

and anthropologist Alice C. Fletcher, thought of human beings not as masters over nature, "but as one of many manifestations of life, all of which are endowed with kindred powers, physical and psychical, and animated by a life force emanating from the mysterious Wakonda." Such spiritual concepts, which emphasized "man's dependence on a power greater than himself," were compatible with a practical, self-reliant approach to problems.³ Attacks by Sioux Indians, disease, grasshoppers, and white demands for Omaha lands and for cultural conformity came close to overwhelming the people during the nineteenth century. But, through selective adoption of white traits and a non-violent rearguard action – the Omahas never went to war with a white nation – the people succeeded in maintaining their unity, and in retaining an allotted and much-reduced reservation in their Nebraska homelands.⁴

In 1846 the BFM began the first permanent mission to the tribe and in 1858 opened its boarding school. The BFM vision of the Christian civilization fused evangelical Presbyterianism to an idealized, rural and small-town American way of life. La Flesche attested to the strength of the missionary conviction that if Indians were to survive in this life and to gain salvation in the next they must reject all of their "heathen" past and become like righteous white Americans in everything but skin color.⁵ To achieve these awesomely ambitious goals, the missionaries placed great faith in the character-transforming power of education, and established schools among many tribes. In the controlled but hopefully home-like environment of the boarding school, children would be "under the case of the teachers all the time; whom they would soon learn to love and obey." They would thus attain the knowledge and skills required for citizenship of the United States and for membership of the Christian civilization.⁶

During six decades of service to the tribes (1837-1893), the BFM provided an up-to-date, and essentially unchanging curriculum. The Omaha boarding school generally followed BFM Indian policy, insisting upon religious education, and on vocational training appropriate to the sexes – labor on the mission farm was especially important for the boys. Pupils of both sexes learned English, arithmetic, geography, history, and music. Like white children, Omahas used the famous McGuffey readers. In the 1860's the number of students hovered at around 50 boys and girls, from six or seven years of age into the teens. The three-storey school contained a class room, a dining room (where, like a large family, all ate together), a dormitory each for boys and girls, a chapel, and a sitting room for girls. In the 1860's, probably during the

superintendency of R.J. Burtt, a number of the remarkable children of E-sta-ma-za (Iron Eye), also known as Joseph La Flesche, attended this school.⁷

The son of an Omaha Mother and a French father, Joseph La Flesche became convinced that only by adjusting to American civilization could the Omahas survive as a people. A principal chief of the tribe, he was revered and reviled as the leader of the "make-believe white men," those Omahas who from the late 1850s lived in a village of wooden frame houses. His second son, Francis, was born about 1857.⁸

Francis La Flesche was five or six when he entered the BFM boarding school. While a pupil he remained in continual contact with his home village, and witnessed Omaha ceremonies. Later he took part as a runner in one of the last tribal buffalo hunts. For a period in the 1880s he became an elder of the PCUSA and also began his productive relationship with Fletcher; as her collaborator or alone he wrote numerous studies of Omaha and Osage cultures. He served in the Office of Indian Affairs, and from 1910 to 1929 he worked for the Bureau of American Ethnology. He earned law degrees and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Nebraska. Although successful in the white world, the "first professional American Indian anthropologist" remained devoted to the preservation of the Indian cultural heritage. Significantly, at the end of his life he returned to the Omaha reservation, dying there in 1932.⁹

La Flesche dedicated *The Middle Five* to "The Universal Boy," and saw it as a bridge between two cultures. He hoped the book would reveal that the "the true character of the Indian boy" was like that of boys everywhere. It reads like a children's book, a charming, at times humorous, and at times sentimental account of the intertwined lives of five young Omahas in a strange new world. As a historical source *The Middle Five* has limitations. It was published decades after the events it describes, and its author may not have witnessed everything he recounted.¹⁰ Perhaps to better communicate the open-mindedness of children, La Flesche adopted a different tone in the text than in the short preface. Finally, the intellectually gifted Omaha, of mixed ancestry and the son of a chief, was hardly a typical Indian boy.

Yet the distance of time gave La Flesche perspective on his experience, and his ethnological expertise helped him present dramatically the clash of cultures. Despite different attitudes toward the mission, on point after point his account tallies with what Presbyterians themselves wrote: on the school building, the BFM policies and practices, the curriculum, even the books used. Further, *The Middle Five* is neither hagiography of

sainted teachers nor anti-missionary polemic. La Flesche presented the strengths and failings of the missionaries and of their program. Below the deceptively simple story line and prose, the author has embedded a complex and real picture of how Omaha children responded to an alien cultural regimen.

Fearful and crying, the Omaha child was taken into the school dining room on his first morning, to be assailed by the "deafening clatter of a hundred tin plates and cups." Later, as a missionary spoke, La Flesche fell asleep at his bench. Suddenly, there burst upon him "a noise like thunder" – he jumped up, ran out of the room, and fell into a cellar. He "screamed at the top of his voice, frightened almost to a fit." In these opening scenes La Flesche communicated with telling detail the frightening strangeness of everything, especially the noise, so overpowering after sound-damping teepees and earthlodges, or even after the small frame-houses of the Omaha "make-believe white men." Yet he immediately showed the humanity of the teachers: an unnamed woman carried him "in her arms" from the cellar. She saved him from his terror, but hardly assuaged his bewilderment, as she spoke to him in a language he could not understand.¹¹

La Flesche appears to have adjusted quickly to the school. Yet, there was much he remembered with displeasure. The heavy reliance on rote learning and "monotonous recitations" produced continual boredom in the classroom. On occasion even the teacher, "sitting with eyes shut," could be overcome "by the drowsiness that attacked everyone in the room." When a student came to a difficult word in a passage she was reading to the class, the missionary pronounced it for her "through a repressed yawn." If La Flesche was so regularly bored, it is difficult to imagine how less-gifted students with a poor knowledge of English stood the endless recitation of often meaningless sounds.¹²

Strict discipline was not new to young Omahas. From the earliest age, according to La Flesche, "there seemed to be no end to the things we were obliged to do [at home], and the things we were to refrain from doing." Even the use of the rod caused few major readjustments. What troubled La Flesche and his fellow-students was the excessive and capricious resort to corporal punishment and abuse. "Grey-beard," the teacher most in contact with the students, was the villain in this respect. An irritable old man, uninspiring as a teacher, he was too quick to resort to the rod, or to a rough shoulder-shaking. Not without some better sides, he at times achieved a degree of camaraderie with his pupils.¹³ Yet life in his class was often unpleasant.

Nothing in Grey-beard's bad-tempered and cane-happy ways, how-

ever, prepared the boys for his brutal attack on a dull pupil who accidentally hit him in the chest with a sod from a sling. Grey-beard fetched a piece of wood and "dealt blow after blow on [the pupil's] visibly swelling hand. The man seemed to lose all self-control, gritting his teeth and breathing heavily, while the child writhed with pain, turned blue, and lost his breath." The "vengeful way" the missionary fell upon the boy, wrote La Flesche, "created in my heart a hatred that was hard to conquer," and left an impression that would last for many years. "I tried to reconcile the act of Grey-beard with the teachings of the Missionaries, but I could not do so from any point of view." La Flesche did not end his account there. He dutifully reported how Grey-beard, after talking "earnestly" with the superintendent, apologized – if only through an intermediary. Nevertheless La Flesche was impressed by the degree to which he and the superintendent were willing to admit error to young Indians.¹⁴

La Flesche was decidedly unimpressed by the cultural intolerance of white Americans, and in the preface of *The Middle Five* gave explicit vent to his resentment. Pupils had to wear American clothes because the "paint, feathers, robes, and other articles that made up the dress of the Indian, are marks of savagery to the European, and he who wears them, however appropriate or significant they might be to himself, finds it difficult to lay claim to a share in common human nature." The cane-enforced rule forbidding the speaking of Omaha meant that a gregarious young Indian "was obliged to go about like a little dummy until he had learned to express himself in English." Omaha names, too, were rejected primarily because of their "heathenish" connotations.¹⁵

In the text of his book La Flesche was less direct, but no less critical of ethnocentrism. His account of BFM clothing policy may have romanticized Indian garb, but the ending is a blunt comment on the missionary assumption that Omaha culture could be discarded almost like a garment. A young Indian came to the school, dressed in "his gorgeous costume"; his robe was "beautifully ornamented with porcupine quills of exquisite colors." The teacher detailed La Flesche and another student to take the newcomer to the store and to fit him out in American clothes. Then, reported the author cryptically, "we tied up his fine Indian costume in a neat bundle to be returned to his father."¹⁶

A group of white visitors – probably government officials – unwittingly instigated one of the most memorable incidents in the book. Unexpectedly, one of them asked the students to sing an Indian song. "There was some hesitency," wrote La Flesche with a nice sense of understatement. To sing such a song in class, and in the Omaha

language, would not only have been against school rules. It would, the children sensed, have been a violation of something sacred to their teachers. But suddenly

a loud clear voice close to me broke into a victory song; before a bar was sung another voice took up the song from the beginning, as is the custom among the Indians, then the whole school fell in, and we made the room ring. We understood the song, and knew the emotion of which it was the expression. We felt, as we sang, the patriotic thrill of a victorious people who had vanquished their enemies....

"That's savage, that's savage!," said the visitor, shaking his head. "They must be taught music." It speaks well for the tolerance of the children that they later enjoyed Western songs "almost as well as" their native melodies.¹⁷

Juxtaposing the richness of his tribal heritage against the intolerance of the teachers, La Flesche included many such examples of Omaha culture and ethical values. Most impressive, if again romanticized, is Joseph La Flesche's reminder to Francis that power and privilege carried with them responsibility to care for the poor and the weak. Less ethnocentric missionaries might have sought out such Christian-like tribal ethics as "common denominators" upon which to build the Christian civilization. Yet the teachers showed not the slightest interest in finding compatibles in the two cultures. Where a mission policy reflected an Omaha trait - the importance attached to rank in both societies was another such instance - this was merely coincidental. La Flesche accurately reported the cultural intolerance of the Presbyterians. Although superintendent Burt could once insist on the need for learning more about Indians, BFM missionaries among numerous tribes declared with numbing consistency that Indian lifestyles were worthy only of obliteration.¹⁸

Why, then, did pupils not flee, as did many young Indians at other BFM schools? The wise school policy of allowing students Saturdays at home probably dissipated some tensions. Moreover, Joseph La Flesche had organized a tribal police force and, reported R.J. Burt happily: "If a boy runs away & his parents do not bring him back, just drop a line to L.F., who sends ... [the] Capt. of Pol. after him, & and is sure to return him." Young Omahas did, nevertheless, sneak away from the school. Francis and a friend attempted to join the annual buffalo hunt, only to be returned to the school for punishment. Significantly, it was his uncle, probably sent by Joseph La Flesche, who brought the aspirant hunter back to the mission.¹⁹

Yet within the compulsory and supposedly rigid school system, young Indians were able to develop a great number of active and often secret

"strategies for coping." There were times "when the pupils became very tired of their books, and longed to take a run over the prairies or through the woods," wrote La Flesche. Then "they sought for ways and means by which to have the school closed and secure a holiday." Once the boys let the pigs out of their pen: "All that afternoon we chased pigs, and had a glorious time, while the girls had to stay in school and be banged at by Grey-beard." When the superintendent thanked them for the "good service" they had rendered in capturing the pigs, the boys experienced great satisfaction in having fooled the staff of an organization dedicated to "uplifting" them out of their "ignorance". Although they achieved few such dramatic victories, the pupils could temporarily reverse roles and enjoy Grey-Beard's mispronunciation of Omaha names. They continually played pranks in class, and creatively transformed cake into currency. Also, despite a careful attempt to keep boys and girls separate - another case in which BFM policy happened to coincide with Omaha mores - there were many surreptitious if innocent romances among the young students.²⁰

The title of the book suggests a vital strategy for achieving both comradeship and even physical security: the joining or forming of gangs, like "the middle five" or "the big seven." Older students, such as La Flesche's great friend Brush, sometimes took newcomers under their wings, helping them with English and with the new environment, or protecting them from bullies. Indeed, La Flesche's vivid recollection of these years was a result in part of the warm relationships he established at the school, and especially of his friendship with Brush.²¹

These schemes, pranks, and groupings certainly showed how much Omaha pupils had in common with "The Universal Boy." Some of the secret activities of the students, however, such as La Flesche's flight to the buffalo hunt, or the late-night telling of tribal myths by a member of "the middle five," despite the threat of Grey-beard's cane, were deliberate perpetuations of Omaha culture, and pointed to the problems of children caught in a bicultural situation. Despite division into gangs the pupils were conscious of the distance between themselves and the missionaries - a distance far greater than if all shared the same cultural background - and many of their activities reinforced a sense of student community.²² The most carefully-organized defiance of school order, for example, involved a dangerous test of bravery and a close attention to ritual words "which had been sacred to generations of [Omaha] boys." Reaching across gang divisions, the leader of "the big seven" initiated the members of "the middle five" into the self-consciously serious game. He spoke Omaha, "fearlessly breaking one of the rules of

the school." Then pairs of students escaped by rope through a high window, and returned to the village. After speaking the sacred words to adult members of the tribe they got their prize, a bag of pemmican. Later, back at the school, the boys formed a circle and sat "Indian fashion." The leader of "the big seven" offered a piece of pemmican to Wakonda - in the mission building, with Grey-beard asleep downstairs! The missionary accidently discovered the adventure and thrashed the ringleader, who bore the punishment without any sign of emotion.²³

These same students would soon again be parroting, and often diligently learning, the ways of the new civilization. They had begun a process of selective and syncretic adaptation to American ways, while simultaneously striving to preserve much of their own culture and sense of group identity. In La Flesche's account they did so with surprisingly little mental anguish. Their attitudes were a product of Omaha practical-mindedness and openness to new ideas, and of the ethnically proud but adaptive lifestyle of their families in the village of the "make-believe white men."

Neither individual nor tribal pride prevented the pupils from enjoying less-repressive sides of the school. The missionaries realized the necessity for humanizing breaks in the demanding regimen: thus the day home each week. And even Grey-beard did not seem to object to a student keeping a dog in the dormitory, or to a rabbit as a pet. When the bulk of the tribe returned from the hunt, Superintendent Burtt wisely closed the school to allow the children home to their parents. In snowy weather he announced that the mission would supply the pupils with wood to make sleds; the concession would teach the use of American tools. Yet in writing to a BFM secretary about the same or a similar event, Burtt noted that "it would do you good to hear the merry & loud laughs as they go down the hills."²⁴ Whatever the motives, such practices softened the discipline of the school.

The missionaries also attempted to delegate responsibilities. Grey-beard sometimes allowed *pupils* to select the English name for a newcomer. If this implicated them in the destruction of their own culture, they could enjoy the occasion, which increased their sense of participation in the mission. Probably to encourage qualities of leadership, the teachers assigned pupils to help newcomers. And, both for pedagogical reasons and to contribute to mission finances, older students received specific responsibilities on the farm or out-buildings. La Flesche took his duty at the water pump seriously; partly for fear of punishment and out of a sense of job pride; and also because of the Omaha belief in the need for responsible performance of duty. Again, a practice which was tacti-

cally useful from the missionary point of view struck a responsive chord in the the young Indians.²⁵

Even if the mission never became the "Christian family" hoped for by the BFM, individual teachers often showed kindness towards the pupils, and the general atmosphere could at times be surprisingly cheerful. La Flesche contrasted his own tears on the first morning with the "merry laughter" of the other students. The superintendent, a remote figure, still emerges as a generous and encouraging teacher. He especially liked Brush, and "favored him in various ways, loaned him books to read, and talked to him about them." When Brush went to him after Grey-beard's assault on the sling-shot student, Burtt greeted him "kindly," offering him another book. Significantly, it was after talking with Burtt that Grey-beard apologized for his actions.²⁶

Brush's last illness provides the climax of *The Middle Five*. The death-bed scenes are a shade too Victorian for present-day sensibilities, but in simple language La Flesche conveyed both his own desolation and the concern of the mission staff. He depicted the superintendent "talking earnestly" to the doctor about Brush. At the end of class a teacher, perhaps Grey-beard, "gave special injunction to the scholars not to make any noise as they passed out, or while moving about the house, so as not to disturb the boy." The admonition was in vain, and Brush died soon after. During his last days the mission did temporarily become a kind of family, pupils and staff united in their concern and grief.²⁷

Although Francis La Flesche devoted much of his professional life to preserving the Omaha heritage there is little doubt that he enjoyed some of what he learnt at the BFM school, and took great satisfaction in his achievements there. When Brush, who had been helping him with English, told him that he was learning fast, he thrilled to the encouragement:

I felt proud of his praise and worked all the harder. We had gone through the alphabet swimmingly... When I was able to read short sentences, I felt sure that I should soon take my place among the advanced pupils.

Coming from a rank-conscious tribe, La Flesche had no difficulty accepting the school's grading of children by performance. He explicitly ranked even his own friends. "What do they know?" he once scathingly asked of the younger members of the gang. "They're all way back in the Second Reader, and you [Brush] are in the Fifth, and I am in the Third."²⁸ Thus had La Flesche blended Omaha and American values, suggesting how effective the mission school could be when its program did not clash against, but - however unintentionally - built upon tribal traits.

Finally, La Flesche would hardly have taken such pleasure in learning American ways, nor spoken so well of better sides of the mission school, had his teachers regarded him or his friends as members of an inferior race. A child might have missed such prejudice; but an ethnologist writing later would not have been insensitive to the explicit or implicit dehumanization of his people. That he gave no hint of such racism, and backed up the claims of the BFM that its schools provided a varied and partly academic education for Indians, strongly suggests that it did not occur. La Flesche could resent the ethnocentrism and other failings of his teachers, while responding to and growing under their encouragement of his capacity. Brush, apparently a full-blood Omaha, and one without a prominent father in the tribe, could grow even faster, during his short life. William G. McLoughlin has recently wondered whether, to those on the receiving end, there was much difference between judgments of cultural inferiority and of racial inferiority. *The Middle Five* suggests that there was. For Francis La Flesche and his comrades, missionary intolerance of their aboriginal culture was far less destructive of individual dignity than racist beliefs in their biological inferiority would have been. The egalitarian optimism of the teachers, then, was perhaps the crucial element in changing La Flesche from a fearful prisoner into a sometimes enthusiastic student.²⁹

Francis La Flesche communicated above all the diverse and ambivalent responses of young Indians to an experience potentially more traumatic than that faced by white children. Despite the compulsory attendance and the constant assault on their tribal values, however, the pupils did not generally see themselves as oppressed; neither were they especially grateful for what their teachers regarded as the precious gift of a Christian and civilized education. They accepted their situation, reacting to specifics. La Flesche achieved both a boyish immediacy and a more judgmental adult perspective as he conveyed the range of responses: the young Omahas feared, resented, thrilled to, were bored, mystified, or encouraged by their strange missionary teachers. This complex and mixed response suggests an equally diverse stimulus. The school presented many characteristics to the pupils, and La Flesche fairly conveyed the good and the bad.

He also convincingly demonstrated the impressive adaptability of young Omahas. Finding themselves near-prisoners for most of the week, they looked out for each other, engaged in mischievous or more purposeful defiance, and, through a second language, grappled with an intellectually demanding curriculum. Products of a receptive culture which had for centuries been incorporating white traits while main-

taining tribal identity, pupils continued this process of tolerant but selective adaptation at the school.

Yet even those who seemed model students had their own motivations, and their own understandings of BFM teachings. Francis La Flesche absorbed his father's practical sense of the need to adjust to the new while retaining much of the old - motives which implied utilization of the school for reasons only partly in accord with the goals of the BFM. Indeed, *The Middle Five* suggests how rarely a real meeting of minds took place at the school. Francis La Flesche's attitude to the curriculum was far-removed from the missionary belief in education as a moral activity and a prerequisite for responsible Christian citizenship. For him, attendance implied obedience to his father. The school also presented a fortuitous opportunity for personal and intellectual development, and for honor in a hierarchy, honor which might later help him in the new world growing up around him. As he reflected upon it decades later, his attitude as a student was clearly exploitative toward the mission.

Further, there is little evidence that, while at school, Francis or his friends took much interest in Presbyterianism. Apart from Bible stories and hymns, which he enjoyed, religious instruction was another bothersome and often boring subject. Church sermons, he wrote derisively, were "remarkable for their length and sleep-enticing effects." Although he did not directly criticize the content of Christian beliefs, La Flesche heavily imbued his book with Omaha spiritual and ethical values. And the one time that the pupil La Flesche thought seriously about Christianity, he was moved to do so by Omaha precepts. The night after his father's lecture on the Omaha ethics of hospitality and kindness, Francis and other students repeated the words of the "Our Father" with Grey-Beard. "I had said them a hundred times before," Francis recounted, but "now for the first time since I had been in the school, I began to wonder what they meant." The tantalizingly ambiguous passage hints at a process of syncretism, one which would have shocked the missionaries: "heathenism" - darkness itself - throwing light on Christian truths! Francis La Flesche, therefore, could become a successful product of the nineteenth century missionary effort, yet for motives of his own, and while creating a blend of tribal and American values quite at variance with the BFM demand for total rejection of the past and total acceptance of the Christian civilization.³⁰

Thus it is facile and condescending to regard Indians like the La Flesches as less admirable than the more traditional tribal members who opposed adaptation to white ways. As James Axtell has provocatively noted, Indians who thought in terms of ethnic survival "had the courage

to change and live in the face of overwhelming odds." They should not be seen as "cultural cop-outs or moral cowards."³¹ Francis La Flesche, like his father and others of the village of the "make-believe white men," combined personal and ethnic motivations for attempting to adapt to and exploit the institutions of the increasingly powerful white civilization.

We cannot assume that Francis La Flesche spoke for all Indians – certainly not for those who permanently fled American schools. Nor can we assume that the Omaha school offered exactly the same environment as, for example, the larger BFM Spencer Academy among the "civilized" Choctaw of Oklahoma. The range of Omaha responses was certainly narrower than at Spencer, where teachers and students became embroiled in violent and near-fatal confrontations. Nor does La Flesche report guilt-ridden religious conversions, as could happen elsewhere. And relatively few fled the Omaha school.³² For all La Flesche's perceptiveness, fairness, and clarity of memory, then, he can only provide us with one man's remembered account of one school during a short period of its existence.

Yet missionary correspondence from the Choctaw, Creek, Nez Perce, and other BFM stations demonstrates that La Flesche told much that was typical of Indian children's responses to Presbyterian schooling from the 1840s to around 1890. Like the Omaha pupils, other Indian children reacted in diverse ways to BFM schools; and their motivations were similarly diverse. For all the uniqueness of Francis La Flesche as an individual and as a witness, and for all the unrepresentative elements of the Omaha school, the responses of young Omahas were more like than unlike those of pupils at sister BFM schools³³.

A number of first-person accounts by Indians at other missionary or government schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provide a broader if incomplete context for the experiences of children at BFM schools. We could not claim that Charles Eastman or Luther Standing Bear (both Sioux), or Don Talayesva or Helen Sekaquaptewa, Oraibi Hopis, were typical Indians, or even typical ex-students of American schools. As in the case of Francis La Flesche, the very act of recounting their experiences makes them exceptional. But they too wrote forthrightly and with an intriguing ambivalence about their own and their fellow-students' varied responses. Such accounts – along with scattered scholarly treatments – at the least indicate that the diverse responses of students at Presbyterian schools were not unique; they may have been common.³⁴

The recollections of Francis La Flesche, other Indians, and even the

reports of BFM missionaries, give strong support to a major contention of the "new Indian mission history": Indians were active participants in the event which involved them. Even Indian children could retain areas of freedom of action in a seemingly controlled situation. Yet *The Middle Five*, and particularly the Omaha experience during the later nineteenth century, warn against over-compensating for earlier views of Indians as pitiable victims, by now depicting them as successfully engaged in strategies of "mutual exploitation" of white Americans. Only in the earliest phases of Indian-missionary contact could it be possible to see near-equal contest of power. The impressive adaptations, adjustments, and even utilizations of the mission by young Omahas in the 1860s, took place in a situation of compulsory attendance, and within a power relationship which became more detrimental to the Omahas with every passing year. Missionaries of the BFM also had to make adjustments – they had, for example, to come to terms with Indian languages.³⁵ Yet there can be little doubt as to which side had greater access to the political, economic, and even military power needed to coerce the other into adjusting to its way of life. The achievement of La Flesche and many of his companions at the Omaha school – and of some Indian children at other American schools – was that, in an environment designed to control their every thought, the young Omahas could accept so much of the new while retaining what they did of their individual initiative, sense of fun, and cultural heritage.

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NOTES

1. Examples of nineteenth century children's responses to "uplift": William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven, 1984), 59, 62-63, 138-43; Robert F. Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1965), chap. 3, passim. On twentieth century responses: Sally McBeth, *Ethnic Identity and the Boarding School Experience of West-Central Oklahoma Indians* (Lanham, Maryland, 1983); Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands, *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1984), chap. 5. On eighteenth century responses: James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*

- (New York, 1985), esp. 204-17; Margaret Connell Szasz, "'Poor Richard' Meets the Native American: Schooling Young Indian Women in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (May 1980): 215-35.
2. I have used an new edition: Francis La Flesche, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*, Foreword by David A. Baerreis, (Madison, Wisconsin, 1963). BFM missionaries occasionally preserved "enlightened" utterances of students: "Copy of letter written by one of our mission girls to her Omaha mother without our help," Dec. 1, 1862, vol. 4, box 1, American Indian Correspondence (hereafter 4:1, AIC), Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS), Philadelphia; Levi Levering, "Does it Pay to Christianize the Indian?," *American Indian Missions*, (New York, 1913), 6-7, in PHS.
 3. Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe*. Twenty Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1905-6. (New York, 1970, 1911), 611-25, 34-35, chap. VII, 597, 599, 70-71, 608-9. On Omaha culture and history: *Middle Five*; R.F. Fortune, *Omaha Secret Societies* (1932. Reprint: New York, 1969); Margaret Mead, *The Changing Culture of an Indian Tribe* (New York, 1932); Clyde A. Milner, II, *With Good Intentions; Greater Work Among the Pawnees, Otos, and Omahas in the 1870s* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1982), Chap. 6.
 4. Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, 612, 622-42; Milner, *Good Intentions*, chap. 6; and "Off the White Road: Seven Nebraska Indian Societies in the 1870s - A Statistical Analysis of Assimilation, Population, and Prosperity," *Western Historical Quarterly* 12 (Jan. 1981): 37-52.
 5. Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, 625-29; Milner, *Good Intentions*, 169-72. Also AIC, esp. R. J. Burt, Omaha Mission. Annual Report of the Superintendent, Oct. 29, 1861, 4:1, AIC; BFM, *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York, 1838-1893). Hereafter *AR*, followed by year: Michael C. Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes toward American Indians, 1837-1893* (Jackson, Mississippi, 1985), chaps. 2 (section II), and 3.
 6. Robert Loughridge of the BFM Creek mission, in *AR* (1851), 8; Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes*, chap. 2, (section IV), and chap. 7 (section IV).
 7. Burt, Omaha Mission. Annual Report of the Superintendent, and Annual Report, March 9, 1865, A, AIC; La Flesche, *Middle Five*, xx, 3-10, 24, 101-3, 123; Foreword by Baerreis, x-xi; Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes*, chap. 7, section IV; also chap. 2 (section IV).
 8. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, xx, 127-29; Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, esp. 631-34, 638-39; Milner, *Good Intentions*, esp. 154-56, 158-60; Norma Kidd Green, "The Make-Believe White Man's Village," *Nebraska History* 59 (Summer 1975): 242-4, and *Iron Eye's Family: The Children of Joseph La Flesche* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1969), esp. chaps. 1-3, and 9.
 9. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, 3-5. And Foreword by Baerreis, x-xiii. His mother was also part white, see Margot Liberty, "Native American 'Informants': The Contribution of Francis La Flesche," in *American Anthropology: The Early Years. 1974 Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, ed. John V. Murra (St. Paul, Minn., 1976), 101.
 10. La Flesche, *Middle Five*, xv-xvi. La Flesche was hardly present at the events described on 23-26. On the publishing history of the book, Green, *Iron Eye's Family*, 189-92.
 11. *Middle Five*, 3-5.
 12. *Ibid.*, 41, 45. Also 7, 26-27, 65-67.
 13. *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii, 46, 63, 75, 96-97, 107, 121-2. Also Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, 327-33, on child rearing.
 14. *Middle Five*, chap. 15. See I. Black to [Walter Lowrie], Aug. 25, 1862, 4-1, AIC, on a female teacher who, among other "scooking" acts, beat a boy "cruelly upon the head." Perhaps "Grey-beard" was a partly fictionalized character. But, significantly, bot Black and La Flesche independently reported such violence at the Omaha mission.
 15. *Middle Five*, xv-xx. La Flesche elsewhere admits that a new pupil could *like* his American clothes, 75-76.
 16. *Ibid.*, 26-28.
 17. *Ibid.*, 98-103.
 18. *Ibid.*, 29-31, 58-60, 127-30. On the importance of rank in Omaha society, 11, 35, 127; Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, 202-16; Mead, *Changing Culture*, 48-50, 61; Coleman, *Presbyterian missionary attitudes*.
 19. *On runaways, Black to Walter Lowrie, Oct. 20, 1860, 4-1, AIC; A. Reid to J.L. Wilson, April 12, 1854, 12:1, AIC; R. Loughridge, in AR* (1851), 8. On buffalo hunt, *Middle Five*, chap. 10. See also *AR* (1864), 9; Burt to [Walter Lowrie?], June 6, 1860, 4:1, AIC. Cf. McBeth, *Ethnic Identity*, 81, 86-88, 144.
 20. Elise M. Brenner, "To Pray or to be Prey: That is the Question. Strategies for Cultural Autonomy of Massachusetts Praying Town Indians," *Ethnohistory* 27 (Spring 1980): 135-52; La Flesche, *Middle Five*, 74, 67-68.
 21. *Middle Five*, 13-14, 22, 28-29. Also 3-4; Burt, A, letter 334, AIC.
 22. *Middle Five*, 29-31, 58-60. McBeth demonstrates that twentieth century Oklahoma Indians transformed the boarding schools into "acceptable symbols of an Indian ethnic identity," *Ethnic Identity*, 114. See also Margaret K. Brady, *'Some Kind of Power': Navajo Children's Skinwalker Narratives* (Salt Lake City, 1984).
 23. *Middle Five*, 29-31, 58-60, chap. 13. See also Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, 596, 601-2; Mead, *Changing Culture*, 96.
 24. *Middle Five*, 11, 32, 70-71, 103, 105-7, 141. Cf. Burt to [Walter Lowrie?], Jan. 8, 1861, 4:1, AIC.
 25. *Middle Five*, 134, 28, 68-70. Taking new names was not unusual in Omaha society; and the tribe placed great importance on responsible conduct, Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, 121, 144-5, 598. On Indian resentment of pupil labor, Berkhofer, *Salvation*, 3, 9-40; also McBeth, *Ethnic Identity*, 89-91.
 26. *AR* (1864), 9. La Flesche came to feel "quiet at home and independent" at the school, *Middle Five*, 12; also 3, 131, 140. Cf. Mead, *Changing Cultures*, 113-16; McBeth, *Ethnic Identity*, 94-98.
 27. *Middle Five*, 146-47, all. chap. 16. Louis La Flesche, older brother of Francis, died at the mission school in 1860, Green, *Iron Eye's Family*, 40.
 28. *Middle Five*, 13, 62, 33, 40.
 29. *Ibid.*, 5. Brush's grandfather was a chief, but his father and mother died when he was very young; McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 41, 68-72; Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes*, chap. 7.
 30. *Middle Five*, 6-7, 14, 127-30, 151; also 77; and 60-64, for examples of syncretism.
 31. James Axtell, "Some Thoughts on the Ethnohistory of Missions," *Ethnohistory* 29 (1982): 37. Fletcher claims that La Flesche perfected his English to preserve Omaha culture in written form, *Omaha tribe*, 30. He hardly had such a utilitarian approach as a pupil; yet he did not accept the missionary rationale.
 32. At Spencer in 1853 there were 132 boys, A. Reid to D.H. Cooper, Aug. 22, 1853,

- 12-1, AIC. For a violent confrontation, J.B. Ramsey to Walter Lowrie, Oct. 13, 1847, 9-2, AIC. For a conversion, Reid to J.L. Wilson, Aug. 10, 1854, 12-1, AIC.
33. Michael C. Coleman, "The Responses of American Indian Children to Presbyterian Schooling in the Nineteenth Century: An Analysis Through Missionary Sources." Paper delivered 16 January. Meeting of Organisation of American Historians, New York, April 1986.
34. Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1977 [1916]), esp. chaps. 2-5; Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Boston, 1928), esp. chaps. 13-18; Louise Udall, ed., *Me and Mine: The Life Story of Helen Sekaquaptewa* Tuscon, Arizona, 1969), esp. 8-15, 30-34, and 91-108, 121-144, 224-44; Leo W. Simmons, ed., *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian* (New haven, 1942), Chaps. 5-6. See also Note 1, above.
35. On the issue of power, David Brion Davis, review of Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, in *American Historical Review* 82 (June 1977): 744-45. Recent studies emphasizing Indian initiative and coping strategies: McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*; Milner, *With Good Intentions*; McBeth, *Ethnic Identity*; Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, and "Some Thoughts"; Brenner, "To Pray or be Prey"; Daniel K. Richter, "Iroquois versus Iroquois: Jesuit Missions and Christianity in Village Politics, 1642-1686, *Ethnohistory* 32 (1985): 1-16.

Fiction as Interpretation of the Emigrant Experience: The Novels of Johan Bojer, O.E. Rølvaag, Vilhelm Moberg and Alfred Hauge*

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My idea in focusing on these novels featuring the Scandinavian emigration to America is the assumption that fiction can be an important factor in conveying historical knowledge and human experience. Writers of fiction can do something different from what historians can, namely dramatize and individualize man's meeting with the historical conditions.

The selected novels are called "emigrant novels" due to the material with which they deal, namely the Norwegian and Swedish emigration to the United States in the previous century, and due to the thematic structure that we find in these works, a structure which in fact embodies the entire emigration process.

The novels that will be the focus of this paper are the Norwegian Johan Bojer's *Vor egen stamme* (1924), translated into English as *The Emigrants*; the Norwegian-American O.E. Rølvaag's *I de dage* (1924), and *Riket grundlægges* (1925), both volumes in English as *Giants in the Earth*, and the sequels *Peder Seier* and *Den signede dag*, translated into English as *Peder Victorious* and *Their Fathers' God* respectively; the Swedish Vilhelm Moberg's *Utvandrarna* (1949), *Invandrarna* (1952), *Nybyggarna* (1956) and *Sista brevet till Sverige* (1959), in English as *The Emigrants*, *Unto a Good Land*, *The Settlers* and *Last Letter Home*; and the Norwegian Alfred Hauge's *Cleang Peerson: Hundevakt* (1961), *Cleang Peerson: Landkjenning* (1964), and *Cleang Peerson: Ankerfeste* (1965), translated into English in two volumes as *Cleang Peerson I and II*.¹

The most typical feature of "the emigrant novel" as a genre is its