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The Restoration of Jim Thorpe's Sole Championships and the Healing of Indigenous Soul Wounds

How Sac and Fox Native American, Jim Thorpe lost his Olympic gold medals and records from the 1912 Olympics is discussed in detail showing the part racism played. Despite this crushing blow to his life, Jim did not turn bitter, but went on to become a successful professional athlete in football and baseball, playing both each year for 16 years, and becoming the co-founder and first president of what is today the National Football League.

Following his unprecedented athletic career, he headed for a new life in Hollywood during the Great Depression, where he attacked inequities in the motion picture industry with his familiar determination, earning the sobriquet, "Akapamata," meaning "Caregiver."

In 1982, the Jim Thorpe Foundation, after discovering the official rules for the Stockholm Olympics which showed that Jim's gold medals were illegally taken away were, with the help of U.S. Olympic Committee President, William Simon, able to convince the International Olympic Committee to reenter Jim's records and give his family duplicate medals. However, today, Jim is still listed as a co-champion, not the sole champion.

The attention now in the U.S. is on overcoming the dysfunctional effects the boarding school system has caused. Interior Secretary Deb Halaand has launched a federal study of the boarding schools to address the historical trauma or soul wounds in an attempt to overcome the dysfunctionality they have caused. Fully correcting the egregious injustice done to Jim Thorpe would be a step toward healing one of the soul wounds perpetrated against Native Americans.

Jim Thorpe was born May 22, 1887, in “Indian Territory,” near Bellemont, Oklahoma in a one-room cabin made of cottonwood and hickory in the Sac and Fox village on the banks of the North Canadian River. His mother, Charlotte Vieux, was of Potawatomi/Kickapoo/Menominee/French descent while his father, Hiram P. Thorpe, was Sac and Fox/Irish. Jim became, arguably, the greatest athlete in the world. He attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he captained the football, track and field, and basketball teams. In total, he was a world-class athlete in 22 sports and even won a national dance championship in his last year at Carlisle.

In the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, he became the first American Indian to win a gold medal for the United States, decisively sweeping both the 5-event pentathlon and 10-event decathlon. Regrettably, this unprecedented triumph happened 12 years before Native Americans were given their citizenship by the U.S. government and a full half century before they received their voting rights in every state. (Hedgpeth, 2020 and Little, 2020).

Jim won the pentathlon by tripling the score of his nearest competitor and surpassed the second-place winner in the decathlon by 688 points. Over the course of these grueling Olympic competitions, he also competed in the high jump and long jump and even participated in a demonstration game of baseball. His track shoes were stolen before the final event of the decathlon, the 1,500-meter race, and the best he could find were two mismatched shoes, one from a teammate that was too small, the other too large, requiring an extra pair of socks, from a trash bin. He just made the start line in time and finished first with his fastest time ever. A photograph taken after the race, shows him in his two different, poorly fitting shoes. Over six months after he received his gold medals from Sweden’s King Gustav V who proclaimed “Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world,” the International Olympic Committee (IOC) took away his medals and expunged his name from the record books, at the request of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), when it was reported in a newspaper that he had played summer baseball in the minor leagues. In those days, only amateur athletes were allowed to compete in the Olympics, and, on the surface, the IOC decision might seem to have been justified.

However, when one looks below that surface at what actually occurred, it was rife with unfair treatment, bigotry, and even illegality by the rules of the day. This case study is about events from over 100 years ago, but Jim Thorpe’s experience can still teach us something about racism today since many of the underlying social factors have not been corrected.

As Jim Thorpe’s ancestor, the mighty Sauk (present-day Sac and Fox) warrior, Chief Black Hawk, wrote in the dedication of his autobiography to Brigadier General H.

Atkinson, who delivered the final blow to Black Hawk's followers at the Battle of Bad Axe River, August 1832: "The path to glory is rough, and many gloomy hours obscure it. May the Great Spirit shed light on yours and that you may never experience the humility that the power of the American government has reduced me to, is the wish of him, who, in his native forests, was once as proud and bold as yourself (Black Hawk, 1833)."

WHAT HAPPENED TO JIM THORPE AFTER THE 1912 OLYMPICS?

If one takes a closer and well-documented look at exactly what took place in Jim's life in 1912 and January of 1913, when his amateur eligibility came into question, the role that the underlying disparities in society played will be seen.

First and foremost, Jim was a student at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, part of the off-reservation boarding school initiative created by the Federal Government.ⁱ On March 3, 1819, the United States Congress passed the Civilization Fund Act which was "An Act making provision for the civilization of the Indian tribes adjoining the frontier settlements (U. S. Statues at Large, 1819)."

Their purpose was to ensure the "Indians," no matter the tribe, became indoctrinated into "white" civilization. As David Wallace Adams concluded after his extensive research on the Native American boarding schools, "In the case of the Indians, the challenge facing educators was nothing less than monumental: eradicating all traces of Indigenous identity and culture, while simultaneously replacing them with the commonplace knowledge and values of white civilization (D. W. Adams, 2020, p. 365)."

"When Jim entered Carlisle, June 1, 1904, he was 17 years old, stood 5 feet 5½ inches tall and weighed 115 pounds (Wheeler, 1979, p. 34)." He was too small to play on the varsity teams so after only two weeks at Carlisle, he began a three-year assignment in the "Outing System" with households where he performed a variety of duties ranging from cooking, housekeeping, and field work. Jim was not allowed to take his meals in the dining rooms of the white families and had to eat in their kitchens.

Some of the negative effects of the boarding schools, such as poor food, hard work, severe punishment, and demeaning work in the "Outing System," which Jim endured during his earlier years at school were no longer suffered by Jim once he was a member of Coach Glenn "Pop" Warner's football and track teams in 1907-08 and 1908-09, and later in 1911 and 1912.

“Pop” took good care of his players with monetary allowances, clothing, food, and time to practice and following the 1909 track season, he sent Jim, his football teammate, Joe Libby (captain and quarterback of the team in 1909), and Jesse Youngdeer (lacrosse and baseball player) to play baseball in North Carolina, as part of an attempt to keep them in shape and to ensure they would return to Carlisle in the fall instead of returning to their homes (97th Congress 2nd Session, 1982).ⁱⁱ This was to play a pivotal role for the rest of Jim’s life.

Many of the severe cultural effects of the boarding schools which are still playing a role in American Indian and Canadian societies today will be examined in the discussion section where they can be given more than a cursory mention.

After his spectacular wins in the Olympic pentathlon and decathlon in July of 1912, gold medals and trophies presentations, and being told, “Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world” by King Gustav V of Sweden, a ticker-tape parade in New York City, celebrations, ceremonies, and following a second All-American season when he led the nation in scoring which included a game where he and his Carlisle teammates crushed the mighty West Point team (featuring five future generals, including Dwight D. Eisenhower) in football, making Carlisle arguably the top “college” team in the country for the second year in a row (Unassigned, 1912); the news of Jim Thorpe having played two summers of baseball in a minor league in 1909 and 1910 broke in the *Worcester [Massachusetts] Telegram* on January 22, 1913. Initially without a byline, the reporter’s name was later revealed to be Roy R. Johnson. In the front-page story entitled “Thorpe with Professional Baseball Team Says Clancy,” Johnson explained how Charles Clancy said he managed Thorpe in North Carolina in the minor leagues.

However, Clancy, did not stop there. He went on to make stereotypical, racist attacks on Thorpe. He questioned Thorpe’s racial purity, said he had a yellow streak, and was seen hollering “war whoops” and “swigging whiskey from a gallon jug.” “An apparently remorseful Charles Clancy denied having told any such tales, but it was too late (Sheinkin, 2017, p. 114).” By the next day, these stories were all over the press and the damage to Jim’s reputation was irrevocable.

HOW THE SITUATION WAS MANAGED BY GLENN WARNER, MOSES FRIEDMAN, AND JAMES SULLIVAN

Jim, having lost both his father and mother by the age of 17, and being distanced from his family and culture by the boarding school system, had no relatives

or elders to turn to for advice on how to handle this situation. He was totally dependent on his coach, Pop Warner, and the Superintendent of Carlisle, Moses Friedman.

Gus Welch, Thorpe's friend, teammate on the 1912 football team, and the student body president was so infuriated by Warner and Friedman not telling the truth or standing by Thorpe, he started a petition among the students to call for an investigation into Carlisle. He was able to secure 214 signatures which he took to the home of A. H. Rupley, a congressman who lived in Carlisle (Crawford, 2005, p. 215).

E.B. Linnen, the Chief Investigator of the Indian Service, arrived in late January to start a preliminary inquest and found so much wrong that he called for a full investigation (United States Congress. Joint Commission To Investigate Indian Affairs, 1914). The scrutiny unearthed "a cesspool of deceit, cruelty, and deprivation (Buford, 2010, p. 187)." All the horrors of reports from other boarding schools, including beatings, food deprivation, and students sent on the "Outing System, ostensibly to learn a trade but for hire, were all found at Carlisle. The most criticism seemed to be leveled at Warner and Friedman who made money by all sorts of machinations including the selling of the complimentary tickets for each game by Warner and Friedman submitting false claims for train tickets for the students to the government and pocketing the money. In his testimony, Welch had the quotation that was perhaps the most damning: "Mr. Warner is a good football coach, but a man with no principle (Crawford, 2005, p. 220)."

Carlisle never recovered from this investigation and was permanently closed in 1918. Friedman was dismissed but went on to a new job and Warner was hired as a coach by the University of Pittsburgh.

Clearly, Jim chose the wrong people to go to for advice and his trust was misplaced. He was not even allowed to write his own defense letter (Thorpe, 2013, pp. 36-37). This is not a matter of conjecture. Gus Welch, testified before a congressional investigator that Warner entered Jim's room, when Gus was there, with a letter that he and Friedman had constructed and told Jim to copy and sign it (Adams, 2012a., p. 24 & Crawford, 2005, p. 220). Fred Bruce, a steamfitter at Carlisle, wrote a letter on November 18, 1913, to the congressional hearing explaining how: "... Mr. Warner came in the room and asked I and Mr. Welch to leave the room a minute, and after Mr. Warner left I went back into the room with Welch and seen James Thorpe copying a letter it was this letter to Mr. Sullivan and a day or so later that James Thorpe's letter of his confession came out in the newspapers all over the county (Bruce, 1913)."

Warner and Friedman knew about Jim's playing minor league baseball in 1909 and 1910. Proof of Pop Warner's knowledge came from several sources. As explained in endnote #2 earlier, Joe Libby's telephone interview confirmed this. One of Jim's sons, former Sac & Fox Chief, Jack Thorpe, also testified about this conversation in more detail before a congressional hearing in relation to a congressional resolution to encourage the IOC to fully exonerate Jim Thorpe (97th Congress 2nd Session, 1982). In part of his testimony Jack stated:

I had the chance to talk with a schoolmate of Jim Thorpe. The man's name was Joe Libby...He was with Jim at Rocky Mount, North Carolina, playing baseball during the summer.

... Joe told me the story. He stated that: "...he and Jim were playing with a farmworkers team in Pennsylvania. The manager of the Rocky Mount team was a personal friend of Glenn 'Pop' Warner."

The manager had heard of Jim and Joe's pitching ability, and he had asked the superintendent of Carlisle [Moses Friedman] for permission for these two and one other student to come and pitch for the Rocky Mount team (97th Congress 2nd Session, 1982, p. 5).

The Libby testimony also goes toward proving that Superintendent Friedman, who also denied any knowledge of Jim Thorpe playing baseball in a minor league, actually knew what was happening. Further evidence for this can be found in a letter Friedman wrote on October 17, 1909 to Indian Agent W. C. Kohlenberg that Jim was granted "leave to play ball in the south during the summer months (Buford, 2010, p. 81)."

James Sullivan, Chairman of the National Registration Committee, Secretary and founder of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), and Secretary of the American Olympic Committee (AOC) at the time of the challenge to Jim's amateur status, was the powerhouse behind these organizations. It was his strong hand that demanded that Thorpe be disqualified.

We are not able to prove that Sullivan knew about Jim Thorpe playing minor league baseball. There are several indications that he should have known. He and Warner were friends, he managed the publication of the *Spalding Base Ball Guide* and Jim Thorpe was listed in it and played under his own name unlike many collegiate players,ⁱⁱⁱ and finally it came out in the Congressional Hearings of 1913 that Sullivan

was on the Advisory Board of Warner's business enterprise, the Carlisle Athletic Association, which puts him in a place where he surely knew all about Jim Thorpe.^{iv}

"Warner was informed that the Middle Atlantic Division of the American Athletic Union (AAU) would hold a hearing in Carlisle regarding Jim's status (Buford, 2010)." Instead, Warner let Sullivan know he would rather meet privately in New York without Jim. A note from Sullivan to the President of the IOC confirms that it was only Warner who met with him in his office on January 27, 1913, and delivered Jim's coerced letter (Sullivan, et al. 2013, pp. 35-36) and one from Moses Friedman (Friedman, M., 2013, p. 37).

The Friedman letter, which by January 26th claimed to have done a "thorough investigation" of Jim's professionalism, also distanced himself and Warner by writing: "... I hasten to assure your committee that the faculty of the school and the Athletic Director, Mr. Glenn Warner, were without any knowledge of this fact until today (Friedman, 2013, p. 37)."

The meeting of Sullivan and Warner concluded with Sullivan writing his own letter to the IOC on behalf of the AAU. In it, he testified to the excellent character of Warner: "Mr. Glenn Warner, formerly of Cornell, a man whose reputation is of the highest and whose accuracy of statement has never been doubted has been in charge of the athletic activities of the institution (Sullivan et. al., 2013, pp. 38)."

The essence of his letter was a fait accompli that Thorpe would be stripped of his medals and records and declared: "The Amateur Athletic Union regrets that it permitted Mr. Thorpe to compete in amateur contests during the past several years, and will do everything in its power to secure the return of prizes and the re-adjustment of points won by him, and will immediately eliminate his records from the book (Sullivan, et. al, 2013, p. 39)."

The more recent authors of articles about and biographies of Jim Thorpe agree there is little question that Warner, Friedman, and Sullivan manipulated him and caused his downfall, to quickly rid themselves and their organizations of the embarrassment and to protect their own careers (J.R. Adams, 2012a; Buford, 2010; Cook, 2011; Crawford, 2005; and Sheinkin, 2017). Although this was a supposition in earlier works, it has been made clearer in recent years. The Cumberland County Historical Society, the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center at Dickinson College and the Internet have made massive amounts of material available which was not accessible to earlier authors. It is now without doubt that the AAU handling was a sham and that Thorpe, as a Native American, would be sacrificed so the careers of the

white men would not be tarnished or derailed. Jim Thorpe was not allowed to write his own letter of explanation, not allowed to testify on his own behalf to defend himself before the AAU, and not provided a lawyer.

There is yet a stronger part of this argument against those who sacrificed Thorpe for their own careers. Thorpe's medals and records were "illegally" taken away, according to the rules under which he participated. In the *Olympic Games of Stockholm 1912: Programme and General Regulations*, Rule 13 states:

13. Objections to the qualification of a competitor must be made in writing, and be forwarded without delay to the Swedish Olympic Committee.

No such objection shall be entertained unless accompanied by a deposit of 20 Swedish Kronor and received by the Swedish Olympic Committee before the lapse of 30 days from the distribution the prizes (Swedish Olympic Committee, 2012, p. 5).

It was over six months since Jim had won his awards, well past the 30-day limit. It is clear that no one except the AAU or the AOC, both controlled by Sullivan, would argue to have Jim's awards taken away. "Reports from Stockholm quoted leading authorities in the field of sports expressing the opinion that 'Thorpe is entitled to retain the prizes he won in the pentathlon and decathlon, as the question of his status has been raised too late (Crawford, p. 209).'"

On January 31, 1913, the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* reported, 'There is no power in the world that can, according to the Olympic rules, deprive Thorpe of the prizes he won, and if they are really sent back to Sweden now ... Thorpe will have given up the prizes of his own free will... (Crawford, p. 209).'" The sad truth was that without a lawyer or some honest person to advise him, Jim lost his titles and medals because he had no one to tell him he did not have to give them up. According to Jim's daughter, Grace, Warner entered Jim and Gus Welch's room when they were not there and took his medals and trophies, packed them up and shipped them to the Swedish Olympic Committee (G. Thorpe, personal communication, 1974). Thorpe trusted the white man and his system of justice, and both failed him. "The whole operation was vintage Sullivan – injustice swift and sure intended to protect the athletic bureaucracy at the expense of the outstanding athlete. In Sullivan's steel grip, the AOC operated without constitution or procedural rules. There was no investigation. No trial (Crawford, 2005, p. 207)."

The press of the United States and around the world were resolutely in Jim's corner and just as vigorously opposed to the machinations of the AAU. *The Buffalo Enquirer* put it as strongly as any of the publications in the U.S.:

Jim Thorpe, amateur or no amateur, is the greatest athlete today in the world. They can take away his tin medals and his pieces of pottery and they can hold him up to the scorn of a few "pure athletes," but the honest world, the thinking world, the great majority of men and women will always consider him the athlete par excellence of the past fifty years in this country (Wheeler, 1979, p. 149).

As Wheeler pointed out, the reactions from other countries were just as sympathetic.

"Excommunication is too severe a punishment for Thorpe," declared the *London Pall Mall Gazette*. "Great Britain thinks none the worse of the Indian for his baseball crime," concurred the *London Daily News*. Scandinavian publications went their British counterparts one better, however, by telling Jim to retain whatever he so desired.

An editorial in the *Toronto Mail and Empire* was most eloquent, "Canadians Stand Firm with Our Jim Thorpe. Canada Has Declared for Jim Thorpe (Wheeler, 1979, p. 149)."

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Jim Thorpe had no choice but to turn professional to earn a living. His first contract was with the New York Giants baseball team. "Reporters figured that the overall cost to the Giants was \$9,000: a \$6,000 annual salary with a \$500 signing

bonus making Jim, according to several reports, “the highest salaried untried major league player in the history of the game (Buford, 2010, p. 171).” Warner acting as Jim’s agent was said to receive “a very generous \$2,500 (Buford, 2010, p. 171),” more than half his annual salary at Carlisle.

THORPE FIGHTING RACISM IN ALL ASPECTS OF HIS LIFE

Jim’s battles with racism, of course, were not limited to just one aspect of his life; it was an ongoing struggle he faced every day, on and off the field.

In 1904, both the World’s Fair and the Summer Olympics were held at the same location in St. Louis during overlapping times. James Sullivan, who wielded the most power in the amateur world of sports in the United States, did not hide his racism. “Human Zoos” (Canadian Broadcasting Company, 2021), as they were called at this World’s Fair, was the brainchild of William John McGee, the head of the Bureau of American Ethnology, a division of the Smithsonian Institution, devoted to researching and recording Native American cultural practices. “After McGee was selected to head the Anthropology Department of the St. Louis World’s Fair, he declared that the aim of his work would be to ‘present human progress from the dark prime to the highest enlightenment, from savagery to civic organization, from egoism to altruism (Eisen, 2019).”

McGee was having trouble getting the measurements and photographs that he wanted for his proof of the superiority of the European race due to the reluctance of many of the Indigenous peoples to being photographed and it looked like his study would fail when he was approached by Sullivan about a collaborative effort.

As well as being head of the fair’s Department of Physical Culture, Sullivan had a leading role in the creation of the 1904 Olympics, which were taking place in St. Louis, and was himself a former athlete. Sullivan was also a committed white supremacist who believed that the genetic superiority of northern Europeans was manifested in their peerless athletic prowess, an idea he shared with the many eugenicists and racial scientists of his day.... McGee’s human zoo, he proposed, presented the perfect opportunity to collect athletic data (without the knowledge or consent of the subjects) that would confirm both men’s beliefs about the order of the races — might the two work together (Eisen, 2019)?

McGee was thrilled to find a way to measure superiority, so Sullivan presented his concept of “Anthropology Days” which became known as the “Special Olympics.” There were 51 Native American nations, including Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, the Comanche, Quanah Parker, and Apache, Geronimo. Other conscripts included Mbutis and enslaved Africans, Ainus from Japan, Patagonians from the Andes and the largest and most popular exhibit in the entire fair, the “Philippine Reservation (Johnson, 2020).” They were all housed in ersatz habitats depicting their cultures enabling the white visitors to “gawk and chuckle and even throw rocks when they sought shelter when the weather turned cold (Johnson, 2020).”^v

The events that comprised what the organizers dubbed the “Special Olympics” took place in mid-August. Although McGee and Sullivan conceived of their data collection as scientific and objective, circumstances reveal the uniquely imperialist and American (or Western) assumptions about testing and proving physical prowess. The hastily thrown-together program left the participants (all of whom were men) with no time for the kind of rigorous physical training undertaken by the white athletes competing in the “real” Olympics, nor did the indigenous athletes receive a properly translated explanation of the rules. What’s more, the events were undermined by the American organizers’ assumptions that their understanding of athletics was universal rather than culturally constructed (Eisen, 2019).

To no one’s surprise, the Indigenous athletes who were not instructed how to play any of the sports, fared poorly and the data “confirmed” that the Europeans were much better athletes than the “primitive” peoples of color on display.

Anthropology Days organizer James Sullivan smugly concluded the events were proof that “the savage has been a very much overrated man from an athletic point of view,” but others labeled them a demeaning and racist sideshow. For his part, Olympics founder Pierre de Coubertin called Anthropology Days an “outrageous charade,” and noted, “it will of course lose its appeal when black men, red men and yellow men learn to run,

jump and throw, and leave the white men behind them
(Andrews, 2020).”

Remember, this is the same James Sullivan who had merely two water stations for the marathon racers on the 90-degree, humid, dusty St. Louis summer streets because he wanted to test self-imposed human dehydration (Abbott, K., 2012, Adams, J.R. 2012b; and Andrews, E., 2020). Eighteen of 32 competitors had to withdraw, one suffered a stomach hemorrhage and almost died before receiving treatment, and the winner could barely stand up as he finished. Sullivan’s racism and male chauvinism were not left behind when it was time for the 1912 Olympics.

These Games allowed female divers and swimmers but Sullivan, on behalf of the AOC, barred American women from participating (Cook, 2011). Ida Schnall, one of the best female athletes of her time, wrote a letter to *The New York Times* in 1912 to complain about Sullivan:

... He is always objecting, and never doing anything to help the cause along for a girls’ A.A.U. He has objected to my competing in diving at the Olympic games in Sweden, because I am a girl. He objects to a mild game of ball or any kind of athletics for girls. He objects to girls wearing a comfortable bathing suit. He objects to so many things that it gives me cause to think he must be very narrow minded and that we are in the last century (Welch, 1975, p. 4).

Eight years later in the Antwerp Olympics, with Sullivan no longer in charge (Sullivan died in 1914), the American women would compete for the first time in swimming and sweep seven out of seven available medals (*Swimming at the 1920 Summer Olympics*, 2021).

At nine o’clock on the morning of Friday, June 14, 1912, as thousands of fans cheered from the port of New York City, Jim and Abel Kiviat, who was to be his “roommate” on the S.S. *Finland* bound for the Stockholm, Sweden Olympics along with 162 other members of the United States Olympic team, boarded the massive ship (Wheeler, 1979, p. 99). Abel, a Jewish athlete, was the world record holder in the 1,500-meters. The vessel contained equipment, meticulously designed by trainer Michael Murphy, upon which the athletes would train throughout the nine-day voyage (Buford, 2010, p. 123). Murphy was James Sullivan’s business partner at Spalding and was handpicked by Sullivan to coach the American team.

As the team ascended the ramp to the registration table, Jim and Abel observed each of the athletes in front of them being handed a key for their first-class room. When they reached the head of the line, they were not given keys and instead were told to bunk in steerage, the ship's basement (personal communication with authors, 6/5/1976, Toms River, New Jersey).

When recounting this humiliating experience, Abel revealed the AAU authorities would have preferred that one of their privileged class competitors had made the team. From his hometown of Staten Island, New York, he competed for the Irish American Athletic Club because being "a minority and poor," he was not allowed membership in the "elite" New York Athletic Club (personal communication with authors, 6/5/1976).

Sullivan, in his book *The Olympic Games of Stockholm, 1912*, claimed "The American Olympic Committee paid the expenses of the athletes upon their arrival in New York to take the steamer for Stockholm on June 14th (Sullivan, 1912, p. 246)." After setting aside rooms for all the team members (164), additional space aboard the ship was sold for the benefit of the AOC. The ship at the time, the S.S. *Finland* "... accommodated 342 passengers in first class, 194 in second class, and 626 in third class (*SS Finland (1902): Launching and Early Career.*, 2021)." Apparently, the AOC did not pay the expenses for all athletes. Or, if they did, they did not pay them equally. Otherwise, how does one explain all the minorities in the basement?

A letter that Thorpe wrote, cited by Buford, further explained:

According to Jim, the AOC informed Carlisle, just prior to departure that due to a shortage of funds, it would not be able to defray the expenses of the Indian athletes. They "would not contest our going," Jim would recall, "if Carlisle would pay the way," adding that Warner had found the money to make up the difference (Buford, 2010, p. 116).

It is important at this point to remember the lengths to which Sullivan went in 1904 to prove the superiority of white athletes over Indigenous athletes. Cutting out Jim Thorpe and Lewis Tewanima from participating in the Olympics, both of whom were destined to win medals, because he claimed that he did not have enough money to pay for them versus the different story that his book tells of the great job he and the

AOC did for fundraising for the Olympics and even had some money left over are not easily reconcilable.

Not only were these the accommodations for the voyage to Sweden and return trip to the U.S., but most of the athletes were required to sleep on the ship for their entire stay for the Olympics in Stockholm. Kiviat explained: “We didn’t stay at a hotel in Stockholm. We docked outside the city and slept on the ship. Everybody lived on the ship except the distance runners and marathoners who were taken to the country. Thorpe asked to go with them, and they took him (Simons & Kiviat, 1986, p. 255).”

Then as now, some in the press were not always careful with the accuracy of their stories and frequently printed racial stereotypes. It was America’s preeminent sportswriter during the first half of the twentieth century, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Grantland Rice, who wrote that Jim chose to be “asleep in a hammock” rather than train during the voyage to Stockholm (Rice, 1954, p. 229).

Another reporter and traveler on the ship to Stockholm with Jim was Francis Albertanti, of the *New York Evening Mail*, who managed to inject racism into a brief conversation he had with Jim when he encountered him sitting on a deck chair. “What are you doing, Jim,” asked Albertanti, “thinking of your Uncle Sitting Bull?” Jim instead of taking offense at the racial slam, politely replied, “No... I’m practicing the broad [long] jump. I’ve just jumped twenty-three feet, eight inches. I think that can win it.” Today, a good coach would recognize what Jim was doing as visualization and perhaps some of his incredible feats were due to his use of that technique (Bloom, 1977).”

Ralph Craig, who won two gold medals for the U.S. in the 100- and 200-meters in that Olympiad, in an interview with Robert Wheeler, was shocked to hear that people really believed this “backhanded” compliment. “It has been more than fifty years since that journey,” he said angrily, “but I can certainly remember running laps and doing calisthenics with Jim every day on the ship. In fact,” he laughed, “Jim and I nearly overdid it on more than one occasion because we were always challenging one another in the sprints (Craig, 1979, p. 100).”

Kiviat, observing the shipboard training regimen, concurred with Craig’s assessment of Jim’s strenuous workouts, especially since he never received formal instruction in most of the decathlon events. Warner’s expertise as a coach was in football, not track and field. Reporters at the U.S. Olympic Trials, held two months earlier, were awestruck that Jim won the pentathlon, “with the awkwardness of a

novice (personal communication, 12/2021, Scot Mondore, Baseball Hall of Fame. Undistributed news clip from 1912),” so decisively that the organizers cancelled the decathlon competition. Jim was never taught shot put or discus techniques yet won anyway. He even threw the javelin from a standing position rather than taking a running start. Kiviat concluded, according to Buford, “that Warner hadn’t taught Jim a thing (Buford, 2010, p. 114).”

Olympic teammate, Avery Brundage, the former president of the IOC and no fan of Jim’s, further debunked Rice’s concoction in a letter to Wheeler: “Certainly Thorpe trained and never missed a session! Even if he or anyone else for that matter had wanted to loaf, our trainer, Mike Murphy, would not have permitted it (Brundage, 1979, pp. 100, 102).”

Another “ridiculous story” was gleaned from Rice’s interview with Dan Ferris, Sullivan’s personal secretary for the Games. Ferris claimed that Jim, after winning the decathlon, snubbed the King of Sweden, who had invited him to his castle (Rice, 1954, p. 230). Further befuddling the issue, sport historian, Frank G. Menke, whose articles were syndicated daily in 300 newspapers, penned that Jim didn’t even want to bother accepting his gold medals from the King at the stadium (Menke, 1953, p. 47).

Jim himself exploded these myths:

Someone started a story that when King Gustav sent for me, I replied I couldn’t be bothered to meet a mere King. That story grew until it was related the real reason I could not meet him was that I was too busy doing weight-lifting stunts with steins of Swedish beer. That story was not true; nor was the one about not wanting to meet him at the stadium. I have pictures showing King Gustav crowning me with the laurel wreath and presenting me with the trophies and it is no fabrication that he said to me: ‘Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world.’ That was the proudest moment of my life (Wheeler, 1979, pp. 112-113).”

Teammate Craig had this to say: “We returned to our quarters aboard the ship after the final ceremonies. There was a man waiting at the gangplank with a message for Jim. It was an invitation from a Russian Admiral requesting Jim’s presence on his battleship. Since the hour was late, Jim declined the offer but has had to pay the price

when a reporter striving for sensationalism substituted the Russian Admiral with King Gustav (Craig, 1979, p. 113).”

Our determination to separate the fact from fiction written about Jim was inspired by the words of Colonel Alexander M. Weyand, former All-American tackle from West Point and one of the U.S.’s most respected football historians, who warned us:

In the interest of scholarship, you will no doubt carefully analyze all stories that come to your attention. Some ridiculous stories concerning Thorpe have been published in magazines and books and have been solemnly repeated by reliable writers such as Grantland Rice and Arthur Daley. I repeat, watch carefully what you write because more lies have been written about Jim Thorpe than about any player in football history (Weyand, 1979, p. 2).

Professional Life

Jim played professional baseball (Wheeler, p. 166) and professional football (Wheeler, p. 192). As a player and often as a coach at the same time, he competed in both sports from 1913 to 1928, meaning he was competing during all four seasons for sixteen consecutive years. And, in 1927, Jim also put together a professional basketball team where he coached and played for one season (Cook, 2011, p. 167). Jim “... brought the beginning of the big-time era in professional football... (Cusack, 1979, p.127)” as paid attendance figures swelled from 1,200 to 8,000 (Cusack, 1979, p. 169) beginning in 1915, to over 70,000 by 1925 (Best, 1925). All the fans wanted to see Big Jim Thorpe in action (Wheeler, 1979, p. 167)!

Lost to most historians is Jim’s role in integrating pro football. In an interview with Wheeler, Leo V. Lyons, owner of the Rochester Jeffersons, one of the National Football League’s (NFL) original franchises, and co-founder of the league, gives an account of how Thorpe handled a race issue in a game pitting Jim’s league champion Canton Bulldogs versus the Jeffs’ with their star running back, Henry “Motorcycle” McDonald.

One incident occurred just after the opening kickoff that doesn’t illustrate Jim’s ability as a player but rather his quality as a man....

[McDonald who] ... could cover 100 yards in 10.2 seconds was knocked out of bounds. Henry, a Black, began to be threatened by the Canton tackler with: "Black is Black and white is white and where I come from, they don't mix." Sizing up the situation immediately, Jim ran between the two men and with the most fearsome stare I've seen told his teammate: "We're here to play football!" thus preventing a real donnybrook. His word was law (Lyons, 1979, pp. 262, 264)!

In 1917, when it occurred, this incident resonated throughout the entire league and solidified the right of a Black man to participate.

In 1920, all the team owners recognized Jim's importance, as well, by unanimously electing him the first president of what would become the National Football League (Wheeler, 1979, p. 184). Inconceivable as it sounds, sixteen days after assuming the office of president, Jim who was the Canton Bulldogs' coach and star player, led his team to a 48-0 victory in the season opener. Unfortunately, game statistics were not kept during this era, and these were Jim's greatest years as he led the Bulldogs to three unofficial world championships (*Pro Football Hall of Fame, 2021*). Explaining to Wheeler the challenge of competing against Jim, West Point's Dwight Eisenhower asserted: "On the football field, both on offense and defense, there was no one like him in the world (Eisenhower, 1979, p. 114)!" Suffice to say, "His mere presence moved pro football a giant step forward in the public's estimation (*Pro Football Hall of Fame, 2021*)."

After playing for the Chicago Cardinals in the autumn of 1928, Jim hung up his football cleats for the last time (Wheeler, 1979, p. 192). There was no obstacle in the world of sports that he had not been able to overcome but now, at the onset of the Great Depression, he was thrust into the maelstrom of modern earning and spending (Wheeler, et al., 2015, p. 35).

At this time, a number of movie directors, aware of Jim's popularity and availability, believed he would be a natural for the then popular "Western" genre of motion pictures. This demand resulted in his move to California.

With so many Native Americans out of work, Jim started helping others to find jobs in Hollywood. He lobbied with movie moguls he knew in the industry, Tom Mix, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, among many others, to hire Native Americans to play Indians instead of hiring whites to play the Indian roles. Jim and his friend and

business partner, Cecelia Blanchard (Kickapoo), organized the Indian Center where their innumerable dinner fires not only provided hot meals and camaraderie during a time devoid of adequate welfare or food ministries, but also gave birth to the Native American Actors Guild to promote healthcare and jobs, since Indigenous people were denied membership in the Screen Actors Guild.

Early mornings would frequently find the indefatigable Thorpe, along with his buddies, hunting rabbits and birds in the hills surrounding Los Angeles, for a feast in the evening (Wheeler, et al., 2015, p. 37). Cecelia's great-granddaughter, Paulette Blanchard (Absentee Shawnee), recalled "Native peoples from all over the United States and Canada streamed into their 'home away from home.' Jim and my great-grandmother were the 'Welcome Wagon' (Wheeler, et al., 2015, p. 35)." At the Indian Center, newly arrived men and women were provided food and housing and jobs were found for them. Jim was called "Akapamata," the word for "Caregiver" in Sac and Fox, because of his tireless efforts on behalf of those who came to the Center for help (Wheeler, et al., 2015, p. 35).

Paulette Blanchard sums it up best:

The industry was racist. ...Jim tried to offer Natives an opportunity to be more than society was telling them they were going to be, which was "poor Indians."

...His valiant effort laid the early groundwork for the benefits enjoyed today by Indigenous people in the industry, where we are still trying to crack the glass ceiling of film and media and taking back control of who we are as a people (Wheeler, et al., 2015, p. 37).

This new mission on his part, left a powerful, though largely unpublicized example of selflessness.^{vi} Although not earning Thorpe a lot of press, it still remains a lasting oral tradition among the families he helped. And that is why, all these years later, it is so important to keep his legacy alive and continue to share Native American stories of resilience and strength. Jim has taught us that whatever our goal, keep going. Cecelia emphatically declared: "Jim went to his grave fighting for equal pay for Native actors and decent health insurance, especially for the stuntmen (Wheeler, et al., 2015, p. 37!)"

BOARDING SCHOOLS

The Native American Boarding School System was based on a racist governmental policy that adversely impacted Indigenous people and continues to affect their descendants. “Earlier generations of Native Americans had suffered the loss of nearly all of their lands. Now, the boarding schools broke up their family units and endangered their languages and cultural practices (Blakemore, 2021).”

Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt opened the first Native American boarding school, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, on November 1, 1879. When the Native youth arrived at school, their hair was cut, their clothes were burned in front of them, they were given English names, and they were forbidden to speak their own language or practice their ceremonies. As the schools multiplied, many of the children were treated to harsh corporal punishment, something unknown in their cultures, and sexual abuse was rampant (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, pp. 211-214).

Pratt was actually a moderate for his time; he was responding with a more positive, although incredibly misguided approach, to statements from people such as Theodore Roosevelt, who had a long history of dislike for American Indians.

Before Roosevelt became President and after his first wife died, he left New York and moved to North Dakota where he experienced the frontier and wrote about it. In 1886 he returned to the New York and gave a lecture in which he stated:

I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every 10 are, but I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian (Hagedorn, 1921, p. 355 see also an account in Landry, 2018).

Pratt on the other hand, believed the answer to the “Indian Problem” was in assimilation not annihilation. In a conference speech in 1892, Pratt spoke out against the harsh rhetoric of Roosevelt by saying: “...all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man (Pratt, 1892, p. 46).” He strongly believed that the Indians needed to be exposed and inducted into the “white” values of civilization, through their children, to become prosperous and worthwhile citizens.

Many children did not attend these schools with their or their parents' approval. "Some Native American parents saw boarding school education for what it was intended to be — the total destruction of Indian culture. Others objected to specific aspects of the education system, the manner of discipline and the drilling. Still others were concerned for their children's health and associated the schools with death. Resentment of the boarding schools was most severe because the schools broke the most sacred and fundamental of all human ties, the parent-child bond (*"History and Culture: Boarding Schools."*, 2021)."

There are many stories compiled from boarding school survivors and massive amounts of books and papers written about boarding schools now that describe how children were abducted and taken to these schools.^{vii}

An article in *History* refers to: "One memorable act of protest [which] occurred in 1894, when a group of Hopi men in Arizona refused to send their children to residential schools. Nineteen of them were taken to Alcatraz Island in California, about a thousand miles away from their families, and imprisoned [under harsh conditions] for a year (Blakemore, 2019, Blakemore, 2021 and see also, "Nineteen Hopi Leaders Imprisoned in Alcatraz, 2021)."

Carlisle was not only held up as a model for schools in this country but also for Canada. In 1879, the Canadian government sent lawyer Nicholas Flood Davin (later a Member of Parliament) to see how the boarding schools in the U.S. functioned. "Davin visited the Carlisle school and other institutions and returned to Canada with a glowing review of the new Educational system," and recommended the Canadian government create its own system "as soon as possible (Blakemore, 2019)."

Even though the boarding schools in the U.S. seemed to be having few positive effects in terms of educating Native children to assimilate or succeed, attendance became compulsory in 1891. "The Bureau of Indian Affairs—the federal agency tasked with distributing food, land, and other provisions included in treaties with Native tribes— withheld food and other goods from those who refused to send their children to the schools, and even sent officers to forcibly take children from the reservation (*Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs United States Senate Sixty-Ninth Congress Second Session Pursuant to S. Res. 341, 1927, p. 24*)." It was "civilization by kidnapping," said the Hon. James A. Frear, congressman from Wisconsin, in his statement to the congressional hearing on Conditions of the Indians in the United States in 1927 (*Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs United States Senate Sixty-Ninth Congress Second Session Pursuant to S. Res. 341 "A Resolution Providing for a*

General Survey of the Condition of the Indians in the United States, and for Other Purposes.” 1927, p. 24).

After what was presented in the hearing, in 1928, Herbert Work, Secretary of the Interior, commissioned a full-fledged report on the state of Native American affairs. The Meriam Report (Work & Meriam, 1928), as it became known, found almost nothing to commend in the boarding school system. In the introduction to Education, Part I, Lewis Meriam states:

The most fundamental need in Indian education is a change in point of view. Whatever may have been the official governmental attitude, education for the Indian in the past has proceeded largely on the theory that it is necessary to remove the Indian child as far as possible from his home environment; whereas the modern point of view in education and social work lays stress on upbringing in the natural setting of home and family life (Work & Meriam, 1928), p. 346.”

It seemed with this statement, the paternalistic, *Education for Extinction* (Adams, 2020) and *Kill the Indian, Save the Man* (Churchill, 2004), attitude was finally changing and that the boarding schools would soon die out. “The report resulted in some immediate changes—among them, the emergency allocation of funds for better food and clothing in the schools. But even though the report recommended dismantling the boarding school system in favor of day schools, the schools persisted (Blakemore, 2021.)”

“It was not until 1978, with the passing of the Indian Child Welfare Act. that Native American parents gained the legal right to deny their children’s placement in off-reservation schools (*‘History and Culture: Boarding Schools.,’* 2021).” In the meantime, tribal languages, customs, ceremonies, and authority, were undermined as the attempt continued to teach white “civilization” as a replacement for Native American beliefs, ways, and traditions. Barb Landis, archives and library specialist for the Cumberland County Historical Society, summed up the general feelings of the Indian Nations about Carlisle most accurately when she said “I don’t think any tribal nation would make a resolution praising the Carlisle Indian School. Part of its legacy is continual dysfunction even though it has been closed for 100 years (Cress, 2018).” Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz at the end of her book on the history of the United States, as seen from the perspective of Indigenous people, agrees with activist-author, Vine Deloria, Jr., *Standing Rock Sioux*, that “... there is a direct link between the

suppression of Indigenous sovereignty and the powerlessness manifest in depressed social conditions (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 211).” A large factor in this lack of control over their own lives for Indigenous peoples in the United States has been the boarding schools.

The experience of generations of Native Americans in on- and off-reservation boarding schools, run by the federal government or Christian missions, contributed significantly to the family and social dysfunction still found in Native communities. Generations of child abuse, including sexual abuse – from the founding of the first schools by missionaries in the 1830s and the federal government in 1875 until most were closed and the remaining ones reformed in the 1970s – traumatized survivors and their progeny (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, pp. 211-212).

The Part Played by Racism

Racism certainly played a large part in Jim Thorpe’s participation in sports, his access to training, the equipment he had and every other aspect of his life. It was thanks to Carlisle and Pop Warner’s coaching that Jim had the opportunity to play football on such a large stage, defeating most of the major college teams of the day. It was also Warner who secured Jim’s entrance as a competitor in the Olympics and even Warner and Carlisle who came up with the funds to pay for Thorpe and Louis Tewanima’s travel to and from the Olympics.

It was also because of Carlisle and the boarding school system that Jim did not have family and elders near when he needed advice. Instead, he was dependent upon Pop Warner and Moses Friedman, who were more interested in saving their own reputations and, ultimately, careers, than in standing by Jim Thorpe. It would have only taken one person of repute to stand up to the AAU and cite the 30-day rule, explaining that his medals and records could not be taken away over six months after they were awarded. Sadly, this did not happen.

However, Jim’s story is not one of defeat by racism. His is one of perseverance and resiliency despite racism. After having to turn professional, Jim had many offers. Following his rejection of a lucrative offer to become a professional boxer, according to his 19-year-old friend, Jack Dempsey, who went on to become the heavyweight champion (personal communication with Wheeler), Jim instead pursued

careers in professional baseball and then football, where he experienced racism time and again for himself and saw its effect on others. Despite these challenges, he became a co-founder and was unanimously elected first president of the National Football League, first known as the American Professional Football Association. His career with Major League Baseball was not quite as illustrious. His first manager, the New York Giants' legendary John McGraw, told a friend: "If he can only hit in batting practice, the fans that will pay to see him will more than make up for his salary (Wheeler, 1979, p. 156)" At the signing ceremony, the Giants manager admitted that he had never seen Thorpe in action; he didn't know what position he played or even whether he hit right- or left-handed (Thorpe was right-handed) (Jensen, 2018).

McGraw's premeditated exploitation of Jim resulted in him riding the bench most of the season. And, even when he was put in a game and made a spectacular play, his appearance of being nonchalant upset the fiery McGraw (Wheeler, 1979, p. 157). Carlisle historian, Dr. Tom Benjey, regrets that Jim wasn't guided to a team that would have given him more coaching to develop his baseball skills (Benjey, personal communication with authors, 10/30/2021). McGraw's propensity for racial slurs eventually pushed their relationship to the breaking point as Al Schacht, Jim's roommate, who later became the "Clown Prince of Baseball," tells the story:

Jim missed a signal while running the bases and it cost a run. McGraw was furious and called Jim a "dumb Indian." This was the only thing that Jim would not tolerate, and he took out after McGraw and chased him all over the Polo Grounds. It took half the team to stop him. When Jim was dismissed, McGraw used the excuse of his inability to hit a curve ball and the writers have echoed that sentiment ever since (Wheeler, 1979 p. 166).

When Jim was able to leave the Giants, and join the Boston Braves his batting average was .327. Jim reflected: "I must have hit a few curves (Wheeler, 1979, p. 166)."

Although 1919 was his last year with Major League Baseball, Jim played in the International League (.360 BA), American Association (.358 BA), and others "...right up until the end, hitting the ball with authority and consistency and fielding his position brilliantly day in and day out... (Wheeler, 1979, p.166)" until his last official game in 1928.

The onset of the Great Depression found Jim encountering racism in Hollywood with Native American actors not being employed to play Indian roles, portraying ridiculous stereotypes of Indians in the movies, denied membership in the Screen Actors Guild and, instead, having to create a separate union for Native Americans to achieve equity in pay and proper health insurance.

The remainder of Jim's life was spent traveling thousands of miles, crisscrossing the country, oftentimes with a couple of his hunting dogs in the back seat, appearing before hundreds of school assemblies, Indian Rights powwows, service organizations, and parks districts teaching youngsters the fundamentals of track (Wheeler, 1979, pp.199, 204). Leo Lyons explained to Wheeler how he asked Jim to make two presentations one day in Rochester, New York. One was before the Rotary Club, the other to a high school assembly. The school's auditorium was filled with "...2,000 youngsters which ordinarily would be like a beehive. But when Jim stood up on the stage, just at a bare desk with no microphone, you could have heard a pin drop. They loved every minute of his inspirational message (Lyons, 1979, p. 265)."

Predominately his topics focused on Indian culture and traditions while he stressed the urgency to improve tribal conditions, including his desire for the security of remuneration for their original land holdings (Wheeler, 1979, pp. 216).

Somehow, he took the time, in the midst of this deluge of appearances, to volunteer to serve in the Merchant Marines during World War II at 58 years of age! He was assigned to the U.S.S. *Southwest Victory* for the battle fronts of India carrying ammunition to the American and British troops stationed there. He served anonymously as the ship's carpenter. He was elated to be "back in the game" and said "We had some rough weather and some rough times, but we had teamwork. Cooperation is important in everything you do, and this is what made us winners (Wheeler, 1979, 209-210)!"

Jim was down at times yet was never defeated.

Primary Recommendation from our Research

As Bill Mallon, the foremost Olympic historian, has said of Jim:

Jim Thorpe was a man and athlete who seemed to have been teleported from the future to the 1910s, an athlete so superior to his peers that he seemed almost a different life form. He won both the decathlon and

pentathlon at the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games, triumphing in the decathlon by almost 700 points over the runner-up, Hugo Wieslander of Sweden. That margin of victory, Thorpe's dominance, has never been approached at the Olympic Games.

Thorpe's score was done with none of the benefits that later Olympians would have. He ran on soft cinder tracks, rather than an artificial rubberized Mondo surface. He used a bamboo pole to vault, rather than modern fiberglass. He high jumped in a scissor's technique, not the Western roll or straddle technique that would soon supplant the scissors, to say nothing of the Fosbury Flop. He did not have modern shoe technology or the advantage of modern training techniques. It mattered not, for his 1912 score would still have won a bronze medal at the 1948 Olympics.

Despite the passage of more than 100 years since Jim Thorpe stunned the world in Stockholm, he remains the paradigm against whom all all-around athletes are measured. It was said of him in 1912, "You sir, are the greatest athlete in the world." It is as true today as it was then (Mallon, letter, 12/02/2021).

In the case of Jim Thorpe, it is indisputable to point to the first recommendation – to fully correct the injustice perpetrated against him when his gold medals and records were taken away.

The Amateur Athletic Union has changed much over the years since James Sullivan, and later, Avery Brundage, who was president of the AAU before he was president of the IOC, are no longer in charge. "The Olympic Sports Act of 1978 organized the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and saw the re-establishment of independent associations for the Olympic sports, referred to as national governing bodies (*Amateur Sports Act of 1978*, 2021)." The AAU now focuses mostly on youth sports and does an exemplary job.

The change in focus and leadership has brought a welcome new era for the AAU. The AAU reinstated Jim Thorpe as an amateur in 1973 clearing the way for the IOC to also reinstate him. And, in 1997, when it was brought to his attention by

several high school students that Jim's AAU medals had never been restored, Keith Noll, National Chair of both the AAU's football and hockey programs, with the unanimous approval of the AAU's Board of Directors, respectfully invited all of Jim's children and grandchildren to a formal ceremony at the Lac Courte Oreilles Convention Center where the children were offered replicas of their father's medals (DeSimone, 1997).

The IOC was never moved by these legitimate initiatives to reinstate Jim. Nor had they ever even hinted at a change of heart over the preceding decades, despite a plethora of impassioned campaigns highlighted by notable initiators: famed journalist, Damon Runyan (1913), President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1935), civil rights leader and baseball executive, Branch Rickey (1950), President Gerald Ford (1976), and Jim's widow and all his children on numerous occasions.

Pessimistically, one of the most emphatic IOC denials came from Julian Roosevelt, the IOC representative to the U.S. and a member of their Executive Board. An Olympic gold medalist in yachting and a grandnephew of President Theodore Roosevelt, he was interviewed by *Washington Times* journalist Marty Hurney in 1982, who told him that the Jim Thorpe Foundation^{viii} had secured 125,000 petition signatures "...in an attempt to convince one of the representatives to bring up the topic again." Roosevelt's response was that "the subject is closed." He added: "They could get the entire country, the President of the United States, [Yasser] Arafat, and anyone else to sign the petition and it won't do any good (Hurney, 1982, 10B)."

All this time, the IOC President, Juan Antonio Samaranch, claimed to the Jim Thorpe Foundation there were no written rules for the Fifth Olympiad.

Victor Mather, who covers sports for *The New York Times*, picks up the story:

Despite being told that there were no written rules, Florence Ridlon, an advocate for Thorpe, searched the Library of Congress in 1982 and eventually discovered them [*Olympic Games of Stockholm 1912: Programme and General Regulations*] between two bookcases. They revealed that protests against gold medalists had to be made within 30 days; Thorpe's brief professional baseball career was not uncovered until six months after the Games (Mather, 2020)."

The Los Angeles Herald Examiner's Richard Levin concluded "... the detective work of Florence Ridlon ...rendered Thorpe's disqualification invalid and illegal (Levin, 1983)."

A copy of these rules was given to the President of the U.S. Olympic Committee, William Simon, who already had been offering invaluable counsel to the Foundation with its efforts. He immediately spoke with Samaranch, in person, and predicted the Foundation would win in a court of law, and it would shed a much more favorable light on the IOC if they would pass a resolution to return Thorpe's awards instead of being forced into it by the legal system. Samaranch agreed and on October 13, 1982, it was unanimously passed by the IOC. Duplicate medals were returned to Thorpe's children and his times were listed in the Olympic record, but he was still erroneously listed as a co-champion even though the scores of the second-place winners were not even close, let alone was there a tie (McCallum, 1982)!

Research by Olympic historians Bill Mallon of Durham, N.C. and Andy Strenk, a professor at USC, indicates that after Thorpe's disqualification, the athletes had been very reluctant to accept the gold medals. Bie [pentathlon second place winner] and Wieslander [decathlon second place winner] aren't alive to speak for themselves, but we do have the views of Gösta Holmér of Sweden who died earlier this year at the age of 91. Holmér finished fourth in the decathlon and was awarded the bronze when Thorpe was disqualified, but he said he would have given up his medal if it meant justice would be done to Thorpe (Kirshenbaum, 1983).

The current Bright Path Strong movement and website (<https://brightpathstrong.org/>) seeks to collect petition signatures to have Jim Thorpe fully reinstated and listed as the sole champion for the pentathlon and decathlon which he fairly and decisively won and deserved.

Jim Thorpe is a hero and role model to many young people, especially Native American youth. It is unfair and unjust to have his legacy tarnished by what was illegally done to him in 1913. The attempt to fully reinstate Jim Thorpe has been a long and tortuous journey that began shortly after the decision to remove his gold medals and records in 1913.

At this time, however, the IOC's Representative to the U.S., Anita DeFrantz, is supportive of the goal of fully reinstating Jim Thorpe and has spoken out about her position. Ms. DeFrantz termed the Thorpe case "one of the most egregious miscarriages of justice in sports history" and "a stunning episode of early 20th century bigotry.... In this time of reckoning over social justice, I urge my colleagues to do their part by righting this wrong (DeFrantz, 2021)." Also encouraging is IOC President

Thomas Bach’s demonstration of compassion toward marginalized people with IOC efforts like the Olympic Refugee Foundation in 2017 (Olympic Refugee Foundation, 2021).

Nedra Darling, Prairie Band Potawatomi and co-founder of Bright Path Strong, summed up the joy and potential a positive decision would bring: “Correcting Jim Thorpe’s achievements in the official records would not end the systemic prejudices that pervade our institutions, but it would send a powerful message of hope and liberation to Indigenous communities in the United States and around the world, whose past and present should no longer be invisibilized.”

Implementing Changes and Alleviating Soul Wounds

The Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit organization that “...challenges poverty and racial injustice, advocates for equal treatment in the criminal justice system, and creates hope for marginalized communities.” They have summed up the need for truth in our history: “America’s history of racial inequality continues to undermine fair treatment, equal justice, and opportunity for many Americans. ...we must acknowledge the truth about our history before we can heal: truth and reconciliation are sequential (“Understanding our History of Racial Injustice,” 2021).

The Canadian government initiated their movement for reconciliation with their Aboriginal communities before the United States. Canada operated 139 Indian residential schools (the U.S. had in excess of 350) based on the American model of forced assimilation. It implemented the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (Government of Canada, 2021) in 2007, in which the government formally apologized to former boarding school students and paid reparations to survivors.

Perhaps even more importantly, in 2009, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) “...was established as part of a legal settlement, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, between Survivors, the Government of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit representatives, and the church bodies that had run residential schools (*National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation*, 2021).”

TRC “began a multiyear process of collecting and listening to survivors’ stories, opening up residential-school records to survivors and families, and ensuring that the history and legacy of the schools are never forgotten (Pember, 2019).”

The TRC concluded its mandate in 2015 and transferred its records to the safekeeping of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) where they will permanently reside. Their report concludes that the residential schools can best be described as “cultural genocide (Austen, 2015).”

Of special interest to our paper are two of the four “Calls to Action” regarding sports and Native Canadians in the final TRC report. After years of research, they suggested in their summary of conclusions:

Call to Action

90) We call upon the federal government to ensure that national sports policies, programs, and initiatives are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to, establishing:

In collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, stable funding for, and access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples.

- i. An elite athlete development program for Aboriginal athletes.
- ii. Programs for coaches, trainers, and sports officials that are culturally relevant for Aboriginal peoples.
- iii. Anti-racism awareness and training programs (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, 299-300).

We would amplify this list by including some of the insights from an article in *The New York Times* in 2001 by Selena Roberts who delved into why there are so few basketball recruits from the reservations for D-1 schools. “Although there is athletic talent on the reservations, a fact underscored by the many state basketball championships and cross-country titles American Indian high school teams have won, few players have had the opportunity to break through in major college and professional sports (Roberts, 2021).”

There is security, family, acceptance, avoidance of racial attacks and friendships on the reservation. These are hard to give up. This is not as much of a

problem for inner-city youth whom coaches find easier to work with because they just want to get out of where they grew up.

There is also the difficulty encountered because of the culture of the tribe. “In many tribes, humility is celebrated, and individuality is suppressed (Roberts, 2021).” Leading scorers in basketball games have been threatened by other tribal members because of their success.

Joseph B. Oxendine talks about “The Dropout Phenomenon” in his book entitled *American Indian Sports Heritage*. “Of course the desire to remain among one’s friends is a natural human trait. However, among Indian youth, especially those on reservations, this tendency is particularly restrictive. Because of jealousy, fear of losing a friend, or perhaps for other reasons, young athletes experience pressure *not to succeed* (Oxendine, 1988, p. 266).”

Roberts relates several stories of students who have received scholarships and then leave after a short time, not feeling capable of dealing with the “outside world” and missing the security of their reservations.

The solution for this problem might be contained in the second (ii) suggestion under the 90th “Call to Action -- Programs for coaches” where they could become more educated about the special problems the youths from the reservations face when they are leaving home to enter college. “Small-college coaches who field teams with American Indians say they have grown to understand the differences in culture and have learned to cope with the problems of their Indian athletes (Roberts, 2021).” Rusty Gillette, the men’s basketball coach at United Tribes Educational and Technical School, a 250-student junior college in Bismarck, North Dakota, summed it up well: “There’s room to be the coach and have rules,” he said. “But there’s room to be supportive, too (Roberts, 2021).”

And on the international level:

Call to Action

91) We call upon the officials and host countries of international sporting events such as the Olympics, Pan Am, and Commonwealth games to ensure that Indigenous peoples’ territorial protocols are respected, and local Indigenous communities are engaged in all aspects of planning and participating in such events

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 348).

The implementation on the international level in the 91st “Call to Action” seemed too simple. Is it possible that respect for others and their beliefs and their involvement in the planning for the events which affect them, so they have control over the proper use of their lands, could be enough?

Here is the account from the Summary Report of how well the “Call to Action #91” worked for the last Winter Olympics in Canada:

The 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia, were held on the traditional territories of the Squamish, Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Lil’wat peoples, and they were an integral part of the event. In the spirit of reconciliation, which aligns easily with the spirit of the games themselves, the Four Host First Nations and the Vancouver Olympic Committee formed a partnership that ensured that Indigenous peoples were full participants in the decision-making process—a first in Olympic history. At the opening ceremonies and throughout the games, territorial protocols were respected, and the Four Host First Nations and other Indigenous peoples from across the province were a highly visible presence at various Olympic venues (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 348).

It seemed to work. With Canada leading the way in the reconciliation movement, the United States is not far behind. Leaders from the U.S. and Canada came together in 2011 to discuss the need in the U.S. for a process similar to the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) was incorporated shortly thereafter, with a mission “To lead in the pursuit of understanding and addressing the ongoing trauma created by the U.S. Indian Boarding School policy” (*History of The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition*, 2012).

In 2020, Deb Haaland, then a congresswoman from New Mexico, introduced legislation to create a Truth and Healing Commission to study the Indian Boarding Schools. The bill did not move forward but once in office as the first Native American

(Laguna Pueblo) Cabinet secretary heading the Department of the Interior, and after the reporting of the mass grave of 215 children in Canada (Austen, 2021), Haaland formally launched a federal study on boarding schools, including their locations, attendance and any associated burials. “Only by acknowledging the past can we work toward a future we are all proud to embrace,” Haaland declared (Haaland, 2021).

It was the Department of the Interior that created the off-reservation boarding schools and Haaland believes it is up to the Department to do what the government can to help heal the wounds it inflicted. The assimilationist policies of the past are contrary to the “doctrine of trust” responsibility, under which the Federal Government must promote Tribal self-governance and cultural integrity. Nevertheless, the legacy of Indian boarding schools remains, manifesting itself in Indigenous communities through intergenerational trauma, cycles of violence and abuse, disappearance, premature deaths, and other undocumented bodily and mental impacts.

Secretary Haaland concluded “Over the course of the Program, thousands of Indigenous children were removed from their homes and placed in Federal boarding schools across the country. Many who survived the ordeal returned home changed in unimaginable ways, and their experiences still resonate across the generations (Haaland, 2021).”

Perhaps the best way to conclude is with a description of a “soul wound,” so the reader may fully understand the difficult task ahead to implement any sort of positive change to begin to correct the damage that has been done to Indigenous peoples just via the boarding schools.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the U.S. government implemented policies whose effect was the systematic destruction of the Native American family system under the guise of educating Native Americans in order to assimilate them as painlessly as possible into Western society, while at the same time inflicting a wound to the soul of Native American people that is felt in agonizing proportion to this day (Duran & Duran, 1995).

“Although there is disagreement in Native communities about how to approach the past, most agree that the first step is documentation. It is crucial that this history be exposed... When the elders who were abused in these schools have the chance to heal, then the younger generation will begin to heal too (Smith, 2006).” The National

Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition started this process in the United States and the Department of Interior will continue it on a larger scale.

A soul wound is not just a prosaic way of describing the damage that has been done. There is clear evidence that it not only exists but also has caused many of the problems currently facing the reservations: from alcohol and sexual abuse to suicide (Smith, 2006).^{ix} It does not end with the generation that initially experienced it but has been shown to cross generations and weave its way through current society.

There are hopeful signs. Eduardo Duran, et al. speaks of how effective soul-wound workshops have been in dealing with historical trauma and unresolved grief.

Through purification and other ceremonies, the pain can be transformed into a powerful, life-giving force. As one healer states, “We have already paid the price. It’s time to accept the many blessings that the Creator has in store for us. We must honor our people who sacrificed everything through honoring ourselves and healing ourselves. By healing ourselves, we will also heal the wounds of our ancestors and the unborn generations (Duran, et al., 1998, p. 352).”

Hope also arises in research from a very different arena, epigenetic studies. The soul wound may not be passed along to the next generation only by cultural factors but also through genetics. Researchers, in a tightly controlled animal study, “fear-conditioned mice to a specific olfactory stimulus (acetophenone) (Dias and Ressler, 2013).”

As Gillson and Ross, in their discussion of this study, note that what the researchers found was “stunning.” “The team extracted sperm from the fear-conditioned mice, performed in vitro fertilization and then raised the offspring separately from their biological fathers. Extraordinarily, these offspring – and another generation beyond them – demonstrated increased fear responses to acetophenone (Gillson and Ross, 2019).”

And, further research has been hopeful. “Follow-up data from the mouse studies discussed above has shown that exposure therapy [therapy to remove their fear responses to acetophenone] before mating appears to reverse the next generation’s inheritance of the behavior and neurobiological marks of the previous trauma (Gillson and Ross, 2019).”

Perhaps, if the current generation can heal, the soul wound will no longer be passed on to the future generations and the coming generations will no longer be burdened by the soul wounds of their elders. With culture and biology working together, there may be an actual possibility that the soul wounds that a white society inflicted on Native Americans evidenced in the continuing dysfunctionality caused by the boarding school system may at some point not be passed on to future generations.

In the meantime, the Circles for Reconciliation in Canada has proposed a reasonable route to follow. “It will take many years to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada’s national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political, and economic change. Ongoing public education and dialogue are essential to reconciliation (*“Closing: Vision of Reconciliation,”* 2021, Numbers 2, 3, and 4).”

Notes

¹The stories of Jim's earlier experiences at boarding schools will give the reader a sense of how much he did not like them.

When he and his beloved twin brother, Charlie, were six-and-a-half years old, their father, Hiram, delivered them to the Sac and Fox Agency School in Tecumseh, twenty-three miles away from their home. While still at the school at the age of eight, a typhoid fever and measles epidemic infiltrated the premises and claimed Charlie as one of the victims.

By the time he turned ten, Jim's disenchantment with this school increased to such an extent that just two weeks before the completion of his fourth year, he headed for home. When he reached his family's one-room cabin, Hiram immediately hitched up the wagon and drove him right back to the front door of the school. As soon as his father turned to go, Jim left by the back door. Taking a shortcut that was only eighteen miles instead of twenty-three, he beat his father home. When Hiram found Jim waiting for him, he could not believe his eyes.

Later that summer, Hiram, after being approached by a recruiter from the Indian school, Haskell Institute, decided to enroll Jim there. Since it was located in the northeastern corner of Kansas, he figured it was far enough away to make it difficult for his son to find his way home.

It was here that Jim was first introduced to football by the Oneida great Chauncey Archiquette, who noticed the little boy racing back and forth across the empty turf trying to emulate him. One day, after practice, Chauncey took Jim to the harness shop and sewed some leather scraps together and stuffed the ball with rags. Now that Jim had a "real" football, it was not long before he organized games among his friends and played with enthusiasm and leadership.

Just before completion of his second year, Jim received the news that his father had been shot in a hunting accident and lay dying. He dazedly walked out of Haskell with nothing but the work clothes he was wearing. He ran all the way to the Lawrence railyard, arriving just in time to hop a freight train.

Later that day as the train slowed to a stop, the young stowaway was discovered and told to jump off. During the ensuing conversation, Jim learned that he had boarded a northbound train instead of a southbound one. Disheartened, he walked all the way home, a distance of 270 miles, and finally arrived two weeks later. Carlisle, at Jim’s father’s insistence, was to be his third boarding school (Wheeler, 1979).

ⁱⁱ This fact was confirmed in a telephone conversation with Chief Jack Thorpe, Jim’s youngest son; Robert Wheeler, Thorpe biographer; and Joe Libby, Jim’s teammate on the football team. Also confirmed in Jack Thorpe’s testimony on a congressional resolution passed on September 28 of 1982 (97th Congress 2nd Session, 1982) that was supported by both political parties. Tip O’Neil, Speaker of the House and Robert Michel, House Minority leader were both on the Advisory Board of Directors for the Jim Thorpe Foundation (1981-1983) making it clearly a non-partisan issue.

ⁱⁱⁱ Among the plethora of white athletes who played under assumed names was none other than President Dwight D. Eisenhower (Staff Writer, 1945, p. 11 and Beschloss, M., 2014), who omitted telling the admission authorities at West Point that he had played summer baseball under the name “Wilson” for the Junction City Soldiers in the Central Kansas League.

^{iv} Bill Crawford (Crawford, 2005, pp. 220-221) calls Sullivan being on the board of the Carlisle Athletic Association the “smoking gun of the 1912 Olympic scandal.”

^v There are so many awful stories told about this Human Zoo that it is hard to comprehend. One of the worst to our knowledge is what Walter Johnson (Johnson, 2020) tells of Ota Benga. “Elsewhere on the grounds lived Ota Benga, who had been sold along with seven other people to the American Samuel Verner, who had traveled to King Leopold’s Congo Free State under the auspices of the fair’s Anthropology Department to purchase Mbuti “pygmies” with the sole purpose of exhibiting them at the fair. Benga, who was about twenty at the time of his sale, had had his teeth filed into sharp points as a child, and was exhibited at the fair as a “cannibal.” Benga and the other enslaved Africans sometimes danced and performed before as many as twenty thousand people at a time. For a time

after the fair, under the auspices of the white supremacist racial theorist Madison Grant, Benga was kept in a cage at the Bronx Zoo. After his release, Benga worked in a tobacco factory in Virginia, where he began to wear Western clothes and had his teeth capped. In March 1916, in Lynchburg, Virginia, Ota Benga built a large fire, danced, and then shot himself through the heart.”

^{vi} Kate Buford, 2010, was the first Thorpe biographer to write in depth about this time in Jim’s life.

^{vii} There is so much excellent material available now, partially thanks to the collecting of information by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada that this paper can barely scratch the surface of the complicated issues of the residential boarding schools and their impact. However, it is such an important topic, related to many of the problems Native Americans and First Nation Canadians face today, that we wanted to refer the reader to: National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (<https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/resources/>) and the “Indian Boarding School Selected Bibliography” from Stewart Indian School Cultural Center & Museum (<https://stewartindianschool.com/>).

Just one of many stories told to us by our friend, Dr. John L. Edwards: Without his parent's knowledge or consent, John was taken from the front yard of his home in Seminole, Oklahoma by an Indian boarding school agent, when he was five years old (1940) and brought to the Seneca Indian School, then on to Pawnee Indian School and finally to Haskell where he graduated in 1953 with his high school diploma. It was approximately four years after his kidnapping, when he was nine, before John was able to get word to his parents telling them where he was. Edwards was one of those amazing people who succeeded despite such a traumatic beginning in boarding school. He was a natural athlete who excelled in football, track, basketball, and baseball as well as academics. Edwards received his bachelor's degree from Weber State College (1965), and his master’s degree (1971) and his doctorate in Education from Arizona State University (1974). He went on to work for the Department of Interior Indian Affairs until 1986 when he became Governor of the Absentee Shawnee Tribe, Shawnee,

Oklahoma and founder and pastor of the Fellowship of American Indian Church in Chickasha, Oklahoma from 1995 until his death in 2014. For every one of these partially positive stories (Those four years of parental anguish worrying about what happened to their son and John's four years of missing his family, were certainly not positive.), there are many more completely negative ones. As with Jim Thorpe, it seems that being an outstanding athlete mitigated some of the negatives of the boarding school system. John said "I put my anger into running instead of into something negative."

viii **The Jim Thorpe Foundation**

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^{ix} An excellent summation of the literature and list of references can be found in Kathleen Brown-Rice, 2021. See also Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, “The Narrative of Dysfunction,” pp. 211-214 and Andrea Smith, 2006.

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