

A Dissonant Education: Marching Bands and Indigenous Musical Traditions at Sherman Institute, 1901–1940

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At the end of the nineteenth century, the US government established a system of off-reservation boarding schools in an effort to assimilate Indigenous youth into the American nation-state. Music emerged as one of the most enduring strategies that these schools employed to reshape the cultural sensibilities of young Native Americans. A lively music culture could be found, for instance, at Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, which was home to a marching band and dozens of other music groups throughout its history. Although school officials created these institutions for the purposes of assimilation and cultural genocide, this music program often had a more ambiguous place in the lives of students. To understand the role of music within Sherman Institute during the early twentieth century, this article examines the school's marching band and the place of Indigenous cultural expression. While the school had students march to the beat of civilization, young Native Americans found various strategies to combat assimilation using the same instruments. At the same time, they also used the cultures of their communities to navigate life in an environment that the government created to destroy those very cultures.

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