the Warrior in Lakota culture extends beyond the familiar tropes of the Wild West and involves more than military service. Mills was taught that in Lakota culture a warrior illuminates the four virtues of bravery, fortitude, wisdom, and generosity. Warriors seek to be positively and constructively unique, belong, make a creative difference in society, and understand.⁴⁵ Becoming a warrior involved being a humanitarian. Warriors are accountable to their people. Thus Lakota virtues and spirituality, according to Mills, emphasize the use of wisdom and generosity to empower others. Billy Mills' life was shaped by these lessons and they guided him as he engaged in activism challenging Indianness and expectations following the 1964 Olympics.⁴⁶

Mills was made a Warrior by his friend Oliver Red Cloud and tribal leaders when he returned home from the Olympics. The Lakota saved their congratulations for the Warrior ceremony. No one from the reservation sent telegrams or cards to Mills immediately following the 1964 Games. Instead, they took a sacred pipe and prayed to

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ This is the concept of the Lakota Warrior as explained to author by Billy Mills. Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

the four directions, Mother Earth, and Grandfather, and asked for Mills to represent himself and the Lakota with dignity. Upon his return, Mills' Grandmother told him “Grandchild, you did that, you represented us with dignity.”⁴⁷ In return the elders danced his deeds, reenacting his victory. They also gave him his Lakota name *Makoce te'hila*, which means “loves your country.”⁴⁸ The gift that meant the most to Mills was a ring made of gold from the sacred Black Hills. The ring was symbolic of Mills’ mediated identity and represents the tribal elders’ affirmation of his victory, independent of broader society. The elders told him that the ring represents the Native American part of him, making him a complete gold medalist.⁴⁹ With the honor came a challenge, however. Tribal elders made Mills promise only to wear the ring if he would take time to share information about the importance of the Black Hills to the Lakota.⁵⁰

Mills’ commitment to this promise and his role as a Lakota Warrior frames his post-running activism and identity. Central to being a Warrior is the “giveaway.” In Lakota culture it is understood that major accomplishments are not done alone.⁵¹ A traditional giveaway requires that the Warrior repay those who have helped him along his journey. The generosity of coaches, fans, friends, corporations, and many others, worldwide, played a role in helping Mills win the gold medal. After the Olympics he received thousands of telegrams, including one from Colonel John Glenn who had just orbited the earth.⁵² Mills felt pressure to have a giveaway that would repay all these people. He wondered what could he offer. His victory extended far beyond Pine Ridge,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Rick Dean, “Running Brave, Running Strong,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 26 April 1988, 3D.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

incorporating members of both his local community and broader society. The Olympics made Mills an international figure. The victory was a difficult thing and Mills initially shied away from it because he knew that a proper giveaway had to have international resonance.⁵³

The activism that Mills engaged in followed the directives of the giveaway. Sport aided Mills with the provision of popular appeal. The Marines introduced Mills to public relations, and AIM helped remind him of the issues affecting indigenous people. Mills activism was especially shaped by the influence of the Marines and AIM.

AIM's militant approach to activism was controversial. Although initially Mills was drawn to AIM, he was also critical of AIM. Mills saw AIM as an organization that provided answers for many of the issues that he struggled with in college. He thought that AIM could have made him more powerful, leaving Haskell armed with an understanding of how he would be treated in broader society and knowledge of how to react. But when AIM was founded, Mills had already finished college, won his gold medal, and become a Marine officer. Those factors may have contributed to why he was not allowed to join AIM, but Mills is not entirely certain.⁵⁴

Dennis Banks, one of AIM's founders, was aware of the controversy incited by AIM and indirectly protected Mills. Occasionally Mills attended AIM meetings, but at certain times, Banks would say "Billy why don't you go ahead and leave. This is not for you. You've got a different purpose."⁵⁵ AIM's takeover of the BIA building in Washington D.C. and occupation of Wounded Knee caused a controversy among Native

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Americans and divided them from each other. Mills remembers going to visit a cousin on Pine Ridge. When he knocked on the door his cousin answered holding his rifle. Banks, like Mills' Commanding General, saw a larger role for Mills. Both the General and Banks used their influence to guide Mills' post-Olympic life. In fact, had Mills been associated with AIM's actions, his position as a "safe minority" molded by the Marines and spared from Vietnam service, would have vanished.

Ironically, Mills began his activism as a Bureau of Indian Affairs administrator. For many Native Americans, AIM included, the BIA was the most despised of political entities and represented the longstanding colonial rule of the United States. The BIA, however, attempted to change its image and the negative connotations associated with its often-autocratic rule. Between 1971 and 1974 Mills oversaw BIA physical education programs. In this role he founded the Billy Mills Indian Youth Leadership Program where he used his influence and notoriety for the improvement of Native American life by developing future leaders.⁵⁶ At the same time, Mills' oldest brother Sid served as Acting Deputy Assistant Director for Indian Affairs as well as Acting Deputy Commissioner for the BIA on multiple occasions.⁵⁷ Walter and Chet Mills were also administrators, serving as area directors and superintendents. Mills' sister worked in the Indian Health Service. The high-level BIA involvement of the Mills family is instructive as it illustrates the lasting influence of their father's teachings of Lakota values. The Mills

⁵⁶ Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011; Earl Gustkey, "Billy Mills: Proof that 'Rocky' Can Happen in Real Life," *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, 10 July 1983.

⁵⁷ United States Department of Interior, "Press Release 8506 – Swimmer Appoints Mills to Albuquerque Area Position," 27 December 1985, accessed 22 May 2011 from <<http://www.bia.gov/News/PressReleases/index.htm>>

family involvement also shows the changes occurring within the BIA to ameliorate years of oppressive rule.

Although certainly political, Billy Mills' BIA service was tempered by his non-political calling: the physical. As with his military service, sports gave Mills the ability to move freely within political structures. While Mills' work in the BIA was a part of his giveaway, the connection to the BIA was likely uncomfortable, especially given the non-political nature of the Warrior. Likewise, the BIA did not offer Mills a broad enough outreach to properly execute his giveaway.

Mills knew that his come-from-behind-victory at the 1964 Olympics was a popular story. In the years following his gold medal performance, many film production companies approached Mills to buy the rights to his story. Although he agreed that a film would be a good way to reach a larger audience, Mills was reluctant. He wanted the film produced on his terms. Mills explains:

I realized I was a contemporary person, and that while I was fulfilling a traditional cultural need, I couldn't allow myself to be taken advantage of economically. So I also pursued it as a business venture. The way I would benefit would not be in profits from the movie, but in ways I could market myself the rest of my life.⁵⁸

To accomplish these goals Mills wanted to avoid a Hollywood-style portrayal of his life. Eventually Mills found a situation that he felt comfortable with and selected Canada-based Englander Productions to make the film.⁵⁹ The Ermineskin Band, also of Canada,

⁵⁸ Rick Dean, "Running Brave, Running Strong," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 26 April 1988, 3D.

⁵⁹ *Running Brave* was made nineteen years after Mills' Olympic medal. In that time writers and directors solicited him for the right to his story. Mills declined their offers because he was worried that they would turn the somewhat depressing tale of his childhood into a happier, Disney-esque production. Keith Schneider, "How the Race was Won," *Miami Herald*, 26 November 1983, 3C.

invested \$8 million dollars to make the motion picture.⁶⁰ Mills played a large role in the film's production by consulting with the writers and producers.⁶¹ He helped shape the storyline and select actors. Mills suggested that Robby Benson portray him when a suitable Native American actor could not be found.⁶² Likewise Mills approved the fictionalization of several characters, including a brother who commits suicide.⁶³ These embellished plot lines were included to emphasize the difficulties of Native American life on the reservation and in mainstream society. He wanted the film to help people understand and inspire them to make a difference. Before the film's release in 1983 Mills explained:

We were trying to do more than tell a story about me. It is a story about Indian people. And it's a story about this country. I believe it is one of the very few honest assessments of Indian life ever filmed.⁶⁴

Running Brave was intended to share Mills' story and the experience of Native Americans with mainstream society. Yet like *Jim Thorpe – All American*, the film neglects the political context of Native American life. The film does little to explain that the poor conditions of Pine Ridge were created by the colonial rule of the BIA. Instead, the film provides Native Americans with a story that they can relate to and challenges them to persevere and reach their goals. Empowerment, a core component of being a Lakota Warrior, is one of the film's major themes. While Mills' giveaway and the

⁶⁰ The Ermineskin Band gained their wealth through oil. Ibid; Earl Gustkey, "Billy Mills: Proof that 'Rocky' Can Happen in Real Life," *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, 10 July 1983.

⁶¹ Bill Easton also read the script and helped advise the film. His character was altered to emphasize the racism and alienation that Mills faced at KU. Chuck Twardy, "Mills Finds Film's KU Scenes Accurate in Runner's Role," *Lawrence Journal-World* [Lawrence, Kansas], 23 October 1983, 1D.

⁶² All of the other Native American roles were filled by Native American actors.

⁶³ In reality, none of Mills' brothers have committed suicide. Other inaccuracies include a composite of his sister and changes to the social-economic status of his wife, Patricia. Keith Schneider, "How the Race was Won," *Miami Herald*, 26 November 1983, 3C; Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

⁶⁴ Keith Schneider, "How the Race was Won," *Miami Herald*, 26 November 1983, 3C.

movement toward self-determination can be identified in the film, its focus on inspiring the individual does little to address the collective conditions of Native American life.

Mills' book *Lessons of Lakota*, co-written with Nicholas Sparks, emphasizes similar ideas of empowerment.⁶⁵ Although it was his first published book, Sparks later became a best-selling novelist and screenwriter. His works are predominately tragedies and love stories, including popular titles such as *The Notebook* and *A Walk to Remember*. The blend of self-help and timeless wisdom found in *Lessons of Lakota* has proved popular too. Originally published in 1990 as *Wokini*, the book has undergone multiple printings.

While *Running Brave* preserved his athletic fame, the book *Lessons of a Lakota* makes no reference to sport. The book is semi-autobiographical, telling the story of a young Native American boy trying to find happiness after the death of his sister. Mills is not the main character, however, it is an allegory influenced by the lessons Mills' father taught him. Thanks to the notoriety of Mills, and the book's co-author Nicholas Sparks, the text entered the mainstream. *Lessons of a Lakota* presents the values and wisdom that Mills gleaned from his traditional culture to broader society while asserting the value of traditional Lakota culture. In the book, Mills balances the "Native American beliefs in meditation, dreams, and respect for the harmony and balance of nature with more *modern*

⁶⁵ Although on the surface Sparks and Mills may appear to be an odd pair, they are not. Sparks grew up in Fair Oaks, CA, where Mills lives. Sparks graduated from high school in 1984, around the same time as the release of *Running Brave* and then ran track at the University of Notre Dame. After Notre Dame he returned to the Fair Oaks / Sacramento area. The close proximity and track interest undoubtedly brought the two together. For more on Nicholas Sparks see: Nicholas Sparks, "Autobiography," *Nicholas Sparks: The Official Website*, accessed 22 May 2011 from <<http://www.nicholassparks.com/AboutNicholas.asp?PageID=1>>

principles such as positive thinking and self-awareness [emphasis added].”⁶⁶ The book represents an active attempt by Mills to change mainstream society's view of Indianness and further illustrates his belief in self-determination.

Although self-help, empowerment, and inspiration were a part of Mills' approach to self-determination, the larger movement encompassed much more. Despite their differences AIM and the NCAI both believed in Native American self-determination through tribal control. Their frustration with Termination and Relocation motivated AIM and NCAI to seek “a renewal of American Indian rights” and services.⁶⁷ While AIM brought attention to Native American dissatisfaction, the NCAI contributed to new legislation. Sociologist Joane Nagel explains:

The Indian Educational Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1975 represented watershed self-determination legislation in that it reduced the power of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to control tribal finances by permitting tribes to contract for tribal services and thus represented a further affirmation of tribal rights.⁶⁸

The Self-Determination Act was one of many new laws enacted during the 1970s aimed at reversing termination and improving Native American life. Other legislative acts relating to self-determination included the Indian Education Act of 1972, the Indian Financing Act of 1974, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act of 1976, the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Billy Mills and Nicholas Sparks, *Lessons of Lakota: A Young Man's Journey to Happiness and Self-Understanding* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2005) front inside cover.

⁶⁷ Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 217.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

According to historian Alexandra Harmon, new economic opportunities were among the improvements under self-determination.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, not all Native Americans experienced increased wealth. Poverty remains a critical issue on reservations. The Indian Health Service notes, “The 2005-2007 Current Population Survey revealed that the American Indian and Alaska Native population has larger families, less health insurance (the number of AI/ANs without health insurance is over double that for U.S. all races), and a poverty level nearly twice that of the rest of the population.”⁷¹ These numbers illustrate the need for a more structural approach to improving Native American life.

To help address such issues, Mills joined Christian Relief Services President Eugene Krizek in establishing Running Strong for American Indian Youth. The organization serves as another venue for Mills to continue his giveaway through its mission “to help American Indian people meet their immediate survival needs food, water, and shelter while implementing and supporting programs designed to create opportunities for self-sufficiency and self-esteem.”⁷² As the national spokesman for Running Strong, Mills helps raise funds to upgrade the infrastructure of reservations. New wells and youth centers are examples of improvements paid for by Running Strong.⁷³

⁷⁰ Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problems of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 227-228.

⁷¹ “IHS Fact Sheets: Indian Population,” Indian Health Service, accessed 28 May 2011 from <<http://www.ihs.gov/PublicAffairs/IHSBrochure/Population.asp>>

⁷² “Who We Are,” *Running Strong For American Indian Youth*, accessed 10 May 2011 from <<http://www.indianyouth.org/about.html>>

⁷³ “History,” *Running Strong For American Indian Youth*, accessed 10 May 2011 from <<http://www.indianyouth.org/history.html>>

Mills' post-Olympic life has been consumed by his giveaway. He travels nearly 300 days a year for speaking and fund raising engagements and has visited nearly 100 countries.⁷⁴ Activism has made Mills extremely popular on a personal level. Mills and his wife daily interact with over 7,500 people through his fan page on the popular social networking site, Facebook.⁷⁵ Likewise Mills receives thousands of letters each year. Moved by this personal interaction, Running Strong for American Indian Youth has now raised over \$650 million.⁷⁶ Such interactions are testament to Mills' success in mediating his identity and the position sport allowed him to carve out in broader society.

Mills' work involves more than fund raising. Mills continues to use his story to inspire Native American youth. During his speeches, Mills recounts his childhood and the struggles he had with racism, self-doubt, and tragedy. While he does discuss the role sport played in his life, he believes that sport is one of several venues available for youths to develop dignity, character, and pride.

During a talk at Haskell Indian Nations University in June of 2010, Mills noted that art, music, drama, and writing are among other ways that students can develop their self-esteem and cultural pride.⁷⁷ Such advice builds on Mills' personal background as an athlete and highly involved high school student at Haskell, while extending from the steps he outlines to become a Warrior. Mills sees many parallels between traditional culture and broader society, helping to mediate the two for thousands of youths. Extra

⁷⁴ Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

⁷⁵ Mills admits that he is not good with computers, so Patricia and their office secretary, Tracy, do most of the Facebook and email responses. However, he is directly involved. "Billy Mills," *Facebook*, accessed 10 May 2011 from <<http://www.facebook.com/#!/OfficialBillyMills>>

⁷⁶ During my interview with Mills he read me several personal letters and relayed the joy that shared stories from others bring to him. Indeed, the letters mean more to him than the money from the book and film. Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011; J. Brady McCollough, "Mills Golden Journey," *Kansas City Star*, 18 April 2010, C8.

⁷⁷ Billy Mills (lecture, Haskell Indian Nations University, [Lawrence, Kansas], June 2010).

curricular activities help Native American youth develop their self-esteem. Fostering a unique talent allows Native American youth to feel accepted in their community. Sport is not the only way that Native Americans have become warriors and challenged the expectations of Indianness in mainstream society even though Thorpe, Bender, Myers, Crutcher, Charles, and Mills illustrated sports popular appeal and resonance within both local communities and broader society. True to Mills' words, sport continues to be an important tool for Native Americans to mediate their lives.

Sport forced Mills "to walk in two worlds half-white, half-Indian with one spirit."⁷⁸ For much of his youth it was a struggle to balance his experiences in mainstream society with his traditional culture. The Olympics, however, allowed Mills to fuse the two and become a humanitarian Warrior. But it may be Mills' activism as much as his athletic fame that allows his story to continue to resonate.

Mills' experience with Vietnam, AIM, and the 1968 Olympics have also affected the way he has crafted his image and marketed himself. While Mills does not actively assert an overt political stance as a part of his public image other than improving Native American life, he does offer advice to tribal leaders and politicians. Central to this advice is the legal protection of Native Americans and their interests. Mills believes that in order to protect Native American treaty rights every state should require Indian Law on the bar exam.⁷⁹ Likewise, he contends that there should be a Native American justice on the

⁷⁸ Rick Dean, "Running Brave, Running Strong," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 26 April 1988, 3D.

⁷⁹ Currently only Washington, New Mexico, and South Dakota require Indian law as a bar exam subject.

Supreme Court.⁸⁰ Although not a part of his official speaking platform, these issues have nurtured Mills' interest in the global indigeneity movement.

As Mills explains, tribal leaders are required to take positions on local, national, and global issues.⁸¹ For example, natural resources are taken advantage of by actors at all three levels.⁸² Mills estimates that there are “50 million to 500 million indigenous people worldwide that control the vast majority of last known natural resources.”⁸³

Consequently, it is important to ensure that indigenous leaders have the knowledge and rights to defend resources and use them to contribute to the world on their terms, or what is essentially self-determination on a global level.

An important step toward Mills' position on global indigeneity was President Barack Obama's endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in December of 2010.⁸⁴ Mills sees a connection between the U.N resolution and his own work in empowering Native Americans and increasing broader society's understanding. Mills often calls in his speeches for individuals to recognize that “global unity through the dignity, character, beauty of global diversity [is] the future of human kind.”⁸⁵ Appreciating diversity stems from the Lakota virtues of wisdom and understanding, and echoes the mission of the Olympic movement. Mills' involvement

⁸⁰ Mills suggested that prominent Native American attorney, John EchoHawk, should be nominated.

⁸¹ Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

⁸² Indeed, in the global economy multinational corporations frequently use their international status to usurp local and national laws.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Prior to this, the United States refused to endorse the Declaration, which was adopted by the United Nations in 2007. “United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,” *United Nations*, accessed 23 May 2011 from <<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html>>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

with such issues has helped him make good on his pledge of a global giveaway. Further, Mills' actions have cemented his iconic status beyond the borders of the United States.

While Mills' post-Olympic activism extends beyond the sports world, often leaving it behind, the sporting middle ground has been an integral part. Mills benefited from both the boarding school experience and military service, which fueled his athletic career to international heights. At the same time, sport allowed Mills to carve out his own identity based on his local Native American traditions. Like other Native American athletes before him, Mills used sport to empower himself and contest the view of Indianness in wider society.

The sporting middle ground proved to be a powerful tool for Native Americans throughout the twentieth century. Sports made Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills icons and enhanced their agency, and allowed them to negotiate broader society. Both used their status as sport heroes to advocate for changes in Native American life.

Although linked by sport and their ethnicity, the political and cultural difference between their eras make Mills and Thorpe disparate figures. Within the sporting middle ground, Native American athletes were affected by these structures. Mills' ability to mediate the expectations associated with his Indianness and assert himself differs from Jim Thorpe. For example, sports fame did not exempt Thorpe from allotment and IRA. Thorpe was inhibited by the trust-relationship between Native Americans and the federal government. The policy of his day forced Thorpe to petition the BIA for permission to access and use his own money. Likewise sport did not automatically make Mills an international activist and humanitarian. Although Mills was thrust into mainstream society with far fewer limitations, his mediation was profoundly impacted by institutional

structures. Sport allowed both men to enter the mainstream and assert themselves even though their freedoms differed greatly.

EPILOGUE

The lives of most Native Americans are very different from those of Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills. Although they are anomalous figures, Thorpe and Mills play an important role in American history. Through the visibility of sports, Thorpe and Mills have asserted their Native American identity and challenged the expectations of Indianness within mainstream society. Sport enhanced their agency and ability to navigate the myriad of structures that frame their lives. Although the activism of Thorpe and Mills did not change federal Indian policies, it was central to shaping the representations of Native Americans. Nevertheless, Thorpe and Mills as iconic sports figures took different approaches to challenge longstanding representations and views of Native Americans.

At the turn of the twentieth century boarding school education helped create a sporting middle ground where Native Americans entered broader society. Through sports, Native American athletes were able to coexist, cooperate, and assert their identity. Initially boarding schools were the primary entry point for Native Americans into mainstream sports. Beginning in the 1930s, however, policy changes reduced the number of boarding schools and the level of their sports competition. Although Native Americans continued to participate in sports, policy changes allowed for fewer Native American student-athletes to enter broader society. Sports, however, remained an important tool for Native Americans. Coupled with military service, the sporting middle ground lived on. Such changes help to explain the difference in context of the lives of Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills, which frame their activism.

Jim Thorpe's notoriety reached its apex during an era when newspapers were the dominant form of public communication, and lingered on in the formative years of the motion picture. Modern American sports were in their infancy and Thorpe was a leading figure. Thorpe was admired for his athletic talent, but curiosity surrounded his Native American "otherness." As the world's greatest all-around athlete, Thorpe was in the national spotlight and his actions represented more than himself. The burden of representing the entire Native American ethnicity was difficult for Thorpe, but not something that he shied away from. At Carlisle Indian School, Thorpe proudly "showed what an Indian can do." And in Hollywood Thorpe urged directors and producers to seek out authentic representations by casting Native American actors.

Mills rose to national attention in a vastly different era. Service in the Second World War introduced more Native Americans to the mainstream. Likewise, the sporting world matured, and television revolutionized media coverage. American culture's obsession with sports encompassed a plethora of activities, relegating track and field to that of a niche sport. The Cold War, however, greatly intensified the importance of the Olympic Games. Unlike Thorpe, Mills' celebrity emerged from a single athletic event. Although sports enhanced his agency and introduced him to the mainstream, Mills' activism stemmed from his ability to craft his own image and market himself. His book, film, and foundation are testament to Mills' ability to capitalize on his athletic notoriety.

While their ability to assert Native American identity and operate within the sporting middle ground is central to their activism, the legacies of Thorpe and Mills are also tied to contemporary Native American communities. Thorpe and Mills remain important figures in the Native American community. They serve as prominent reminders

of the athletic tradition of Native Americans. On the Pine Ridge Reservation, the community center is named Billy Mills Hall and the mascot of the Pine Ridge high school is the “Thorpes.”¹ While these names are certainly inspiring, they also put pressure on future Native American athletes. Mills has witnessed this pressure first hand. Although sport continues to resonate with Native American youth, communities place so much pressure on their teams to win that a South Dakota State Championship basketball game becomes as intense as an NCAA Final Four.² Although not solely responsible, community pressure has prevented many talented Native American athletes from following in the footsteps of Thorpe and Mills and entering the sporting middle ground. Many athletes fear failure and have trouble adjusting to different roles and systems in college. This is not to say athletes who do not become iconic figures are not important or successful. C. Richard King explains that Native American athletes are too often judged in “European American contexts exclusively through mainstream measures of success” rather than in their local, traditional setting.³

Mills and others continue to encourage Native Americans to participate in sports. The Indian Health Service has encouraged exercise as a way to promote good health on the Reservation and combat the high occurrence of obesity among Native Americans.⁴ Exercise has more benefits than just improved health, however. Announcing the

¹ That the high school is located on an Indian reservation negates the controversy of a Native American mascot. Associated Press, “Mills to Attend Dedication,” *The Daily Plainsman* [Huron, South Dakota], 2 March 1966, 9.

² Billy Mills, Interview with the author, Fair Oaks, CA, 3 January 2011.

³ C. Richard King, “Identities, Opportunities, Inequities: An Introduction,” in *Native Athletes in Sport and Society*, C. Richard King, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xxv.

⁴ “Healthy Weight for Life: Trend and Impact of Overweight and Obesity,” *Indian Health Services*, accessed 29 May 2011 from
<http://www.ihs.gov/healthyweight/index.cfm?module=dsp_hw_trend>

extension of Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" initiative to fight childhood obesity into Indian Country, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Larry Echo Hawk, writes:

My family has been very fortunate in obtaining their education, and many are attorneys. Our success could be closely attributed to the active lives that my siblings and I led while growing up. Because our parents were not wealthy, being physically active, especially in athletics, led to us to being fortunate enough to attend college on athletic scholarships.⁵

Echo Hawk's advice to Native American youth illustrates the lasting power of the sporting middle ground, and provides an example of sports success leading to careers outside of athletics.⁶

New role models are emerging to inspire and enable Native American participation in sport. In November of 2009, Nike launched its N7 Fund.⁷ The N7 initiative has enlisted the help of current, prominent Native American professional athletes to serve as "ambassadors," such as Jacoby Ellsbury of the Boston Red Sox and Sam Bradford of the St. Louis Rams. The ambassadors are inspirational figures as the initiative seeks "to help Native American and Aboriginal youth recognize their proud history and build on it for a triumphant future."⁸ Echoing the words of Mills and following the tradition of turn of the century Muscular Christians, Nike N7 "believe[s] that sport has the power to unleash human potential....Involvement in sports and physical activity leads to greater self-confidence, enabling youth to be a force for positive change

⁵ Larry Echo Hawk, "The Launch of Let's Move! in Indian Country," Let's Move Blog, 27 May 2011, accessed 28 May 2011 from <<http://www.letsmove.gov/blog/2011/05/27/launch-lets-move-indian-country>>

⁶ It is important to note that Echo Hawk, Michelle Obama, and the IHS fail to address the root structural causes of childhood obesity and poor health and instead expect Native Americans to "help themselves" within a broken system.

⁷ N7 consists of its own line of shoes that borrow from Native American culture in their design. Profits from shoe sales as well as donations make up the fund. The money is then used to aid Native American communities in need of equipment and money for sports programs.

⁸ "About N7," *Nike N7*, accessed 23 May 2011 from <<http://niken7.com/about-n7/>>

in their communities.”⁹ Throughout the twentieth century sport was powerful and helped many Native American athletes enact change in both their local communities and broader society. Ellsbury and Bradford are continuing this tradition and ensuring that the sporting middle ground lives on with the help of Nike's N7 Fund. Perhaps, one day, they too will join Thorpe and Mills in the American Indian Hall of Fame.

⁹ Ibid.

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