

The Carlisle 62

By Valerie Vargas

As history has well documented, the U.S. military forces landed on the shores of Guanica in 1898 in what was to become known as the beginning of the American occupation of Puerto Rico.

General Miles who led the invasion, was already a veteran of the American Indian Wars and U.S. expansionism in the Southwest. At the time of the US occupation, General Miles was quoted as saying that the people he encountered on the island were not much different for physically than those he had just encountered in the Southwest. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, between 1898 and 1905, 62 "Porto Rican" children were placed at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

After reviewing documents taken from the National Archives in Washington DC, thanks to the tireless efforts of Jorge Estevez of the Smithsonian Institute National Museum of the American Indian in New York City, the mystery still remains as to why these "Porto Rican" children were placed at the Carlisle School. (These archives can be accessed through Mary Frances Morrow at the National Archives in Washington D, DC).

It would be easy for those of us involved in the Taino movement and restoration to shout, "here it is, proof that we were once considered Indians by the U.S. government"! But such a statement could easily be refuted, upon closer inspection of the many files and letters from the National Archives, by those less inclined to believe in the legitimacy of Taino cultural survival.

The following are some of the statistics available relating to the "Porto Rican" children placed at Carlisle Indian School.

Sex: 35 boys, 18, girls, 9 not listed

Ages: 12-18 (with girls decidedly younger than the boys)

Grades Attended: First through 10th grade.

Parents living or dead: 3 orphans, 22 with 1 parent deceased, 18 with both parents living.

Occupation after leaving Carlisle: Domestic, Farming, Printing Stenography, Postmaster, Laborer, Law, Medicin, Naval Lieutenant.

Most returned to Puerto Rico with one "run away".

Classification of Indian Blood Quantum:

41 "full blood"; 12 no classification (of these 53, 1 full blood with no classification were mentioned in subsequent documentation as being "negro" or mostly negro "Porto Ricans")

The Archives, mentioned above, document the poignant histories of these misplaced children of a new colony. All correspondence to the school from these former "Puerto Rican" students show a never-ending gratitude towards the school and its teachers. Some of the students wrote to say how improved had become since the American Occupation and what fine citizens they had become for having attended the Carlisle Indian school, and some even asked if their relatives would be allowed to attend. These students were apparently, the seemingly perfect products of an Indian school education.

One student, although grateful for the education received, was bitter at the government order, issued in 1905 for the removal of the "Porto Rican" students in order to make room for that which "Rightfully belonged to the Indians." Precious few documents exist.

So, where the Puerto Rican Children placed at Carlisle Indians? Jorge Estevez says it best, " According to DNA studies, at least 61% of the children probably had Indian ancestry". That said, it is clear that the children were placed in these boarding schools as well as African-American schools not because they were Indians or black, but rather because they were non-white.

Several in-depth investigations have been done on this case. Undoubtedly the best comes to us from Mrs. Sonia Migdalia Rosa who sadly passed away several years ago. We hope to up-load her study in a few weeks.