

The Indian as the American Savior:

Charles Alexander Eastman's Indian
and His Vision for America's Future

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I Introduction

In his first autobiography *Indian Boyhood* (1902), Charles Alexander Eastman or Ohiyesa invites his contemporary readers into the lively stories of a Dakota boy of the late nineteenth century, the nomadic life that he once lived as a youth. “What boy would not be an Indian for a while when he thinks of the freest life in the world? This life was mine.”¹ Opening his narrative in such a manner, he continues telling of his training in nature, his life with his family, his learning from the old medicine man's stories and Dakota legends. It was a tale of “primitive” life of “a natural and free man” which “no longer exist[ed].”² Stating this theme of “vanishing Indian” before the beginning of his narrative, Eastman writes his autobiography in a nostalgic manner, and gives his contemporary readers Indian virtues that seem to be gone when he started writing in 1893.³

His recollection of a life as an Indian must have been celebrated by his white readers who were longing for an “authentic” account of the past which was vanishing. “No one can read this story of ‘Indian Boyhood’ without profoundly touched by its pathos and its power,” noted a reviewer of *Milwaukee Sentinel*, enthusing further that the autobiography “presents Indian[s] in a new light [and ... it] should arouse sympathy and enlarge understanding in the

1 Charles A. Eastman, *Indian Boyhood* (New York, NY: McClure, Philips & Co., 1902), 3.

2 *Ibid.*, v.

3 The recent Eastman's biographer David Martinez notes that Eastman began writing after 1893, when he moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. See David Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009), 7-8.

public mind.” Likewise, the *St. Paul News* praised the book for providing “not only an authentic, but an interesting story of a life that is fast becoming only a memory.”⁴ Eastman’s illustration of “primitive” life surely appealed to his white readers. Eastman thus eventually gained fame as a best-selling author of books about American Indians. Until his separation from his wife, Elaine Goodale Eastman, who was also a writer and his collaborator, Eastman wrote widely on his knowledge about Dakota cultures, American Indians in general, and addressed the issues that concerned American Indians, especially in relation to U.S. government policy. Over his twenty-five years as a writer, he published eleven books, including two collaborative works that he did with his wife. His writings were widely read. His autobiographies in particular had frequently been assigned in classrooms, and translated and published in French, Danish, and Bohemian.⁵

Eastman’s success as a writer was largely indebted to the cross-cultural skills that he gained from his early education. Eastman was born in 1858 and grew up in learning from traditional Dakota training as well as from Euro-American education as a youth. Eastman lived in a period when the lives of American Indians were rapidly changing due to the course of assimilation policies. The Dawes Act of 1887 was, for example, a policy that aimed to make individual farmers out of American Indians, by allotting reservation lands to the individual ownership.⁶ Assimilation was also sought through education. Off-reservation schools, such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School founded by Richard Henry Pratt, were designed to eliminate American Indian identity by having Native children learn English, and giving them “practical” education such as “mechanical arts and farming” for boys, and domestic housework for girls. Under Pratt’s slogan of “Kill the Indian in him and save the man,” Native children learned gendered forms of industrial education, based on the program

4 Comment on “Indian Boyhood,” Lecture Announcement 1904-05 (Southern Lyceum Bureau, Louisville, KY). Goodell/Goodale Family Papers, Jones Library Special Collections, Amherst, M.A., folder: Charles A. Eastman.

5 Charles Alexander Eastman, *Indian To-day: The Past and Future of the First American* (New York, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1915), viii.

6 This policy promised eventual admission of citizenship for American Indians after twenty five years of cultivating “reserved” land as farmers. Despite its intent, it resulted in accelerating reduction and distribution of tribal lands to white American ownership.

practiced in Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute for African American and American Indian students.⁷

The Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 seemed to have confirmed the idea of “vanishing Indian” to non-Indian eyes as “the marker” of complete defeat of American Indians as a whole, beyond tribal experiences. After the Wounded Knee, American Indians came to represent the nation’s past violence, portrayed in the forms of novels, movies, and other types of medias, as caricatures that only existed in the past.⁸ Living in such a period of enforced assimilation, Eastman chose to gain skills from white American education. Yet Eastman saw more complexity in what white Americans saw as the only path for American Indians to take during this era—“assimilation or extinction.” Through his pen and in print, he remained Indian while claiming himself as an “American.”

Eastman started writing only several years after he had the experience of treating wounded victims and burying the dead after the Wounded Knee tragedy.⁹ Nevertheless, Eastman’s tone of writings was strangely optimistic, and seemingly avoided extensive discussion on difficulties that American Indians had faced in the early twentieth century. Instead, Eastman evidently uses his books to exhibit romantic notions of the “primitive” life of Indians, in stark contrast to modern Western civilization. This romantic presentation of Indianness troubles critics today to delineate his intentions for the writing. One of the early critics, H. David Brumble III, investigating *Indian Boyhood*, observed Eastman as “Romantic Racist and Social Darwinist.” In looking at Eastman’s superior observations on the “childlike” Indians, Brumble III thus seemingly reduced Eastman as a “fully acculturated” assimilationist, who deeply embraced a Western, modern mindset as a way of observing cultures.¹⁰

7 Kevin Slivka, “Art, Craft, and Assimilation: Curriculum for Native Students during the Boarding School Era,” *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 3 (Spring, 2011): 226-227.

8 Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 16; Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher*, 9.

9 Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 5.

10 H. David Brumble III, *American Indian Autobiography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 148; Jennifer Bess, “‘Kill the Indian and Save the Man!': Charles Eastman Surveys His Past,” *Wicazo sa Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 2000): 8; Tony Dykema-VanderArk, “Playing Indian in Print: Charles A. Eastman’s Autobiographical Writing for Children,” *MELUS* 27, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 9.

Eastman's omission of the grotesque images of American Indian life as it was for the victims at the Wounded Knee, and description of more utopian imagery of Indians, reveals troublesome picture of Eastman as the man who devoted himself solely to the mainstream culture.

Recent critics, however, have revisited Eastman's writings and observed the complex but strategic performance behind his style of writings, reevaluating him as one of the early Native American resistance writers who wisely manipulated the Indianness that was expected of him.¹¹ Philip J. Deloria demonstrates the instances in which American Indians performed their Indianness to talk back to non-Indian audiences.¹² Malea Powell saw American Indian intellectuals' use of major discourses about Indian as a "rhetoric of survivance," that enabled them to "both respond to that discourse and to reimagine what it could mean to be Indian."¹³ Delineating her story through

11 Major driving force of this change in perception is, as Joy Porter puts it, contributed by "much critical debates over its position ... as postcolonial literatures." Acknowledging "chronic conditions" and "structural limitations" that American Indians lived under, recent critics argue that Native American literature should be observed as "part of resistance literature" (Porter, 59). See Joy Porter "Historical and cultural contexts to Native American literature" in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, eds. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Also, significant growth in numbers of important body of criticism both in Native American literature and in broader discipline of literatures helped this transformation. According to Kenneth M. Roemer, before 1970s there were virtually no academics who specialized in Native American literature and it was quite uncommon for Native American literature to be included in college literature courses. However, it began to attract more attentions alongside wider social and academic movements during the 1970s and 1980s, as represented in "Civil Rights and Ethnic Studies," in particular, but also "feminism and Women's Studies." With a rise in numbers of Native American academics, the presence of Native American literature came to be highly visualized, and contributed in developing "substantial body of criticism worthy of recognition, praise ... and ridicule." See Kenneth M. Roemer, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, 1-4. Critics who follow this revised perception on Eastman are, for example: Peter L. Bayers, "Charles Alexander Eastman's *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* and the Shaping of Native Manhood," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 20, no. 3 (Fall, 2008): 52-73; Penelope Myrtle Kelsey, "A 'Real Indian' to the Boy Scouts: Charles Alexander Eastman as a Resistance Writer," *Western American Literature* 38, no. 1 (Spring, 2003): 30-48; Malea Powell, "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing," *College Composition and Communication* 53, no. 3 (Feb., 2002): 396-434.

12 Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 126.

13 Powell, "Rhetorics of Survivance," 396.

her close examination of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Charles Alexander Eastman's writings, Powell claims that their uses of writing in colonial context worked as a necessary tool for their survival and resistance within the dominant society. It enabled Eastman, in particular, to exhibit himself as "'authentic' as both an Indian and a citizen (Euro-American)," that qualified him to renegotiate the popular stereotypes about American Indian as well as to critique civilization.¹⁴

This essay, following Powell's concept of "rhetoric of survivance," attempts to revisit Eastman's re-appropriation of Indianness. I will argue that Eastman, by responding to an expected Indianness, reimaged an indigenized "American-ness" to offer lessons to both white and American Indians. This essay, however, will focus on how Eastman's teachings were delineated to white Americans. Eastman offered white American audiences a supposedly first-hand account of Indian virtues that American Indians had developed through their trainings in nature. In doing so, Eastman envisioned a better future for America as a nation led by the very "first Americans" of the continent.

II Ohiyesa Becomes Charles A. Eastman: Eastman's Performance of Native "Authenticity" and White Middle-Class Gentility

Eastman was born in 1858 on the Dakota reservation near Redwood Falls, Minnesota, yet he spent most of his youth in Manitoba, Canada, following his relatives in exile after the 1862 U.S.-Dakota war.¹⁵ His name was Hakadah (Pitiful Last) at that time, because his mother died right after his childbirth. However, he was later named Ohiyesa (Winner), to celebrate a victory in a village lacrosse game. In Redwood Falls and Manitoba, Eastman received his early education from his grandmother and his uncle. They taught him to

¹⁴ Powell, 418.

¹⁵ Although Eastman appeared as a "full-blood Sioux" in many newspapers published during his era, he was actually a "mixed-blood" Dakota, born as a son of Ite Wakanhdi Ota (Many Lightnings) and Wakantankanwin (Goddess) who was mixed-blood and had the English name of Mary Nancy Eastman. His mother was a daughter of Captain Seth Eastman, a noted artist. See Raymond Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 12.

develop his mental and physical strength and become a successful hunter and warrior. Among the traits that he learned through his training were “courage, patience, self-control, and generosity.”¹⁶ While he grew up as a healthy Dakota youth, his hatred toward white Americans also grew, because he was told that his father Many Lightnings and his brothers were among thirty-eight Dakota men who were taken hostage and hanged after the 1862 U.S.-Dakota war. Eastman, then Ohiyesa, sought to use his skills for vengeance in the name of his lost father and brothers.¹⁷

However, his anger against white Americans seemed to ease after his father’s return. And it was at this time that his metamorphosis began. His father, Many Lightnings, now appeared before him as Jacob Eastman and persuaded him to learn the white American way of life. Jacob told him that he was exempted from the execution, and instead he stayed in prison for three years in Davenport, Iowa. During his imprisonment, Jacob was converted to Christianity, and after eleven years of separation from his son, Jacob came to reclaim his son to his newly established life in Flandreau, South Dakota. It was Jacob who persuaded Ohiyesa to adopt the changes around them.

For Ohiyesa, the need to make a transition was not clear at first. When Ohiyesa met his father Many Lightnings, he was first confused about his honored father’s acceptance of “so-called civili[z]ed life, or the way of white man.”¹⁸ Eastman later recollected his feelings as follows: “I could not doubt my own father, so mysteriously come back to us, as it were, from the spirit land; yet there was a voice within saying to me, ‘A false life! A treacherous life!’”¹⁹ Eastman perceived his father’s return as a somewhat biblical moment in his life, in which his reincarnated father from “the spirit land” inspired him into this new life awaiting him. However, having grown up in Dakota tradition, he was reluctant to admit that he should accept his father’s way of life.

At the same time, though, this must have been a moment of realization for

16 Wilson, 16; Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, 9, 44-48; Charles Alexander Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1916), 1, 6.

17 Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, 285; Wilson, 16.

18 Eastman, *From the Deep Woods*, 7.

19 *Ibid.*, 7.

Eastman. Even in his woodland life, he had heard of the “supernatural” power of white Americans, creating “fire-boat,” or “‘fire-boat-walks-on-mountains’ (a locomotive).”²⁰ Eastman’s previous knowledge of white American’s mysterious technology may have made it easier for Eastman to understand his father’s saying: “the sooner [American Indian] accept [white American’s] mode of life and follow [white American’s] teaching, the better it will be for” American Indians overall.²¹ In order to live in a society where American Indians were required to give up their traditional culture, he thought it was necessary to gain the language and knowledge that dominant culture offered them. Eastman regarded this transition as his replacement of “bows and arrows” with “the spade and the pen,” white American’s knowledge and language. Eastman then decided to depart from his indigenous life to receive a Euro-American education.²²

Eastman soon acclimated to the white American way of life. At his date of graduation from Boston University Medical College in 1890, Eastman assured himself that the time had come to “use all that [he] had learned for [American Indian’s] benefit.”²³ He was first appointed to be a government physician for the Lakota people at Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota in the fall of 1890. There he met his wife, Elaine Goodale, who was working as a supervisor of education at Pine Ridge, and he soon announced their engagement on Christmas Day, 1890. The Wounded Knee Massacre that the couple witnessed right after their engagement only seemed to make their relationship stronger. Eastman and Elaine got married within a year.²⁴

After he and his family moved to St. Paul, Minnesota in 1893, he attempted to establish himself as a private physician, but he never succeeded.²⁵ Largely

20 Ibid., 280.

21 Ibid., 8.

22 Ibid., 39.

23 Ibid., 74.

24 Margaret D. Jacobs, “The Eastmans and the Luhans: Interracial Marriage between White Women and Native American Men, 1875-1935,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 3 (2002): 35-36.

25 According to Erik Peterson, “Eastman only actively practiced medicine for fewer than six years.” See Erik Peterson, “An Indian, an American: Ethnicity, Assimilation and Balance in Charles Eastman’s *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 2nd ser., 4, no.2/3 (Summer/Fall, 1992): 148; Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher*, xiv.

in need of finding ways to make a living, Eastman began to publish books on American Indians with the assistance of his wife, while he simultaneously engaged in a series of jobs including field secretary for the YMCA, organizer for a summer camp, lobbyist, lecturer, and agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.²⁶

Eastman's main teaching that he embroidered within his writings was that American Indians were capable of thinking about their own affairs, and their virtues deserve respect within the wider American community. In order to demonstrate this, Eastman displayed himself as the "authentic" "first American," an American Indian who was also capable of living in a modern society.

Eastman led his audience to confirm his credibility in writing about the American Indian experience. However, he also did this work by performing the Indianness that his readers expected, while countering the popular stereotypes that permeated early twentieth-century America. During this era, in which people were primed to view American Indians as a "vanishing race," an increasing numbers of literatures and ethnographic works were done on natives, to capture the "wild" Indians who once lived freely in the West. With the strong influence of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, the image of Plains Indians in the feather headdress became a somewhat universal image that symbolized "Indians" beyond any tribal distinctions.²⁷

By applying this image of Indian, Eastman authenticates his "primitive" Indianness to his readers. In the beginning of his book, *The Soul of the American Indian*, he puts a picture of himself, donning the feather headdress, revealing his bare chest and wrapped by some kind of fur. Eastman poses himself before a dark background, looking up to the left, towards the light. With a slight smile on his lips, he situates himself as if he is going on a vision quest, communicating with the native spirits. Placing his "primitive" Indianness up forward in the beginning of his book, he assures that his narrative of

26 Peterson, 148; Carol Lea Clark, "Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) and Elaine Goodale Eastman: A Cross-Cultural Collaboration," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 13, no. 2 (Autumn, 1994): 274.

27 Jeffery R. Hanson, "Ethnicity and the Looking Glass: The Dialectics of National Indian Identity," *American Indian Quarterly* 21, no.2 (Spring, 1997): 204.

American Indian philosophy, a philosophy he held “before he knew the white man,” was “real.”²⁸ Furthermore, Eastman’s attempt to portray himself a “real” Indian can also be drawn from the opening sentence of *Indian Boyhood*, where he claims that “the freest life in the world” was “mine.”²⁹ There he clearly indicates his ownership over the natural, free life of his youth, by using the possessive, and confirms the story that he is going to tell is an “authentic” account of his experience and “true” Native experience in general.³⁰

While Eastman shows his credibility to tell the “true” story of the American Indian, Eastman also shows himself capable of becoming a modern American. In order to do so, Eastman constructed himself to fulfill white middle-class expectations of the era, a loosely defined behavior that was any “civilized” person supposedly should have: “physical and sexual self-restraint; intelligent citizenship and self-government; appreciation of art, music, and literature; and mastery over the natural world.”³¹ Eastman’s rhetoric can be seen in a picture located in the very beginning of his autobiography, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. There he presents a photograph of himself in a suit with his signature attached in English. Unlike many pictures of American Indians taken by Euro-American photographers at this period, Eastman does not pose himself facing the camera.³² While American Indian portraits taken by Edward Curtis, for example, imply the documenting of a somewhat frozen, “innocent,” dying imagery of American Indians, Eastman’s portrait in the autobiography as well as of the picture in *The Soul of the American Indian*

28 Charles A. Eastman, *The Soul of the American Indian: An Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), ix-x.

29 Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, 3.

30 Gale P. Coskan-Johnson, “What Writer Would Not Be an Indian for a While?: Charles Alexander Eastman, Critical Memory, and Audience,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 2006): 109.

31 See discussion of reformed notions of “civilization” in the middle-class in works such as Joseph O. Jewell, *Race, Social Reform, and the Making of a Middle Class* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 7; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1800-1917* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

32 Amy Nelson, “A Stylistic Analysis of American Indian Portrait Photography in Oklahoma, 1869-1904,” (M.A. thesis, University of Northern Texas, 2001), 11.

reveal lively images of Eastman, as Indian, with obvious implication of his self-performance. In the portrait, Eastman takes a diagonal position, looking to his right hand side. Posing again in front of a dark background with some lighting on his face, Eastman in his dark suit appeals to the audience with his civility and middle-class gentility, as opposed to the “barbarous,” “savage” image of American Indians in the wilderness.

His display of his state of “civilized” can also be seen from the pictures that he inserted in his books. Of all twelve pictures that he put throughout the book, only two pictures can be easily associated with the indigenous culture—pictures of tepees and Kicking Bear, gazing outward in his regalia. Eastman clearly uses the picture to stress his move to the upper social ladder from a “barbaric” state, by choosing to put photos of tepees and the log cabin on the same page. The place that picture of teepees was taken is unknown. The picture of the log cabin was supposedly taken at Flandreau, South Dakota, as Eastman notes that it is a “typical Indian log cabin, such as Dr. Eastman’s father lived at Flandreau, Dakota Territory.”³³ Although these dwellings were situated in a similar, “wild” looking landscape, the picture of the log cabin shows a sign of land use. A part of the land right next to the log cabin is fenced off, supposedly for a ranch or a field that Eastman’s father cultivated to live. Making a stark contrast to the picture of tepees, it visualizes Eastman and his father’s docility in accepting white American way of life, and to convince people that his metamorphosis was thus a success.

Eastman shows his capability for becoming a “civilized” man to counter the popular stereotypes over American Indians that treat American Indians as “childlike” Indians, who need paternal support from white Americans, and it would take a lengthy time to make them “civilized.”³⁴ Eastman, by taking his father and himself as an example, attacks this stereotype: “civilization [was] beyond the reach of the untutored primitive man in a single generation.”³⁵ He explains: “It did not take my father two thousand years, or ten years, to grasp its essential features, and although he never went to school a day in his life, he lived a broad-minded and self-respecting citizen. It took me about fifteen years

33 Eastman, *From the Deep Woods*, 17.

34 Coskan-Johnson, “What Writer Would Not Be an Indian,” 125.

35 Eastman, *The Indian To-day*, 100.

to prepare to enter it on the plane of a professional man, and I have stayed with it ever since.”³⁶ He actually spent seventeen years in preparatory, college, and professional education, but the length of time that Eastman spent was in fact, “two years less than [what was] required by the average white youth.”³⁷ Also, he includes the list of names of well-known white Americans who he “had honor of acquaintance with,” and lists names such as Theodore Roosevelt, G. Stanley Hall, and Ernest Thompson Seton.³⁸ It clearly shows Eastman’s purpose for demonstrating to his readers his competitiveness and urge to participate in the dominant society, as self-reliant and established self, living out white middle-class expectations.

Eastman was a strong advocate for American Indian citizenship.³⁹ Therefore, we can easily assume that Eastman’s expression of his belief in American Indians’ capability for their self-support is aimed to generate in the public mind the possibility of making American Indians into citizens.⁴⁰

36 Ibid., 100.

37 Ibid., vii.

38 Eastman, *From the Deep Woods*, 192; Bayers, “Charles Alexander Eastman’s *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*,” 59.

39 Eastman was a member of the Society of American Indians (SAI), a group of Native intellectuals whose primary aim was to codify American Indian citizenship. However, it is unknown if Eastman himself embraced full citizenship status. According to David Martinez, a recent biographer of Eastman, it is “frustratingly ambiguous” to determine whether or not Eastman was a citizen. Yet Martinez thinks that Eastman did not have citizenship. It is because, while his father had his homestead in Flandreau, South Dakota, Eastman never claimed his allotment, which could be used to buy his citizenship (David Martinez, personal communication with Malea Powell, Dec 8, 2011). Moreover, although the original provision of the Dawes Act “granted” citizenship for those who accepted “civilized” mode of life and did not live on the reservation, there were always confusing criteria that “civilized” Indian needed to meet in order to gain/keep their citizenship. It is very this problem that members of the SAI wanted to clarify and solve (Malea Powell, personal communication with author, Dec 8, 2011).

40 The criteria for citizenship had been always obscure for American Indians, including birthright citizenship. Until the Dawes Act was legislated, legal status for American Indians had never been formally clarified. Even after the legislature, as Lucy Maddox explains, citizenship for American Indians had been randomly granted and denied depending on the circumstances. Even when American Indian individuals managed to attain citizenship, though, it did not always mean that they had a right for suffrage either. For instances, Sherman Coolidge, the first president of the SAI was regarded as a citizen and allowed to vote in Minnesota but was denied citizen status while he was in Wyoming. Under the Dawes Act, in 1887, Coolidge could become a citizen when he was allotted the land in Wyoming, but was again denied citizenship

Yet by displaying himself as a “real” Indian who is capable of adopting white American way of life, it seems that Eastman obtained agency for discussing problems beyond the concerns of American Indians. By showing his credibility of being “primitive” and “civilized” at the same time, Eastman gained agency both to imagine what it means to be Indian and what it means to be American.

III Promoting Indianness to Save Civilization

Having established himself as credible for bringing Indian wisdoms to white American audiences, Eastman talked directly to white Americans who were anxious about their lives as being overcivilized. In the early twentieth-century, there was active discussion about the way to face the problems that emerged from a rapidly modernizing society.⁴¹ One of the popular problems to be discussed was so-called “boy problems,” that concerned the increasing rate of juvenile delinquency and decline of morality and physical strength among future American citizens.⁴² Increasing numbers of white Americans, especially those on Christian missions, began to have fears about “urban overrefinement and feminization [... that seemingly] threatened manhood among growing

when the Burke Act (which was an adjustment of the Dawes Act and required twenty-five years of land ownership for allotted Indians) was endorsed in 1906. However, Coolidge later could become a citizen again because he parted from the reservation and accepted a “civilized” form of life under the original provision of the Dawes Act. Eastman wrote about his discomfort with this ambiguity. Eastman mentioned the legislation for citizenship as “confusing” and expressed that it was questionable if “there [was] a learned judge in these United States who [could] tell an Indian’s exact status without a great deal of study, and even then he [might] be in doubt.” Like many SAI members, Eastman was eager to clarify the legal status of American Indians as a whole. See Charles A. Eastman, “Indian Plea for Freedom,” *American Indian Magazine* 6 (Winter, 1918): 164; Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race & Reform* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 107-108; Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1978), 174-175.

- 41 For detailed discussion of the problems that white Americans felt in need of dealing with in the face of modernization, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1981).
- 42 David P. Setran, “Developing the ‘Christian Gentleman’: The Medieval Impulse in Protestant Ministry to Adolescent Boys, 1890-1920,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 20, no. 2 (2010): 166.

boys.”⁴³

Ernest Thomson Seton, a founder of Boy Scouts of America, expressed his anxiety by indicating that this modern setting would be transforming “robust, manly, self-reliant boyhood” into “a lot of ‘flat chested cigarette smokers, with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality.’”⁴⁴ While some Christian missions sought the solutions by looking into the chivalrous nature of the medieval knight, to nurture the ideal of “purity, self-control, courage, and reverence” in boys, Seton saw solutions in “primitive” Indianness to nurture most notably, self-control in boys.⁴⁵

Eastman was an acquaintance of Seton, and as a secretary of the Boy Scouts of America, he shared concerns with Seton about the problems that modern society seemed to possess. He also believed the luxury and comfort that materialism brought to urban population stripped vitality and self-reliance from American boys. In particular, he was keenly aware of the fact that these children in urban “artificial” setting were alienated from the nature, where he considered vital for healthy development of the manhood. Eastman, as an “authentic” Indian, thus presented “primitive” Indianness as a solution to these problems. Utilizing the popular notion that treated Indianness as an antithesis to civilization, Eastman depicted the Indian as a figure who preferred the simple life, in comparison to the materialistic nature of civilization. He noted that Indians enjoyed “roving out-door-life” in contrast to the centralized population of civilization.⁴⁶ Especially in this “roving out-of-door life,” Eastman found virtues essential for maintaining “their physical excellence and strength, and sense of endurance and vitality.”⁴⁷ Eastman thus illustrated these virtues in the image of determined Indian heroes. His heroes were figures who bravely countered and solved the problems that they faced when it came to the historical struggle with Euro-Americans. Through these images, Eastman attempted to assure white audiences that there were respectable aspects from Indians of the past that white Americans should learn.

43 Ibid., 166.

44 Ernest Thompson Seton, *Outlook Magazine*, 1910; Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 107.

45 Seton, “Developing the ‘Christian Gentleman,’” 178.

46 Eastman, *Indian To-day*, 5.

47 Ibid., 6.

Eastman highly honored Indian men of the past in his publication entitled *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains*. For example, in the figure of Crazy Horse, a renowned Sioux fighter, Eastman found “a gentle warrior, a true brave, who stood for the highest ideal of the Sioux.”⁴⁸ When Crazy Horse was four or five years old, Eastman explained, he hunted two antelopes and distributed them to his band of people who were suffering from starvation during a severe winter. He saved Hump, one of the foremost Sioux warriors, amidst a shower of arrows during the war with Gros Ventres. Furthermore, Eastman explained that Crazy Horse, as a brave warrior, masterfully handled his men, and “won every battle that he undertook, with the exception of one or two occasions,” and “managed to extricate himself in safety from a difficult position.”⁴⁹ Benevolence, toughness, and self-reliance made Crazy Horse a great leader. And he was, according to Eastman, along with Chief Joseph, “pure patriot, as worthy of honor as any who ever breathed God’s air in the wide spaces of a new world.”⁵⁰

In Chief Gall, who commanded in the battle of Little Big Horn, Eastman saw “a most impressive type of physical manhood.”⁵¹ Gall “appear[ed] most opportunely in a crisis, and in a striking and dramatic manner to take command of the situation.”⁵² Eastman explained this drawing from Gall’s deliberative reaction that he took when Marcus Reno, a military officer who served under General Custer led his party and entered the Little Big Horn. In the confusion, when many were unprepared and excitable youths attempted to rush “madly and blindly to meet the intruder,” it was Gall who stopped them until they were fully armed with more guns and horses. His advice led the Sioux to victory, and Eastman noted that “Reno retreated pell mell before the onset of the Sioux.”⁵³ Drawing from this, Eastman celebrated Gall’s excellence as a strategist, as well as his bravery and endurance.⁵⁴

48 Charles A. Eastman, *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1919; reprint, Middlesex, UK: The Echo Library, 2007), 32.

49 Ibid., 35.

50 Ibid., 38.

51 Ibid., 27.

52 Ibid., 30.

53 Ibid., 30.

54 Ibid., 29-30.

What made these two masculine men of Sioux legend valuable, according to Eastman, was the experiences and training they received as children of the wilderness. Crazy Horse nurtured his “big-hearted, generous, courageous, and self-denying” character through the teachings of his parents.⁵⁵ Gall gained his physical courage and endurance from the early training and contests that he had gone through in his younger days. Receiving their early training in nature, Indians developed a soul that led to an essential manhood.⁵⁶

Eastman interpreted that it was this soul that they, Native American men, had lost from close contact with civilization.⁵⁷ He depicted Gall as “a real hero of a free and natural people, a type that is never to be seen again.”⁵⁸ Crazy Horse was, for Eastman, “one of the ablest and truest American Indians, [whose] life was ideal,” and continued that this character was now difficult to find among “so-called civilized people.”⁵⁹ Illustrating these heroes as the artifacts of the past that was vanishing, it seems that Eastman brought a sense of sorrow to his white audiences, generating sympathy and romanticism with the virtues of these Indian heroes.

Eastman thus portrayed the demoralization that Native Americans experienced while they were in the process of assimilation, making a stark contrast to the lives of Indian heroes. He criticized materialism and the “inner-mode of life” as elements of civilization that spoiled Native Americans. Eastman indicated that whisky and gunpowder were the “two great ‘civilizers’” that destroyed Indian manhood, and he wrote, “from the hour the red man accepted these he had in reality sold his birthright, and all unconsciously consented to his own ruin.”⁶⁰

Eastman observed that Native acceptance of gunpowder or European weapons were the things that significantly changed basic principle of warfare among Indians. “The original Indian warfare [...] was founded upon the principle of manly rivalry in patriotism, bravery, and self-sacrifice,” he noted,

55 Ibid., 32.

56 Ibid., 27.

57 Ibid., 34.

58 Ibid., 31.

59 Ibid., 38.

60 Eastman, *Indian To-day*, 15.

and in such warfare, people were willing to risk their lives “for the welfare or honor of the people.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, with the introduction of European weapons, Eastman described that warfare started to become more “cruel, relentless, and demoralizing” because such warfare was caused by “the desire to conquer and to despoil the conquered of his possessions.”⁶² He made clear that this kind of desire was unknown to American Indians before encountering European colonizers. While he showed his understanding of the convenience of the new weapons that Europeans had introduced to them, for him, they were not suited to the purpose of primitive life.⁶³

It is clear that Eastman believed that European-introduced materials were the things that destroyed Indian manhood, changing robust, self-sustaining Indians into helpless “victims” who no longer held vital control over their lives. He repeatedly described that “the introduction of liquor completed the ruin of [his] race.” Overall, he explains poetically that “the whirlwind and tempest of materialism and love of conquest tossed them to and fro like leaves in the wind.”⁶⁴

Eastman stressed that adopting “the inner mode of life” also threatened American Indian manhood.⁶⁵ He criticized the reservation system as one which deprived Indians of their freedom. Confined in “the well-defined boundaries,” Indians were not able to hunt or interact with neighboring tribes outside of its boundaries. Giving up “his vast possessions to live in a squalid cabin in the backyard of civilization,” he explained that “[Indian] was practically a prisoner.”⁶⁶ He noted about the rations that Plains Indians got as a replacement of the buffaloes white Americans had eliminated from the Native land and stressed this ration-giving system was the one “fatally injured” self-respect of these Indians. With such a system, they had become “time-serving, beggarly, and apathetic,” losing the masculine traits that they used to have in the past.⁶⁷

This degradation that civilization had brought to Native Americans

61 Ibid., 7.

62 Ibid., 14.

63 Ibid., 14.

64 Ibid., 18.

65 Ibid., 13.

66 Ibid., 41.

67 Ibid., 43-44.

seemed to be experienced in different levels from the degradation white Americans were experiencing over the course of modernization. However, Eastman presumably attempted to connect these issues by providing the reasons why Native Americans were in a ruined condition. According to Eastman, materialism and a forced centralized population were the causes of the problems for all modern peoples. Eastman observed that the recent ruined condition of civilization stemmed from excesses of wealth and a dense population. He stressed that people's loss of connection with their nature would significantly prevent the further development of civilization as a whole. He directly expressed his concerns about modern civilization: "[D]epriv[ing] of close contact and intimacy with nature" from man would produce "many deaf ears and blind eyes," thus preventing them from becoming self-sufficient.⁶⁸ He diagnosed social ills that modern society suffered by relating them to the degradations that American Indians experienced, and then presented his Indianness as a cure for modern civilization.

He particularly showed sympathy for the condition of children in civilization. It seemed that modern society, which pursued of material comfort, was doing no good for them. Eastman explained: "White boys and girls can go through their entire lives without having their senses whetted to aid them in observation. They grow up artificially, they are dependant rather than reliant."⁶⁹ Eastman believed that "primitive" Indianness would rescue children from such an effeminate state. "In the great laboratory of nature there are endless secrets yet to be discovered," Eastman noted, suggesting that the Indian education in nature would nurture in children what modern society did not offer.⁷⁰ Particularly, he considered individuality and initiative as being more successfully developed in an Indians' outdoor life.⁷¹ Eastman thus evoked a common anxiety that his white audiences had shared and guided the civilization back to nature, urging them to learn from Indian teachings.

His attempt can be seen in the summer camp activities that Eastman

68 Charles A. Eastman, *Indian Scout Talks: A Guide for Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1914), 1.

69 Charles A. Eastman, "Training American Girls as Indian," *Boston Sunday Post*, 20 June 1915.

70 Eastman, *Indian Scout Talks*, 2.

71 *Ibid.*, 188.

organized for children. In *Indian Scout Talks*, he called out to white readers, especially to boys, to get back in nature and “keep nature’s laws, develop a sound, wholesome body, and maintain an alert and critical mind.”⁷² His camp, which was “absolutely authentic, present[ation] [of] a remarkable illusion of aboriginal life,” was arranged to help boys recover their “masculine spirit.”⁷³ It suggested that, by participating in camp activities, they grew to “be true in thought, free in action, and clean in body, mind, and spirit.”⁷⁴ By learning “[t]he language of footprints and of gestures, Indian signals, making fire with rubbing sticks, building shelters, open air cookery, and many other secrets of the red man are imparted on the forest trails,” he wrote, the white children will “find himself, and [be] conscious of his relation to all life.”⁷⁵ In nature, “he develops a wholesome vigorous body and mind, to which all exertion seems play, rather than painful toil for possession’s sake.”⁷⁶ Offering “open-air education, patterned largely upon [his] own early training,” he suggested that white children would be able to regain “[t]he desire to be a man—the native spirit of the explorer and the hero.”⁷⁷

Although Eastman did not write extensively about the heroic virtues of American Indian women, he acknowledged woman’s importance in creating a noble Indian community. The summer camp that he organized for girls was thus carefully designed to contribute to saving civilization from its ruined state. Eastman stressed woman’s education in nature as equally indispensable.⁷⁸ As a “moral salvation of race,” women had an essential role as a “spiritual teacher of the child, as well as its tender nurse” in their society. For Eastman, woman’s becoming of the mother, serving as a nurturer of the child, was “the real and most important business of her existence.”⁷⁹ He thus arranged his camp for

72 Ibid., 6.

73 “OHIYESA (the Winners) —A Camp For Boys” (promotional brochure, 1917, 15pp.) Goodell/Goodale Family Papers, Jones Library Special Collections, Amherst, M.A., folder: Charles A. Eastman, 5.

74 Ibid., 1.

75 Ibid., 4-5; Eastman, *Indian Scout Talks*, 189.

76 Eastman, *Indian Scout Talks*, 189.

77 Eastman, *From the Deep Woods*, 193; Eastman, *Indian Scout Talks*, 7.

78 Eastman, *Indian To-day*, 88-89.

79 Ibid., 88.

white girls to engage in many activities that were the same as those of boys, but with an added emphasis on woman's domestic roles.⁸⁰

By participating in his camp, learning "Indian signaling, sign language, and fire-making" for example, girls were nurtured in skills necessary to life in modern society. Learning Indian methods, the article of *Boston Sunday Post* reported, that they would be able to "tell the directions when lost on a city street by examining the leaves of the first shade tree," "make a baby stop crying at night," or "cook a porterhouse steak without a skillet."⁸¹ Through that, Eastman made sure that girls would develop a strong mindset that had "no room for the clash of personalities, for undue self-consciousness, or unhealthy fancies" that prevented them from becoming the ideal mother.⁸² Eastman taught white girls because he believed that they would have their kids raised in following the Indian method that they learned as children later when they were nurturing future American citizens.⁸³ Through educating girls, Eastman attempted to bring about "the moral salvation of race" he regarded as the key role that Indian woman held for civilization.⁸⁴ By showing woman's significant role in helping the progress of the civilization as a mother figure, Eastman suggested Indianness would reaffirm the ideal gender roles for the further development of the nation.

By manipulating the Indianness of the past and teaching Indianness to white children, Eastman tried to visualize possible Indian contributions to the further progress of civilization. Eastman asserted passionately that "[w]e want the best in two races and civilizations in exchange for what we have lost."⁸⁵ As a "civilized" Indian, he recognized his embrace of civilization that had brought him successful personal development. He knew that Indians would eventually need to adopt the culture of the more powerful whites to live as citizens in the United States. Yet Eastman made sure to his audience that

80 "School of the Woods" (promotional brochure, 1915, 4 pp.), Goodell/Goodale Family Papers, Jones Library Special Collections, Amherst, M.A., folder: Charles A. Eastman.

81 "Training American Girls as Indian," *Boston Sunday Post*, 20 June 1915.

82 "School of the Woods" (promotional brochure, 1915, 4 pp.)

83 "Training American Girls as Indian," *Boston Sunday Post*, 20 June 1915.

84 Eastman, *Indian To-day*, 88-89.

85 *Ibid.*, 120.

Indians would be “transforming but they were hardly disappearing.”⁸⁶ He has not fully appreciated the notions of bringing civilization to both Indians and to white Americans. He drew his criticism from Indian’s experiences after contact with Euro-American, linking it with his concern about moral and physical degradation of Euro-American civilization. Presenting Indianness to civilization, its trainings as a solution to recover moral and physical vitality, he attempted to infuse his Indianness with white American civilization. In the form of free, masculine heroes of the past, and by working in the present to improve the conditions of the society, Eastman envisaged the future as an “Indianized” America, where his Indian would live in the thoughts of the nation, an ideal for the nation’s unified spiritual progress.

IV Conclusion

In the last passage of *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, Eastman revealed his beliefs for the further development of America as the nation as well as his personal identity: “I am an Indian; and while I have learned much from civilization, for which I am grateful, I have never lost my Indian sense of right and justice. I am for development and progress along social and spiritual lines, rather than those of commerce, nationalism, or material efficiency. Nevertheless, so long as I live, I am an American.”⁸⁷ As his often-quoted narrative suggests, Eastman demonstrated that his embrace of “mainstream American life was not a simple choice between two evils—assimilation or extinction.”⁸⁸ Rather, Eastman consciously constructed himself a model Indian and American, complicating this binary. He, exhibiting himself as the “first American” whose virtues were worthy of adoption by other Americans, thus brought his Indianness to the center of American civilization.

Eastman was not the only American Indian in this era to perform and promote Indianness toward wider American audiences. As the establishment of the Society of American Indians (SAI) in 1911 suggests, there was an increasing number of American Indian intellectuals, including Arthur C.

86 Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher*, 100.

87 Eastman, *From the Deep Woods*, 195.

88 Martinez, *Dakota Philosopher*, 6.

Parker, Carlos Montezuma, Gertrude Bonnin, or Angel De Cora, who began asserting the necessity of American Indian presence in discussing issues that concern American Indians, and by and large, America as a nation. They, as part of a Pan-Indian movement, attempted to bring individual and separate groups of American Indians to cooperate as an “Indian” race, and envisioned the universal solutions for the problems that concerned American Indians overall. Most notably, in promoting citizenship for American Indians as Eastman did, they positively manipulated their expected Indianness to potentially advocate for citizenship.

In 1917, a Seneca intellectual, Arthur C. Parker, as an editor, ran an article about Eastman in *American Indian Magazine*, the quarterly journal of SAI. The article highly praised Eastman as follows: “Dr. Eastman through all his books gives us a brand of philosophy that while critical is yet refreshing because it is so evidently true. As a great Sioux, history will write him down as a great American and a true philosopher.”⁸⁹ Although his career as a writer was relatively short, Eastman, utilizing his cross-cultural skills, strenuously worked to publicize his vision for American progress. As this comment on Eastman suggests, Eastman’s overly optimistic but realistic views of American Indians and white American civilization seemed to be appreciated by other SAI members. The Indianness that Eastman attempted to promote was maybe “idealized, genetic, detribalized” image of American Indians emerged from his knowledge of Dakota culture.⁹⁰ Yet Eastman’s contribution to American Indians and to an even wider American audience possibly led to an increased understanding of issues that concern American Indians. More significantly, perhaps he contributed to opening the future path for American Indian citizenship. The enactment of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 was an achievement that Eastman hoped to realize. Eastman manipulated his Indianness not only to reimagine his own Indian identity, but also to reimagine a new “American” future led by the “first Americans.”

89 Arthur C. Parker, ed., “Men and Women Whose Lives Count for the Red Man’s Cause,” *American Indian Magazine* 5, no. 4 (Winter, 1917): 270; Martinez, *Datota Philosopher*, 1.

90 Maddox, *Citizen Indians*, 134; Tova Cooper, “On Autobiography, Boy Scouts and Citizenship: Revisiting Charles Eastman’s *Deep Woods*,” *The Arizona Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (Winter, 2009): 9.

ABSTRACT

The Indian as the American Savior: Charles Alexander Eastman's Indian and His Vision for America's Future

Miyuki Jimura

Malea Powell argued that in the early twentieth century, American Indian intellectuals' use of major discourses about American Indians was "rhetoric of survivance." They manipulated their expected Indianness for their survival and resistance within the dominant society, in order to "talk back" to the majority and also to reimagine the meaning of their Indianness.

This study follows Powell's story on "rhetoric of survivance," and furthers her argument through revisiting Charles Alexander Eastman's writings. It argues that Eastman, by manipulating his Indianness, taught Indian virtues to white American audiences, thus reimagining his own new "American" future led by the American Indian as the very first American of the North American continent.

The process that Eastman took to publicize his vision for America was complex. The early twentieth century that Eastman lived in was when American Indians were seen as a "vanishing race." There were a series of federal policies, including the Dawes Act of 1887 that aimed to make American Indians assimilate into the dominant culture. Also, the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 seemingly marked for white Americans the end of the American Indian resistance and made them think American Indians' distinct cultures were doomed to extinction. Increasing numbers of white Americans thus began to romanticize American Indians as a memorial to the past. Eastman, by responding to this discourse, through his writings, presented himself as an "authentic" Indian, but also demonstrated his ability to adopt to the mainstream culture. In so doing, Eastman attained his agency to critique white American civilization, and envisioned a future of America where Indian virtues were well respected, and American Indians were more at the center of

the civilization.

Having established himself as a “real” Indian who is also capable of living in modern society, Eastman responded and gave a solution to the “boy problem,” an awareness that emerged from rapidly modernizing society. Eastman took Indian virtues from determined Indian heroes of the past, and he related its problem to the problems that American Indians suffer from baleful encounters with white American civilization. Eastman thus claimed that future American citizens should learn from the past American Indians in order to gain mental and physical strength to survive in modern society, where they tended to lose their self-control.

Eastman’s legacy can be seen this way. His romantic, overly generalized form of Indian which was constructed majorly from his experience as a Dakota youth might have reinforced American Indian stereotypes. However, as one of “Red Progressives,” Eastman did counter vicious binary path that American Indians were seen to be inextricably on at that time—“extinction or assimilation.” By manipulating his Indianness, he reimagined a future path for American Indians to live as American citizens.

American Indians viewed nature as a gift from the Gods, which should be treated with great respect at all times. They gratefully took food and clothes from nature, but they never exceeded the limits. B) The Native Americans inhabited different regions of the country and there is no reliable evidence of where they come from. The Native Americans claim that they have lived there since the beginning of time. There is also an opinion that they migrated there in prehistoric times via the Bering Strait Land Bridge. Some researchers believe that they came from Siberia or Asia. All these are still onl American citizens who self- identify as Native Americans are either enrolled members of one of the 562 Federally recognized tribes located primarily in the US, or are descended from Native American tribes that either no longer exist or are currently not Federally recognized. Some of the 562 recognized tribes own Casinos, so this is how members of those tribes are "associated"™ with Casinos. Now, just as the Tribes are beginning to build infrastructure, schools, hospitals and roads, states also demand access to the tribes' gaming revenues. Even the National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC), which regulates specific forms of gaming, can infringe on tribes' rights as it promulgates regulations.