**RICHARD PRATT -- "KILL THE INDIAN, SAVE THE MAN"**

*Carlisle’s founder, Capt. Richard C. Pratt, espoused an approach to educating Native Americans that aimed to “kill the Indian, and save the man.” The following excerpt from a paper read by Pratt at the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction, at Denver, Colorado, in 1892, spotlights Pratt’s pragmatic and frequently brutal methods for “civilizing” the “savages.”*

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man....

The Indians under our care remained savage, because forced back upon themselves and away from association with English-speaking and civilized people [as a result of segregation on isolated reservations], and because of our savage example and treatment of them. . . . We have never made any attempt to civilize them with the idea of taking them into the nation, and all of our policies have been against citizenizing and absorbing them. Although some of the policies now prominent are advertised to carry them into citizenship and consequent association and competition with other masses of the nation, they are not, in reality, calculated to do this....

We make our greatest mistake in feeding our civilization to the Indians instead of feeding the Indians to our civilization. America has different customs and civilizations from Germany. What would be the result of an attempt to plant American customs and civilization among the Germans in Germany, demanding that they shall become thoroughly American before we admit them to the

country? Now, what we have all along attempted to do for and with the Indians is just exactly that, and nothing else. We invite the Germans to come into our country and communities, and share our customs, our civilization, to be of it; and the result is immediate success. Why not try it on the Indians? Why not invite them into experiences in our communities? Why always invite and compel them to remain a people unto themselves?

It is a great mistake to think that the Indian is born an inevitable savage. He is born a blank, like all the rest of us. Left in the surroundings of savagery, he grows to possess a savage language, superstition, and life. We, left in the surroundings of civilization, grow to possess a civilized language, life, and purpose. Transfer the infant white to the savage surroundings, he will grow to possess a savage language, superstition, and habit. Transfer the savage-born infant to the surroundings of civilization, and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit. These results have been established over and over again beyond all question; and it is also well established that those advanced in life, even to maturity, of either class, lose already acquired qualities belonging to the side of their birth, and gradually take on those of the side to which they have been transferred.

As we have taken into our national family seven millions of Negroes, and as we receive foreigners at the rate of more than five hundred thousand a year, and assimilate them, it would seem that the time may have arrived when we can very properly make at least the attempt to assimilate our two hundred and fifty thousand Indians, using this proven potent line, and see if that will not end this vexed question and remove them from public attention, where they occupy so much more space than they are entitled to either by numbers or worth.

The school at Carlisle is an attempt on the part of the government to do this. Carlisle has always planted treason to the tribe and loyalty to the nation at large. It has preached against colonizing Indians, and in favor of individualizing them. It has demanded for them the same multiplicity of chances which all others in the country enjoy. Carlisle fills young Indians with the spirit of loyalty to the stars and stripes, and then moves them out into our communities to show by their conduct and ability that the Indian is no different from the white or the colored, that he has the inalienable right to liberty and opportunity that the white and the negro have. Carlisle does not dictate to him what line of life he should fill, so it is an honest one. It says to him that, if he gets his living by the sweat of his brow, and demonstrates to the nation that he is a man, he does more good for his race than hundreds of his fellows who cling to their tribal communistic surroundings. . . .

No evidence is wanting to show that, in our industries, the Indian can become a capable and willing factor if he has the chance. What we need is an Administration which will give him the chance. The Land in Severalty Bill can be made far more useful than it is, but it can be made so only by assigning the land so as to intersperse good, civilized people among them. If, in the distribution, it is so arranged that two or three white families come between two Indian families, then there would necessarily grow up a community of fellowship along all the lines of our American civilization that would help the Indian at once to his feet. Indian schools must, of necessity, be for a time, because the Indian cannot speak the language, and he knows nothing of the habits and forces he has to contend with; but the highest purpose of all Indian schools ought to be only to prepare the young Indian to enter the public and other schools of the country. And immediately he is so prepared, for his own good and the good of the country, he should be forwarded into these other schools, there to temper, test, and stimulate his brain and muscle into the capacity he needs for his struggle for life, in competition with us. The missionary can, if he will, do far greater service in helping the Indians than he has done; but it will only be by practicing the doctrine he preaches. As his work is to lift into higher life the people whom he serves, he must not, under any pretence whatsoever, give the lie to what he preaches by discountenancing the right of any individual Indian to go into higher and better surroundings, but, on the contrary,

he should help the Indian to do that. If he fails in thus helping and encouraging the Indian, he is false to his own teaching. An examination shows that no Indians within the limits of the United States have acquired any sort of capacity to meet and cope with the whites in civilized pursuits who did not gain that ability by going among the whites and out from the reservations, and that many have gained this ability by so going out.

Theorizing citizenship into people is a slow operation. What a farce it would be to attempt teaching American citizenship to the negroes in Africa. They could not understand it; and, if they did, in the midst of such contrary influences, they could never use it. Neither can the Indians understand or use American citizenship theoretically taught to them on Indian reservations. They must get into the swim of American citizenship. They must feel the touch of it day after day, until they become saturated with the spirit of it, and thus become equal to it.

When we cease to teach the Indian that he is less than a man; when we recognize fully that he is capable in all respects as we are, and that he only needs the opportunities and privileges which we possess to enable him to assert his humanity and manhood; when we act consistently towards him in accordance with that recognition; when we cease to fetter him to conditions which keep him in bondage, surrounded by retrogressive influences; when we allow him the freedom of association and the developing influences of social contact – then the Indian will quickly demonstrate that he can be truly civilized, and he himself will solve the question of what to do with the Indian.

***Official Report of the Ninteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), 46-59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880-190*0 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260-271.**