

FOREWORD

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Six years ago, I received an email from my former graduate advisor Clifford Trafzer about a student named Kevin Whalen, who was conducting research on Sherman Institute, an off-reservation Indian boarding school in Riverside, California. Although Cliff had written to me about his students in the past, his enthusiasm for *this* student, coupled with my interest in Sherman, caused me to take special notice of Kevin and his work. At the time of Cliff's email, he and I were putting together an edited collection on Sherman with Oregon State University Press, and he wanted me to consider including Kevin's essay in our book, a chapter he had written entitled "Labored Learning."

In the academy it is common for established scholars to "guard turf" and to be critical of others who do work in their area of research. All junior faculty experience this to some degree, and even I allowed this mentality to influence my initial thoughts about Kevin. Who was this "star," as Cliff described him, and what more could he possibly add to what I had already done? While these were my original reactions to Cliff's description of Kevin, my opinion of him quickly changed once I began reading his essay. It took only a few pages into his chapter for me to realize that his work was too good, and his writing too polished, for me to deny that there was something unique and special about him and his project.

In the chapter that Kevin wrote for our collection, he explained that beginning in the early 1900s, officials at Sherman sent Native students off-campus to work as domestic servants, ranch hands, and many other occupations. He noted how school superintendents and local farmers and ranchers used the agricultural industry of Southern California to further deeply held U.S. government assimilation goals and to fill the region's labor needs. And he explored the reasons why Indian students agreed (and often requested) to work "beyond" the "school walls" at places such as the Fontana Ranch, and at the many citrus orchards in the greater Riverside area. Although I had written about Hopi students who participated in the school's Outing Program in my book *Education beyond the Mesas*, Kevin took the conversation of Indian labor at Sherman to a different level. Even at this point, I could see that he was establishing himself

as an authority on Sherman and Indian labor at off-reservation Indian boarding schools.

While Kevin and I share an interest in Sherman Institute and Indian boarding school histories in general, there are other areas in our career trajectories that we have in common. We both graduated from the same PhD program, and we were mentored and taught by the same faculty, including Cliff and Ojibwe historian Rebecca “Monte” Kugel. As graduate students at the University of California, Riverside, we learned the importance of working with Native communities, and not just writing about them. Our professors taught us the value of contributing something useful to Indian tribes, and they urged us to consider how our research could benefit Native communities. In many ways, the education that we received in Native history at UC Riverside was a combination of the theoretical and the practical. Familiarity with archives and the process of honing skills needed to analyze documents was only part of our training. Cliff and Monte also encouraged us to leave the comforts of campus and interact with and work alongside Native people. Kevin certainly experienced this. As a graduate student, he regularly accompanied Cliff to community gatherings on and off Indian reservations in Southern California, including the Colorado River Indian Tribes. And he interviewed numerous individuals for his book, including director of the Sherman Indian Museum Lorene Sisquoc, and former Sherman student Galen Townsend, to name a few.

After Kevin completed his Ph.D. from UC Riverside, he became my colleague at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and continued working on his book as a Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Fellow of American Indian Studies. At the time, the American Indian Studies Program was at the center of a major national and international controversy surrounding the university’s de-hiring of the program’s new faculty member Steven Salaita. Although he had just arrived on campus, Kevin stood by my colleagues and me as we protested the university’s decision and demonstrated our commitment to shared governance and academic freedom. Nobody expected Kevin to join the fight, but he eagerly engaged in the protests, and soon it became clear to all that our struggle had also become his struggle.

While Kevin found himself in the middle of a highly politicized situation, and one that required huge amounts of time and energy from the program, he did not allow it to distract him from his major research project. In fact, nearly every time I walked into his office, he was revising some aspect of his book. Whether he was agonizing over external reader reports or adding new material to chapters, Kevin was always working. He gained valuable insights

from faculty, including our director, Robert Warrior, and twice participated in writer workshops where colleagues and graduate students critiqued his work and offered suggestions on ways to improve it. During his yearlong fellowship at Illinois, Kevin and I also spent hours together—usually over a meal, coffee, or a craft beer—talking about his book. We had long conversations about the field of American Indian studies, the growing literature on Indian boarding school studies, and the important contributions that he was making with his scholarship.

The following book, then, has emerged from numerous spaces, and each of these spaces has influenced *Native Students at Work* in unique ways. They have all done their part to transform what started as a chapter of an edited collection into the present volume. Kevin will no doubt write other books. He may even one day write a second book on Sherman or some other aspect of the off-reservation Indian boarding school experience. But for me, this book will always remain special. Not many scholars get an opportunity to help shepherd a project along from its infancy to publication. I did just that, and I remain grateful to Kevin for allowing me to accompany him on this journey.