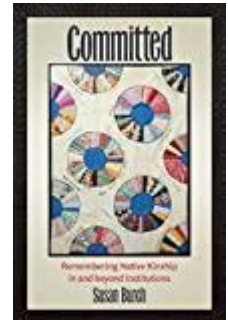


**Susan Burch.** *Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and beyond Institutions.* Critical Indigeneities Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 222 pp. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-6161-2.



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*Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and beyond Institutions* is a model of how to write histories that are as inclusive and broadly accessible as they are necessary. Centering this study on the period 1902-34, Susan Burch sensitively conveys the story of the Native adults and children confined to the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians, established in South Dakota under the auspices of the US government. The volume notes on a cover page that “this book embodies a commitment to access, to conveying content with as few barriers as possible. Access is a practice, not a checklist.” Burch “intentionally use(s) accessible language,” has chosen a font that maximizes legibility, and includes alt-text to convey transcriptions of the included photographs.

The book weaves together Native history, histories of medicine and institutionalization, and analyses of settler-colonialist frameworks to tell the story of the people and their families who experienced forced removal and involuntary confinement at Canton. Burch is careful to note that this is not a “neutral or balanced account of his-

tory” (p. 21). Instead, “this is an active effort to honor those who appear in this book as well as the many others whose stories converge, if less obviously, in its pages” (p. 20). Through informal phone and written correspondence, more formal oral histories, family visits, and material culture analysis, Burch meticulously constructs a story of kinship, cross-generational experience, and first-person accounts of life inside and after the asylum. It is both gripping and heartbreaking to read, and her central point is that the “slow violence” of institutionalization left lasting effects on families long past the hospital’s 1933 closure (p. 84).

Divided into six chapters, *Committed* opens with the forced removal of Elizabeth Faribault, a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Band of Dakota Nation. One morning in May 1915, officials arrived at her home to force her to go to Canton, citing evidence that she was alcoholic and insane. When Elizabeth’s husband, Jesse, arrived home, he discovered his wife missing and their two youngest children left home alone. What follows is both a

story of generational trauma and the family's efforts at healing and reclaiming sovereignty.

Burch traces Faribault's life in the asylum, including the birth of her daughter, Cora Winona, in 1926, eleven years after Faribault was first incarcerated. In 1928, Faribault died, leaving Cora in the care of the asylum staff for two more years until she was removed to an orphanage in Arizona at the age of four. Educated at the orphanage and Indian boarding schools, Cora eventually became pregnant as a teen and gave birth to a son in 1945. At first, they lived in Phoenix's Florence Crittendon home, part of a national organization of Crittendon homes in the United States that provided maternity care, vocational training, and moral education to "fallen women" and their children. White Crittendon staff encouraged her to relinquish her parental rights and her son was ultimately adopted by a white family. He had no more contact with Cora or other Faribault family members. Burch's account reveals a family story of loss, separation, and forced confinement that spans three generations, all triggered by the events of a single day when officials from the Bureau of Indian Affairs made their fateful decision about Faribault. Unfortunately, there were many days and many families where this kind of decision making was repeated with long and violent consequences.

Underlying the intimate family stories that make up this book are Indian and white conflicts. Government institutions like the Bureau of Indian Affairs sought to categorize, contain, assimilate, and ultimately erase whole tribes. The processes of removal undermined kinship ties, broke up families, and made instability a core feature in these families' daily lives. Ironically, life within the Canton asylum, however, was known for its monotony and endless cycle of compulsory labor and chores that the staff required patients to complete. Of one individual confined, Burch writes, "Mundane, hourless time pulled on her, as it did every confined person at the Indian Asylum" (p.

71). Many of the patients, including Faribault, were subject to harassment and physical and sexual violence. They fought back—escaping, only to be captured and returned within days to even more restrictive measures. The author illustrates the bleak landscape of asylum architecture, writing, "By design, detention penetrated every level of the institution. Padlocked wards, secured windows, walls, and fences held people within its grounds. On a routine basis, straightjackets, shackles, and iron beds, as well as ward attendants, subdued numerous individuals" (p. 68). Patients were rarely returned to their families, many of them dying while institutionalized and then buried in unmarked graves on the grounds.

For the family members and descendants of the patients at Canton, their ancestors are both "absent and present, surfacing partly and poignantly" in memories, photographs, and family heirlooms. The next generation has since "worked to close the gaps that institutionalization had laid open" (p. 90). The families explain to Burch that telling their ancestors' stories repeatedly is healing—a form of finally reclaiming what was not just lost but removed on purpose.

Through these individual stories, *Committed* reveals broad, interwoven histories of the power of the state over indigenous populations and the making of disability and the unfit in pursuit of settler values. By explaining in an accessible way the impact of these transformations over time, Burch helps us better understand the long reach of institutionalization within the lived experiences of multiple generations of indigenous families. This is a powerful book precisely because it is less of an academic history than it is an explanation of how people attempted to grapple with systems of power and coercion at a particular time and place. This is not to say that Burch does not rely on meticulous primary and secondary sources to make the case; indeed, her carefully researched footnotes add welcome detail and nuance to the main text.

For readers looking for deeper, more elaborated histories of eugenics, disability, incarceration, or Native American history, there are many more traditional scholarly sources to find further information. But in *Committed*, Burch adds only what is necessary for context so that the reader can more deeply understand the people and their experiences at the heart of these histories. In returning Elizabeth, Cora Winona, and the other individuals she discusses to the center of the book, Burch presents not only the forces that shaped them but also the ways these individuals responded, survived, and attempted to reclaim their lives.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-disability>

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