Charles Eastman and the Limits of his Advocacy

Jessica Vilk

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol16/iss1/24

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A prolific figure, Charles Eastman chronicled his life and ideals in his autobiography *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. His complex identity as both a Native Sioux and Western educated physician meant his stances on Native and Western life were not always clear. Integrated into the West at a young age, he attempted to carve a place for other Natives within civilization as well, but his efforts had varying degrees of success. Despite staunchly resisting assimilation and instead advocating for an amalgamated community, the strength of colonialism and Eastman’s personal comfort with the West limited the scope of his advocacy which could have benefited from a closer connection to Native cultures and traumas.

Although ultimately Eastman had an uncommonly positive introduction to the West, as a young Native Sioux he himself experienced trauma before and during his educational journey. Eastman confessed that his people were deceptively “turned out of some of the finest country in the world…” (Eastman 2). According to him, the United States falsely offered to buy the land on which the Sioux lived, but at the time of the narrative’s publication the agreed upon price “stands unpaid…” (Eastman 2). This injustice naturally led to tension and bloodshed between the Sioux and Americans. Eventually, because of his participation Eastman’s father was captured and believed to be executed. Thus, at a young age, Eastman experienced the trauma of being cheated, and losing a parental figure. He also revealed that because of this damaged relationship between the Sioux and Americans, his uncle instructed him never to spare an American. Although Eastman did not personally contribute to this generational violence, it is a story that other Sioux members and many Natives can relate to. Despite his obvious disdain for this event, compared to the rest of his narrative, Eastman spends little time discussing the traumas and troubles of his tribe. In contrast, he prefers to focus on traumas where he was an outside participant, and not a victim, like the Ghost Dance massacre, or the reparations scandal of 1891. However, Eastman does dedicate more time to discussing his shock while initially attending Western schools.

It is important to note that while Eastman voluntarily attended Western schools and adapted his life to the Western world, that did not make his transition painless. Eastman reflected on how he first arrived at a Western school riding his pony but was quickly confronted by another Native boy named Red Feather who said: “Well, as there are no more buffalo to chase now, your pony will have to pull the plow like the rest,” (Eastman 12). While a seemingly inconsequential statement, the fact that Eastman remembered it and included it in his narrative speaks to its impression upon him. The statement immediately reduces Eastman’s Native culture to a buffalo chase, while it simultaneously forces a symbol of his culture (the pony) into a position that benefits the West. Additionally, the lack of buffalo speaks to the level of Native erasure already present at the time of Eastman’s boyhood. Surely disgruntling to Eastman, another Native boy made this statement, therefore revealing that he likewise underwent the trauma of having his culture reduced. Unfortunately for Eastman, this was only the beginning of the trauma that he would feel during his first years at school.

Upon entering the school building Eastman recalled immediately feeling uneasy and taking little comfort in the other Native students who felt similarly. Regarding his initial thoughts on Western education Eastman wrote: “...for the first time...I was an object of curiosity, and it was not a pleasant feeling” (Eastman 13). With his distinctly Native appearance Eastman felt singled out by the other Native children who had already begun to adhere to Western conventions at the expense of their Native culture. Even much later in life, there were moments in Eastman’s college...
Despite his initial distress, Eastman willingly adhered to Western modes of education, and its ideals quickly became the presiding force in his life. Jacob Eastman must be credited for his son’s introduction into Western education, as he originally pushed Eastman into school. While Eastman understandably struggled and suffered from culture shock, his father’s logical arguments convinced him to remain on his new path, “Our own life, I will admit, is the best in the world of our own, such as we have enjoyed for ages...But here is a race which has learned to weigh and measure everything” (Eastman 5). Jacob Eastman’s argument was neither condescending nor offensive, and instead based itself on firm logic. Resisting racist appeals, Jacob Eastman presented his son with the argument that given the advancement and encroachment of Western civilization, Natives could no longer expect to live as they had. Appealing to Eastman, he adapted this way of logical thinking and carried it throughout his narrative. Importantly, it did not degrade Native philosophies and allowed Eastman to adapt them to Western education. Likewise, Eastman avoided debasing Native cultures, and instead focused on how to adapt education to help integrate Natives respectfully into Western society.

The dedication to education that Eastman demonstrated was admirable, and it influenced his advocacy efforts as an adult. By the time Eastman had begun his college education he “absorbed knowledge through every pore. The more [he] got, the larger [his] capacity grew, and [his] appetite increased in proportion” (Eastman 31). Recognizing that education constructively introduced him to the West, Eastman’s advocacy focused on academic spheres in order to transition other Native Americans as well. However, he expressed a clear correlation between his desire to learn more, and his separation from Native cultures. As his education pushed him farther away from his past, it simultaneously blinded him to the struggles of average Native Americans, therefore limiting his ability to
empathize with their plight and advocate on their behalf. Hence, his advocacy would have benefited from a greater focus on Native trauma and the ways in which it prevented smooth transitions between communities. This would have inspired more Natives to willingly become involved in the education that Eastman valued. Highly influential to his life, Eastman’s application of his father’s argument and later expansions are well documented.

Naturally, Eastman’s Western education inspired him to explore the West further and led him to conclude that Native cultures was irrevocably lost unless it merged with the dominant West. Fundamentally, Eastman did not propagate an assimilated society even when confronted with the grandeur of the West, but he did promote a combined society that was deeply unequal. Newly arrived at Dartmouth College, Eastman wrote “This was my ambition -- that the Sioux should accept civilization before it was too late! I wished that our young men might at once take up the white man’s way, and...wield influence in their native states” (Eastman 37). This was Eastman’s solution to the diminishing presence and agency of Native Americans. He envisioned a society in which Natives “wield[ed] influence in their native states” through an adaptation to Western civilization, in which education served a pivotal introductory role. Irrefutably confronted with a shrinking Native world, Eastman argued that because Native cultural dominion failed under the powerful Western society, in an amalgamated community Natives naturally submitted. While sensible, that statement was tone-deaf. Prompted by Eastman’s reflection on the erasure of Natives, it was uninspiring to conclude Natives must unquestionably combine with their exterminators. A genuine recognition of these traumas and their lingering effects would have better served Eastman’s advocacy efforts by attempting to heal them. Despite this pressing concern, Eastman seemed unaware that he endorsed a troubling solution to the current problem of shrinking Native sovereignty. This phenomenon is explained through his focus on education, and how it left him disconnected from present and powerful traumas that he had not himself experienced since boyhood. An examination of how Eastman applied Native thinking to Western life reveals both his advocacy’s strength, and weakness.

Eastman himself represented the ideal of a combined society that he urged other Natives to emulate, but few had the opportunity to replicate him. The ease in which Eastman applied Native thinking to Western life was a major part of the integrated society he hoped to create. As a young boy he was “consciously trained to be a man... but after this [he] was trained to be a warrior and a hunter, and not to care for money or possessions, but to be in the broadest sense a public servant” (Eastman 1). Later in life when choosing a profession, Eastman wrote, “...my choice narrowed down to law and medicine, for both of which I had a strong taste; but the latter seemed to me to offer a better opportunity of service to my race” (Eastman 34). Clearly, his Native philosophy was never abandoned and carried well into his adult life. He advocated for the right of Natives to adapt to Western civilization while still acknowledging their Native philosophies. For Natives facing forceful assimilation, Eastman’s ideal combined society was a welcoming compromise. However, the problem with this advocacy method was rooted in the fact that few Natives felt as ease to imitate him. Unfortunately, because of his comfort with the West, Eastman did not recognize this complication.

In his article, “Good Indian: Charles Eastman and the Warrior as Civil Servant”, author Drew Lopenzina identifies why Eastman’s advocacy suffered from a limitation. Lopenzina firmly believes Eastman combated assimilation given he consistently applied Native Sioux philosophies to his life but admits that Eastman’s introduction to the West complicated his promotion of
Native rights. He posits that Eastman was a distinctly rare figure, as he was spared from the reservation system (Lopenzina 729). Taking that into account, Lopenzina concludes that “He was able to reap all the benefits of a traditional Sioux upbringing, without internalizing the poverty and humiliation” (Lopenzina 729). Adhering to Lopenzina’s argument, this meant that Eastman’s idea of a combined society was rooted in the dismissal of Native traumas due to his ignorance of such matters. These past abuses culminated in both the shame and erasure of culture, and consequently few Natives felt secure enough to apply Native thinking to Western life as Eastman had. Forced to join Western society, many Natives left behind their culture and philosophy in order to belong. While his education and subsequent mentality made Eastman a strong advocate for Native involvement in Western education and society, his efforts simultaneously nearly resulted in assimilation for others. Therefore, his advocacy would have been improved through a deeper connection to Native cultures and traumas to help Natives retain their philosophies as he had. While Lopenzina discovers why Eastman’s advocacy was distinctive, there is a larger scholarly discussion on his status as either an agent of assimilation or a staunch Native defender.

As a major advocacy organization that Eastman helped found, his efforts with the Society of American Indians encapsulates the key philosophies carried throughout his life and the debate about his identity as either a loyal Indian advocate or agent of assimilation. In his article, “The SAI and the End(s) of Intellectual History”, Robert Warrior argues that it was logical for the SAI members to assume that the domination of Western civilization signaled the end of Native cultural dominion. He writes that the members saw “...themselves in a liminal space between the end of one thing and the beginning of something else...” (Warrior 225) and therefore acted accordingly in order to survive. Importantly, they carved a place for Natives in higher educational settings, both by holding meetings at institutions and “orienting Native studies toward Native leadership” (Warrior 230). The SAI’s focus on education reflected Eastman’s idea to integrate (not assimilate) Natives through education as he himself was. There was neither racism nor assimilation in SAI founders’ reactions to what they understood as a changing world. Since they regarded it as such, their efforts to save Native cultures preserved it in relation to the West, rather than distinctly. Despite their successes, Warrior addresses the organization’s main problem in that “it does not span the distances that have always plagued Native studies between the academy and the people and communities at its center” (Warrior 231). Lopenzina discovered that Eastman’s personal advocacy suffered from this particular problem because of his uncommonly gentle introduction to the West that blinded him to Native traumas. As Warrior argued, the SAI -- and subsequently Eastman -- should have acted to meet the needs of suffering Native communities, therefore inspiring smoother societal transitions. Warrior is not the only scholar to analyze Eastman’s philosophies and their relation to the SAI’s exploits.

Philip J. Deloria’s article, “Four Thousand Invitations” coincides with Warrior’s argument. He too emphasizes the logicality of the SAI member’s fatalism, as the founders lived during “a moment when Indian people had effectively reached the bottom: population severely reduced; land effectively stripped; cultural and religious practices under restriction” (Deloria 37). While Deloria states that the “shadow of assimilation” (Deloria 26) cast itself upon the SAI, it also “worked actively to preserve elements of Native cultures and societies from destruction” (Deloria 26). Founded in a society where the wounds of colonialism still bled, the SAI and Eastman recognized that defiance would quicken assimilation, while compromise would conserve limited aspects of Native cultures, importantly stemming its reduction. However,
their methods of preservation often contrasted with the Natives who continued practicing their culture in defiance of Western influence. The logical arguments that Eastman and the SAI favored placed them out of touch with these contemporary Natives. Their advocacy would have influenced a wider population had they expanded their methods to preserve Native cultures outside of Western civilization as well. Despite this disconnect, the founders’ (including Eastman’s) multiple efforts to conserve Native cultures proved that they remained loyal Native advocates. This scholarly debate represented concerns that continued throughout Eastman’s involvement with the Ghost Dance and later advocacy efforts.

The Ghost Dance and ensuing massacre at Wounded Knee were two principal moments when Eastman’s advocacy would have benefited from a closer connection to Native cultures. When news of the Ghost Dance reached Eastman on the Pine Ridge Agency where he worked, he initially regarded it as a serious, but harmless, issue. The religious ceremony intended to instigate a new era of Indian sovereignty, triggered by the arrival of buffalo at the expense of Western civilization. Rather than devolve into panicked confusion, Eastman consulted “…some of the educated and Christian Indians” (Eastman 51) to garner a better understanding. His effort to avoid the hysteria mounting around the Ghost Dance reflected his good relations with the Natives he worked with, as he trusted them to explain the situation thoughtfully. His choice to consult only “educated and Christian Indians” demonstrated his value of education, but ultimately limited his understanding of those participating in the ceremony. Due to this, Eastman’s potential to be a strong advocate regarding the Ghost Dance quickly diminished with his sudden dismissal of it.

Eastman’s response to the Ghost Dance was dismissive, but not surprising. Considering that the violence at Wounded Knee originated from a confused panic about the ceremony’s potential danger, Eastman had an opportunity to help deescalate the situation by educating the West. However, he missed this opportunity. First, Eastman reduced the dance to an anomalous “religious craze” (Eastman 55) that did nothing to qualm the distress. Secondly, Eastman adopted a decidedly fatalistic viewpoint, writing, “It meant that the last hope of race entity had departed, and my people were groping blindly after spiritual belief in their bewilderment and misery” (Eastman 55). His belief that Native cultural sovereignty was lost and his allegiance to the West minimized his ability to ease the situation on the Native’s behalf. Eastman’s response to the Ghost Dance was not random, and instead mirrored attitudes he previously expressed in his autobiography. His disparagement of the Ghost Dance originated from the fact that he wanted an amalgamated community to preserve Native cultures: neither fully Native nor western was permissible. As the Ghost Dance preached the total return of Native cultures, it contrasted sharply with Eastman’s beliefs. His distrust of the ceremony’s efficiency emanated not from pure contempt, however, but rather from a logical assumption that Native cultural dominion had ended. In consequence, Eastman refused to voice his support for the Ghost Dance, and instead allied himself with the United States Government in order to salvage his ideal combined society. A traumatizing event for Eastman, the ways in which he described the hours before the violence briefly demonstrated how it altered his attitude.

Recording the events much later in life, the diction Eastman utilized to convey the rising tension before the massacre at Wounded Knee indicated a deviation from his earlier perspectives. Horrified, Eastman wrote that women and children flooded into the Pine Ridge Agency “evidently fearing that the dreaded soldiers might attack their villages by mistake” (Eastman 60). Juxtaposed to the defenseless women and children were the “dreaded soldiers” who
Despite Eastman’s condemnation, the divide between himself and Native life persisted. Surrounded by “grief” and “death song[s]” (Eastman 65) Eastman stated: “It took all my nerve to keep my composure in the face of this spectacle” (Eastman 65). Although the massacre outraged him, Eastman did not associate himself with the grieving Natives, and instead relied on his identity as a Western educated physician in order to direct himself through the turmoil. Since he depended on the West as the medium of Native survival, Eastman “passed no hasty judgement” (Eastman 66) on civilization or Christianity— he could not afford to do otherwise. In a strictly colonial society, his hopes for Native survival hinged upon an amalgamated community. If he alienated Natives further from the West after Wounded Knee, it would rob them of a safe haven. However, Eastman’s association with the West allowed him an identity to retreat into, therefore saving himself from the trauma in a way that other Natives could not replicate. These traumas made implementing a combined society problematic, as Natives felt compelled to either resist the West or abandon their culture. If Eastman recognized these traumas, he could have combated them while still advocating the same ideals. Compared to the actions of one of Eastman’s contemporaries, his advocacy during the Ghost Dance clearly could have been improved.

Witnessing the decimation of Wounded Knee for himself, Eastman condemned Western civilization on levels unprecedented for his autobiography. Eastman volunteered to make the dangerous journey to the site of the massacre, hopeful of finding survivors. While he aided those on the scene as best he could, Eastman was struck by the numerous prone bodies at and around Wounded Knee. According to his account, multiple dead women were “found...scattered along as they had been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives” (Eastman 65). Eastman’s gratitude and fascination with the West did not blind him from the truth, and he regarded Wounded Knee as a horrifying, unjust, massacre. Recognizing that most of the slaughtered Natives were helpless without their guns which the government had previously confiscated, Eastman was justifiably angry as his trust in Western civilization was violated. Even in this intense moment of misery, Eastman remained separated from his Native counterparts who also embarked on the rescue mission with him.

Eastman’s white wife, Elaine Goodale, displayed a greater respect for the Ghost Dance ceremony than her husband. The two mince no words in establishing the innocence and the heartbreaking panic of the Native Americans, but Goodale made greater strides than Eastman to understand the ceremony. Curious, she visited the dancers and documented the events in her memoirs, Sister to the Sioux, while Eastman did not. Impressed by Ghost Dance, Goodale argued “No one with imagination could fail to
Unlike Goodale, Eastman directly expressed a willingness to forgo the trauma of the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee because he believed clutching onto the past was not a viable method for Native survival in the vastly colonized world. Consequently, he neither defended the Ghost Dance, nor did Wounded Knee diverge him from his later advocacy methods, but his perspective on the West did change.

Eastman gradually became more pessimistic about Western civilization, and the event that triggered his withdrawal from the Pine Ridge Agency demonstrated his altered attitude. The annual payment of treaty money of 1891 coincided with the government’s reparation payments for Wounded Knee, which totaled one hundred thousand dollars. Eastman agreed to witness the payments, but later uncovered a devastating truth: roughly ten thousand dollars had been stolen from vulnerable Indians. He loudly complained and campaigned on behalf of the Native victims and wrote “...in my inexperience I believed that it had only to be exposed to be corrected” (Eastman 75). In reality, Eastman’s advocacy efforts amounted to nothing, and he was harshly punished with intolerable working conditions. Finally, he left the Pine Ridge Agency “...being utterly disillusioned and disgusted with these revelations of Government mismanagement in the field, and realizing the helplessness of the best-equipped Indians to secure a fair deal for their people” (Eastman 77). His spurned faith that the reparations would heal the scarring inflicted by Wounded Knee led Eastman to further develop a severe distrust of the West, but not a deviation of his goals. The swift punishment for his direct advocacy against the United States government dissuaded him from further attempts. Also, his new pessimistic views reinvigorated his belief that Native survival hinged upon a submissive combination with Western society, as the latter was too powerful and dishonest to resist. This encouraged him to re-focus his advocacy on education, and subsequently lengthened the divide between Eastman and average Natives, even when he tried to connect with them.
After leaving the Pine Ridge Agency, Eastman experienced a heightened connection between Native cultural values and Christianity. Through his travels, Eastman spoke to members of the Sioux, Cheyenne, Cree, and Ojibwe tribes about Christ, which inspired him to contemplate his relationship with Christianity. This reconnection with his Native origins led him to believe that Western civilization employed Christianity as a tool for colonization and was used as a “machine-made religion” (Eastman 80). He conjectured that those who professed Christianity in order to declare superiority had no real spiritual relationship with the religion. According to his beliefs and experiences, Native cultures should be willingly molded to Christianity, not eradicated by it. In response, he campaigned “...to make the Indian feel that Christianity is not at fault for the white man’s sins” (Eastman 84). While Eastman’s travels made essential steps to bridge the divide between himself and average Indians, his immediate impulse to defend Christianity despite the evils perpetrated in its name again relates to Eastman’s lack of experience in degrading situations. While he felt at ease to adhere to Christianity without entirely ignoring his Native culture, others had their Native ties severed in favor of the Western religion and still were at the time of his travels. His arguments concerning Christianity surely appealed to some, but with his new revelations, Eastman could have directed efforts to assuage the harms done by false prophets in order to create a healthy combined society.

Born from Eastman’s Christian reinvolve with Natives was his second effort to aid Native Americans by making a genuine appeal to combat corruptions plaguing Native lives and lands. While Wounded Knee convinced Eastman of the futility of attempting to maintain Native cultural sovereignty, the reparations scandal that followed in its wake induced him to distrust lower government officials. However, that scandal did not uproot Eastman’s trust in the leading members of the United States government. His contrasting levels of trust were exposed and amended when senior Sioux members and his brother, Rev. John Eastman, appealed to him for assistance. Understanding Eastman to be an ardent Native supporter through his efforts at Pine Ridge and beyond, they asked him to represent their claim as a lobbyist in Washington for the lost reparations from the 1851 treaty. When Eastman agreed, he was appalled to learn that “scarcely one of our treaties with the United States had been carried out in good faith in all of its provisions” (Eastman 86). Despite this bleak reality, Eastman idealistically “was confident that a fair hearing would be granted, and our wrongs corrected without undue delay” (Eastman 88). His statement almost exactly mimics his thoughts during the reparations scandal, which infamously ended his career at Pine Ridge. Although Eastman eventually understood the fault in his assumption, his ability to form such an opinion demonstrates how separated he truly was from average Native Americans, and their struggles. He himself experienced the trauma of Wounded Knee and learned the disappointing truth of the Native treaties, but he did so under the shelter of his Western identity which allowed him to retain his trust of the West. Eastman’s short career as a lobbyist certainly exposed his disconnect, but likewise demonstrated his sincere dedication to helping Natives.

During his stay in Washington, Eastman ardently assisted not only the Sioux, but additional groups of Natives who sought his expertise. Although he could not stray far from his original purpose, Eastman gave advice and often witnessed their arguments before the Indian Commissioner or committees of Congress. Considering how urgent the cause of Eastman’s trip to Washington was, the time that he devoted to additional Indian delegations demonstrated the scope of his concern for Native welfare. Unfortunately, both Eastman’s main goal to restore the proper restorations and his side efforts amounted to nothing, and firmly disillusioned him. Frustrated,
Eastman wrote “political and personal feuds in Congress persistently delayed measures which I had looked upon as only common justice,” (Eastman 89). Besides these feuds, he was confronted by corrupt officials who requested portions of the reparations in return for their voice, unaccommodating courts who did not supply adequate translators for Natives, and personally offensive politicians who were overly fascinated by Eastman’s intelligence at the expense of his argument. In consequences of these issues, he distrusted all sectors of government, high and low, and abandoned the hope that advocating for Native causes would result in their amendment. The way in which this event altered his advocacy permanently limited its scope. Rather than waste his time in what Eastman regarded as a lost cause, Eastman’s advocacy switched solely to promoting integration to solve the gradual disappearance of Native cultures, rather than combating the roots of those injustices. Admittedly, as a single man there was little Eastman could do to combat the corruption of the United States government, but as his career advanced, he gained more allies. Especially once he helped found the SAI, crusades against governmental corruption and attempts to help amend Native injustices could have been more effective. Nevertheless, the disappointment Eastman felt because of the Pine Ridge reparations scandal and the corruption in Washington explains his complicated later efforts to conserve Native cultures.

After his failed lobbyist career, Eastman became involved with white museums in a problematic effort to share Native artifacts with Western civilization twenty years after Wounded Knee. His assignment was “…to search out and purchase rare curios and ethnological specimens for one of the most important collections in the country” (Eastman 94). Eastman felt obvious pride at his task, as otherwise “a white man would probably not have been allowed to see [the artifacts] at all” (Eastman 94). Natives were not the target audience for the museum attractions, but Eastman perceived the commission as a vital tool to integrate Native cultures into the Western world. It would combine the two societies and preserve the diminishing Native cultures in an ethnological setting. Especially after the destruction Wounded Knee, Eastman was convinced that these items needed to be specially preserved so as to not be destroyed. Although Eastman mourned the gradual disappearance of Native cultures, he did not recognize how the transfer of the artifacts contributed to that disappearance. The removal process was not disagreeable for Eastman who had lived in Western civilization for decades, but the culturally significant artifacts disappeared for Natives who had no access to Western museums. Until recently, the specifics of Eastman’s commission were unknown.

Curious about Eastman’s benefactor and the exact artifacts he received, David Martinez researched and discovered the answers to his questions. In his article, “Out of the Woods and into the Museum: Charles A. Eastman’s 1910 Collecting Expedition across Ojibwe Country”, Martinez determined that George Gustav Heye sponsored Eastman’s expedition. Despite Heye’s interest in Native artifacts, he expressed little respect for the culture, and locked the items away for decades. Eastman’s willing decision to partner with such a man potentially harmed his reputation through association. Martinez combats this idea, and instead argues that the affair was respectful, considering “…the Ojibwes who handed over their utilitarian and sacred artifacts to Eastman did so under their own volition” (Martinez 80). Although Martinez admits a personal discomfort with Eastman’s expedition, he argues that Eastman believed it to be a logical step in closely acquainting Western society with Native cultures. Therefore, he believes Eastman should not be condemned for his actions. The sentiments Martinez voices echoes similar discussions on Eastman’s advocacy.
Robert Warrior argues the same point as Martinez regarding the SAI and the uneasy reactions triggered by its seemingly assimilationist policies. Both authors reason that a modern lens distorts Eastman’s efforts, and that the challenging circumstances of a colonialist world limited his advocacy options. While Eastman’s endeavors helped integrate Native cultures into academic spheres, the unease both authors quote distinguishes where his advocacy could have been improved. Whether taking Native artifacts or espousing an “overdetermined commitment to American belonging” (Warrior 226), Eastman often failed to relate to the Natives he tried to help and instead favored increased Native involvement within academic spheres. If he had a stronger connection, Eastman could have understood these faults and directed efforts to assuage Native trauma and encouraged more to accept a combined community. In particular, Eastman himself inflicted trauma by surrendering Native items to a prejudiced benefactor, therefore disconnecting Natives from their cultural artifacts in favor of entertaining white society. Had Eastman been better connected to Natives, he would have understood the consequences of his specific museum commission by avoiding an association with Heyes who secreted the artifacts, benefiting no one. Similar to his misguided involvement with museums was another instance in which Eastman allied with the government for the intended benefit of Natives.

Eastman’s advocacy again needed improvement when he agreed to change the names of Native Sioux in an effort to simplify their transition into the Western world. According to Eastman, “Indians had no family names” (Eastman 103) which led to harmful confusion. Therefore, the government gave him the task to “...select from the personal names of a family, one which should be reasonably short, euphonious, and easily pronounced by the white man” (Eastman 103). While the government geared this effort towards assimilation, Eastman resisted that goal through a respectful compromise: the new names were carefully selected for the benefit of Natives and whites alike. For Eastman, the subjugation of Native cultures was unavoidable, and therefore name-changing was a natural progression towards a combined society. However, the result of his effort is questionable.

David J. Carlson directly contradicts Eastman’s stance on Native name-changing in his article “‘Indian for a while’: Charles Eastman’s ‘Indian Boyhood’ and the discourse of allotment”. Carlson regards it as a futile effort that “...highlight[ed] the degree to which his experience had taken him away from the traditions of his youth” (Carlson 610-11). Eastman himself adopted an English name, but freely chose to do so without outside pressure. The fact that he did not recognize this difference encapsulates Carlson’s argument that Eastman was too far removed from Native cultures to identify how forceful name-changing was traumatic. Unintentionally unaddressed, the traumas resulted in shame and erasure of Native cultures, consequently corrupting Eastman’s ideal combined society. An awareness of these traumas through a greater connection to his culture could have avoided this complication, and more could have been done to educate the Western world on Native names instead.

Contrasted to both Eastman’s museum involvement and Carlson’s argument is Lopenzina’s article. After Wounded Knee, Lopenzina posits that “suddenly Eastman’s narrative blind eye seems to have opened” (Lopenzina 743). This is semi-true: Eastman certainly became more pessimistic about Western civilization and the future of Native cultures, but his advocacy efforts and its weak points remained the same. Regarding the museum commission, Eastman respectfully acquired Native artifacts, only to mysteriously relinquish them to a racist benefactor. Until Martinez’s research, the artifacts remained missing -- certainly, this did not aid Native Americans.
Lopenzina’s article also differs with Carlson’s argument, as Carlson emphasizes a harmful persistent disconnect between Eastman and Native cultures, even after the shock of Wounded Knee. Due to this disconnect, Eastman later allied with governmental efforts that stripped Natives of their identity. Nevertheless, Lopenzina’s assertion that Wounded Knee “became the seminal event ushering him into continued advocacy for American Indians” (Lopenzina 730) is clearly true, as Eastman’s efforts never ceased, despite their few deficiencies.

A loyal advocate for Native rights, Eastman combated assimilation through his efforts to create an amalgamated community in which Natives would apply their cultural philosophies to Western life. However, the colonialist society that he lived in and his comfort with Western civilization convinced Eastman to focus his advocacy solely on education and integration, rather than alleviating Native traumas. These traumas complicated cultural transitions, and alienated Eastman from many Natives. Despite this, his efforts importantly increased Native presence in higher-educational settings that exist in modern society and leave a clear positive legacy.

**Bibliography**


**About the Author**

Jessica Vilk is a senior at Bridgewater State University majoring in English, set to graduate in July 2021. Dr. John Kucich (English) helped oversee the completion of this manuscript. She enjoys studying British literature, particularly Shakespeare and John Milton, because reading such literature offers a glimpse of past values and culture through a deeply entertaining and enlightening lens. In the future, she hopes to be accepted into graduate school and a later Ph.D. program concentrating on British literature.