



# **They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School (North American Indian Prose Award)**

*K. Tsianina Lomawaima*

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Established in 1884 and operative for nearly a century, the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma was one of a series of off-reservation boarding schools intended to assimilate American Indian children into mainstream American life. Critics have characterized the schools as destroyers of Indian communities and cultures, but the reality that K. Tsianina Lomawaima discloses was much more complex.

Lomawaima allows the Chilocco students to speak for themselves. In recollections juxtaposed against the official records of racist ideology and repressive practice, students from the 1920s and 1930s recall their loneliness and demoralization but also remember with pride the love and mutual support binding them together—the forging of new pan-Indian identities and reinforcement of old tribal ones.

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