

## Inspection Report of J. H. Dortch for May 1915

In her article in *The Atlantic*, Mary Annette Pember writes that she was initially disappointed with what she found in the archives at Marquette University. The existing material consisted mostly of “lists of student names with check marks in columns indicating whether they’d graduated, run away, or died, the boxes contained mostly bureaucratic reports and correspondence... There was nothing in the dry letters and reports concerning the people I wanted to learn about, such as Sister Catherine or my mother.”

Pember eventually found some materials that spoke directly to her mother’s stories, but archival research is often challenging because the materials that are produced and preserved—the “dry letters and reports”—tend to speak to the concerns of the people who created them, not necessarily the concerns of the historian.

For class today, you read the “Inspection Report of J. H. Dortch for May 1915,” in which Dortch describes those elements of the Carlisle Indian School that were interesting to him and to more distant administrators in Washington. The task we’ll embark on in class today (in small groups) is to mine his report for information that speaks to our interests. We will read this archival material “with the grain” (to borrow a phrase from Ann Stoler) and “between the lines” to gain glimpses into what the Carlisle school was like in May of 1915. I’ll ask that you pay special attention to issues of race, gender, class, religion, labor, and sexuality—six main categories of analysis that can help reveal the experiences, thinking, and intentions of historical (and contemporary!) actors.

The following questions are meant to guide you in your analysis of the Inspection Report, but they are merely places to begin your historical excavations.

1. Who was J. H. Dortch? And why did he write this Inspection Report?
2. What was Dortch most concerned about? What did he focus on? And how might this reveal the priorities of administrators at the Office of the Interior?
3. What differences can you see in his report in the lives of boys and girls at the Carlisle Indian School?
4. When does Dortch show his explicitly racial thinking? What do these comments reveal about life at the school?
5. Who does the work at the school? What kind of work do they do?
6. What kind of discipline does Dortch feel the students need? How does this differ by the students’ gender or age?
7. What types of education does Dortch believe the school should instill? Why? How does he imagine the students will live after they leave the school?