

letter to Hardie, she explained how the harsh conditions of the reservations that the Native Americans had been forced onto would provide the pretext for further racist representations: 'the whole land is barren and forlorn. It is here they have driven the poor Indians and now they will say they are lazy and will not work!'³ Her discussion of this in her letter to Hardie underlines their shared concern to understand and challenge racist narratives.

Sylvia was evidently expected by her hosts to express her approval of Haskell Institute, a college for Native Americans in Lawrence; on 16 March, a luncheon was held in Sylvia's honour by Mrs H.H. Fiske, the wife of the college superintendent.⁴ Again, Sylvia observed the destruction of indigenous skills, which was a stated intention of the college, and which was boasted of by the teacher Sylvia encountered.⁵ Writing on the training that female students received, Sylvia noticed the similarity of their work to those of 'the jaded sweated factory wage slaves'. Myriam Vučković's study of Haskell demonstrates that in this period, the propagation of a 'scientific' racism which proclaimed racially proscribed differences, justified limiting education in Native American colleges to 'vocational training in order to prepare students for a working-class life on the margin of American society'.⁶ Sylvia did not attempt to conceal her objections. In an interview with a Kansas reporter (a female whom Sylvia asked if she received equal pay), Sylvia provided 'an explanation that the Indian school at Haskell was so civilized as to give no adequate idea of the real Indian'.⁷ Capitalist 'civilization', Sylvia identified, was obliterating a people and their culture not only in obvious but also in insidious and apparently enlightened ways. As an artist, she found the language to express her disgust at that process and her solidarity with its victims.



A RED INDIAN COLLEGE

The train passed on through New Mexico, on through the dreary desert. Far as the eye could reach, behind and before us, stretched the dull red sand and the withered-looking tufts of grey-green sage bush. On the horizon to right and left, great red stone ridges rose sheer out of the sand. There was something repellent and unnatural about them, perhaps because their sides seemed rather to have fallen away in slices, without

cause, than as other hills and mountains, to have been worn away by waters, or to have been thrown up molten hot during some vast volcanic movement. No bird or beast or any living thing was in sight, but beside the occasional dried-up watercourses lay the whitening bones of cattle, and there were many little skeletons upon the sand. Under the leaden sky it seemed a land of death, forsaken of God and man.

Hour after hour went by thus as the train sped on. Then, suddenly, a figure in loose dark blue garments with a touch of brilliant scarlet, started out, ran half crouching along the ground, and disappeared behind a mound of sand. A few moments later was seen a tiny village of huts built of sun-dried bricks made from the red sand. Close to the huts were little patches of tilled land, some of which showed the tall dried-up stalks of last year's maize, whilst others were planted with tiny trees. We were passing through one of the 'reservations' which the American Government has set apart for the Indians.

Everywhere that one goes in the United States one meets a certain picture. It is chosen for the decoration of the State House and the theatre. Should the descendants of the pilgrim fathers, or the 'Sons' or 'Daughters' of the American Revolution, desire to present a work of statuary or painting to their native town, it is always the subject chosen. In it is represented the joyous entering of the white settlers into the rich blossoming country of America, whilst the lion and the tiger and the other beasts of prey, the Red Indian people, the original natives of the land, steal off into the darkness of the past. Here, in the midst of the dreary New Mexican desert, is one of the spots to which the Indians have been driven.

Some hours later the train stops at a small town. The passengers flock out to stretch their limbs, after many tedious days in the over-heated car. Several Indian men, with broad, brown faces and long coarse black hair, wearing loose blue cotton suits, with blankets about their shoulders, are selling little bits of turquoise matrix and smoky topaz. Women, with short red skirts and white felt leggings, are selling bead chains and earthenware pottery that they themselves have made.

But it is inside a wide-doored barbaric-looking building in the centre of the platform, that the best Indian work is to be seen. Here is an abundance of wrought silver, iron, and copper work, baskets woven with extraordinary fineness, and pottery decorated with simple harmonious pattern. Women and girls are weaving richly-coloured woollen rugs, but